

Migrating Bodhisattvas and Fo Guang Shan

Religious Mobility

The ethnic Chinese who migrated to the US in the past had a very low status in society, the majority of them belonging to the working class. But our overseas compatriots have managed to slowly but surely advance from being restaurant and laundry owners to the point that now there are professors, industrialists, and politicians among them. From this we can see that the status of ethnic Chinese in society has been continuously on the rise.¹

Hsing Yun

With Hsi Lai Temple in America as starting point, Humanistic Buddhism thus began to spread to the West and the rest of the Five Continents. Considerable gratitude goes to the Chinese immigrants and local governments in various parts of the world.² Hsing Yun

In 2017, a report published by the UN counted an estimated 258 million transnational migrants globally.³ Comparing emigration countries in 2010 and again 2017, another UN report shows that China was one of the five biggest migration sending countries worldwide in both years.⁴ According to a 2009 estimate, the worldwide population of overseas Chinese numbered between 40 and 45 million.⁵ Southeast Asia was once the most popular destination for Chinese migrants. In 1955, for example, the vast majority of overseas Chinese (96.7%) were still located in Asia. Yet this changed significantly in the decades that followed.⁶ Numbers in Asia began to decline, while in the US on the other hand, the Chinese overseas population almost doubled in every decade from the 1960s to the 1990s.⁷ By 2009, only 75.2% of the globally dispersed Chinese overseas population was still

1 Quoted from Chinese, own translation: “過去華人移民在美國沒有甚麼地位，大多都是勞工階級、僑胞們職業從餐廳、洗衣店，慢慢得到現在也有教授、企業家及政治人物等，因此，華人在社會的地位也不斷在提升。” Hsing Yun, *Bai nian foyuan*, vol. 10, p. 29.

2 Hsing Yun, *Humanistic Buddhism: Holding True to the Original Intents of Buddha*, Kaohsiung: Foguang Cultural Enterprise, 2016, p. 309.

3 International Migration Report 2017, <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationReport2017.pdf>, p. 17. The report refers to the PRC, there is no mention whether Taiwan is included or not.

4 International Migration Report 2017: Highlights, http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationReport2017_Highlights.pdf, p. 13.

5 C.-B. Tan, “Introduction”, in: Tan (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of the Chinese Diaspora*, London: Routledge, 2012, p. 4.

6 P. S. Li and E. X. Li, “The Chinese Overseas Population”, in: Tan (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of the Chinese Diaspora*, p. 21.

7 Li, *Ethnoburb*, p. 61.

located in Asia; meanwhile the US already hosted 18.5% (compared to only 2.3% in 1955).⁸ Thus, although the majority of overseas Chinese are still in Asia, there has been a clear shift in distribution from Asian to non-Asian countries.

In his seminal work on modern Chinese emigration, China historian Philip A. Kuhn argues that the present era of ethnic Chinese mobility, beginning with the 1960s, has been shaped by four historic events: The first event was the abandonment of race-based exclusion by the immigration countries of North America and Australasia; the second event was the economic opening up of the People's Republic; the third was the reconfiguration of Europe after the Cold War; and last, changing PRC emigration policies.⁹ To these four events we might add the economic, political, and societal changes that occurred in the ROC on Taiwan and the transfer of Hong Kong to the PRC in the late 1990s. As a result of these changes, there was a significant shift in the socio-economic status of the Chinese diaspora outside of Asia. Chinese migration during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was characterized by the relocation of large numbers of Chinese workers from the southern coastal provinces to Southeast Asia, as well as to the Americas, Australia, and Africa.¹⁰ Most of these migrants were impoverished and uneducated. In contrast to their predecessors, the new generation of ethnic Chinese migrants, which after 1965 settled in the US and all over the world, were significantly more affluent, better educated, and more urbanized.

Since the 1960s, ethnic Chinese from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao, Singapore, Southeast Asia, etc., have left their places of origin and moved to countries of the West. Migrants from Taiwan and Hong Kong were the first to take advantage of the repeal of race-based immigration policies of immigration countries such as the United States in the 1960s. They represent the vanguard of a new generation of ethnic Chinese migrants. It was these “pioneers” from Taiwan who facilitated the establishment of Fo Guang Shan’s first overseas temples. The Taiwanese who could afford to move abroad mostly belonged to the middle and above socio-economic strata of Taiwanese society. They often went to study overseas and decided to settle permanently after receiving their degrees and finding employment.¹¹ In the years that followed, their high educational background and resulting high socio-economic status enabled them to invite monastics over from Taiwan, and to found and support Buddhist temples. China historian Wang

⁸ Li and Li, “The Chinese Overseas Population”, p. 21.

⁹ P. A. Kuhn, *Chinese among Others: Emigration in Modern Times*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009, p. 321.

¹⁰ Li and Li, “The Chinese Overseas Population”, p. 16.

¹¹ S. L. Chang, “Causes of Brain Drain and Solutions: The Taiwan Experience”, *Studies in Comparative International Development* 27 (1992) 1, p. 28.

Gungwu has famously called the phenomenon of the new, wealthy, and highly educated Chinese migrant “upgrading the migrant”.¹² To this day, many if not most of the first generation migrants that one encounters at a Fo Guang Shan overseas temple belong to the upper-middle and upper classes.¹³ It is members of these particular segments of society that are attracted to the order’s modern Buddhist religiosity. Fo Guang Shan has adapted to the new affluence of Chinese societies by presenting Buddhism in a way that is compatible with the conveniences of a modern lifestyle. An introduction to the principles of Fo Guang Shan puts it as follows:

After many years of effort, there have been positive results in the development of humanistic Buddhism. For example, conservative, traditional Buddhist practices placed an emphasis on asceticism. Today’s magnificent modern temples, with air-conditioning, carpeting, electronic equipment, and a comfortable environment, are seemingly contradictory to Buddhist tradition and practice. However, in the extremely blissful world of which the Buddha teaches, the ground is paved with gold, there are seven rows of fences, seven rows of trees, and eight virtuous waters, all magnificent and wonderful.¹⁴

Hsing Yun refers to the imagery of the pure land sutras here in order to legitimize the modernization of the Fo Guang Shan’s temples. Many of the order’s temples, particularly those that were built most recently, use high quality materials for construction and maintain teahouses, bookstores, exhibition spaces, and conference rooms. Their architecture and design aim to be visually appealing to the visitor and create a welcoming and comfortable environment.

The remarkable global development of Fo Guang Shan’s temples and practice centres unfolded over just a couple of decades. It was made possible by this very generation of affluent and highly educated ethnic Chinese migrants. During the early phase of the order’s globalization project, Taiwanese migrants attended Fo Guang Shan’s first Dharma assemblies in an old church building in the greater Los Angeles area in such great numbers that the order had to purchase another, bigger church building and eventually constructed the Hsi Lai Temple building complex. Today, ethnic Chinese migrants of different national and regional origins – from Taiwan, Southeast Asia, Hong Kong, and increasingly the PRC – visit the order’s overseas temples to pray, to celebrate holidays,

¹² G. Wang, “Upgrading the Migrant: Neither Huaqiao nor Huaren”, in: E. Sinn (ed.), *The Last Half Century of Chinese Overseas*, Aberdeen, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1998, pp. 15–34.

¹³ I. Lin, “Journey to the Far West: Chinese Buddhism in America”, *Amerasia Journal* 22 (1996) 1, pp. 132, footnote 58.

¹⁴ Hsing Yun, *Understanding the Buddha’s Light Philosophy*, Hacienda Heights, CA: Buddha’s Light Publications, 2002, p. 12.

and become members of the BLIA. It is they who, through their donations of money, time, and manpower, sustain the order's overseas temples and many other undertakings.

Layers of Ethnic Chinese Migration

After over half a century of refusing to allow Chinese to relocate to the US, the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943 and later passing of the Immigration and Nationality Act in 1965 finally allowed Chinese migration to resume while at the same time giving Chinese immigrants resident in the US the right to become naturalized citizens and own properties and businesses. These changes had a significant impact on the shifting demographics of Chinese migration. Besides laying down quotas for family reunification and some low-skilled professional migrants in areas where there were labour shortages, the new laws primarily provided immigration opportunities for high-skilled professionals. The same is true of the 1990 Immigration Act, which, in addition to the previously mentioned high-skilled professionals and family sponsored migrants, also aimed to attract wealthy migrants that would invest money and thereby create employment for local Americans.¹⁵ Similar developments occurred in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand around the same time.¹⁶ These changing conditions for Chinese migration not only changed the fabric of the overseas communities but also had repercussions for previous Chinese migration routes. Earlier migration patterns were characterized by kin relations, shared place of origin, and focused on destinations in Southeast Asia. The new Chinese migrants – whether from the PRC, Hong Kong, Southeast Asia, or Taiwan – on the other hand, favoured the countries of the West, were urbanized, often wealthy and had a high educational background. For them, overseas study became a very important new migration channel.¹⁷ In addition, other opportunities to migrate were based on business and tourism.¹⁸

New patterns of transnational ethnic Chinese migration also generated new modes of settlement. The earlier migrants had moved to inner-city Chinatowns, often described by scholars as ethnic enclaves.¹⁹ Being founded mostly by labour

¹⁵ Li, *Ethnoburb*, pp. 35–38.

¹⁶ Kuhn, *Chinese among Others*, pp. 325–326.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 356.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 335–339.

¹⁹ See for example J. Lin, *Reconstructing Chinatown: Ethnic Enclaves and Global Change*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998; M. Zhou, *Chinatown: The Socioeconomic Potential of an Urban Enclave*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010.

migrants from Guangdong, the population of the Chinatowns spoke Cantonese and tended to be poor and little educated. Over time, some of the inhabitants of the Chinatowns would move upward on the social ladder and relocate to the suburbs, where as a small minority they were expected to assimilate into mainstream culture. However, because of their higher socio-economic background, the post-1965 migrants could afford to bypass Chinatown and move directly into the suburbs. The result of this large influx of ethnic Chinese in a relatively short period of time was the emergence of large Chinese residential and business clusters in the suburbs.²⁰ In her study of neighbourhoods in the Los Angeles San Gabriel Valley, the US geographer Wei Li has dubbed this new pattern of settlement the “ethnoburb”.²¹

Over recent decades, the San Gabriel Valley ethnoburb has continuously evolved. Taiwanese were the first Asians to settle in the formerly majority European American neighbourhoods. They were followed by Hong Kongese and Southeast Asian Chinese. Most recently, especially from the 1990s and 2000s onward, a growing number of inhabitants of the “626”, as the valley is known colloquially after its area code, originate from the People’s Republic of China. It is therefore no coincidence that Fo Guang Shan’s North American headquarters and first overseas temple, Hsi Lai Temple, is located in the Los Angeles ethnoburb. The large number of highly educated and affluent Chinese of all regional and national backgrounds in the valley generate the ideal conditions for the order’s globalization project. As Hsing Yun states in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, Hsi Lai Temple represents the starting point of Fo Guang Shan’s transnational trajectory. But Los Angeles is not the only city with a Chinese ethnoburb; ethnoburbs exist in many localities that have experienced a large influx of Chinese migrants, including Houston, the San Francisco Bay Area, the suburban New York/New Jersey region, as well as in Australia, and New Zealand.²² Not surprisingly, many of these ethnoburbs also host a Fo Guang Shan temple or have one close by.

There are many similarities but also some differences between the histories of Chinese migration to South Africa and to the United States of America.²³ The South African Chinese diaspora consists, as in the US, of ethnic Chinese of a variety of regional and national backgrounds who arrived in the country at different times and under very different circumstances. The earliest wave of

²⁰ Kuhn, *Chinese among Others*, p. 361.

²¹ Li, *Ethnoburb*, p. 1.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 174.

²³ An earlier version of the following section was published in Reinke, “The Buddha in Bronkhorstspuit”.

Chinese migration to South Africa was linked to European colonialism. The first Chinese arrived as early as in the seventeenth century; however, the Chinese did not arrive in larger numbers until the nineteenth century, when they were brought over by the Dutch East India Company. Some came as convicts or company slaves, others as contract workers and artisans and later as contract miners. As is the case in the US, most of these early migrants originated from Guangdong and were Cantonese or Hakka.²⁴ During my fieldwork I was told that in terms of religion, the majority of the descendants of these early Chinese migrants have converted to Christianity and by now do not speak Mandarin or any other Chinese language. Not surprisingly, and similar to the situation at Hsi Lai, these so called “local Chinese” are the least represented group of ethnic Chinese at Fo Guang Shan’s South African temples and practice centres.

As with Hsi Lai Temple, it was Taiwanese migrants who generated the conditions for the establishment of Fo Guang Shan in South Africa. In the 1970s, the USA had cut diplomatic ties with the Republic of China on Taiwan and established diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China. As a result, Taiwan became isolated on the international stage and began to search for new allies. It turned to South Africa, which because of its Apartheid policies was in a similar situation. The two countries then began to strengthen their economic cooperation and in 1976 officially established diplomatic relations.²⁵ The earliest Taiwanese to arrive in South Africa came in the 1970s and 80s. They were a small group of Taiwanese industrialists whose aim was to invest. Throughout the late 1980s and into the 1990s, the numbers of these industrialists continued to grow and in the 1990s there was a second wave of Chinese immigration from Taiwan and Hong Kong. This second wave of Taiwanese migrating to South Africa consisted of entrepreneurs who opened import/export firms, restaurants, and other smaller businesses. Another group arrived in South Africa as overseas students, but eventually settled. Over time, Taiwanese became important members of South African society. As of 2009, there were many prominent business people and even four members of the South African parliament amongst the Taiwanese South Africans.²⁶ The fact that many of the Taiwanese that migrated to South Africa belonged to the higher end of the socio-economic spectrum of Taiwanese society also came up during one of my interviews. A leading South African BLIA member told me that in the 1990s interests on bank deposits in South Africa were very high, which allowed more wealthy Taiwanese to

²⁴ K. L. Harris, “The Chinese in South Africa: Five Centuries, Five Trajectories”, in: Tan (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of the Chinese Diaspora*, pp. 176–183.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 185–186.

²⁶ Park, “Recent Chinese Migrations to South Africa”, pp. 154–155; 157.

transfer their retirement funds to the country and spend their retirement living off the interest. She added that this was also true of another group – wealthy migrants from Hong Kong. Many of this second group moved to South Africa during the 1990s because they were concerned about the transfer of sovereignty over Hong Kong to the PRC. Being retirees, many of these well-off migrants from Taiwan and Hong Kong not only had the financial means to support a temple, but also the time to get involved and volunteer.

The two cases discussed above – the United States and South Africa – show the important role of educated and affluent Taiwanese (and to a lesser degree Hong Kongese) migrants in creating the basic conditions for the earliest stage of Fo Guang Shan's globalization project. Yet from the 1990s on, the demographics of ethnic Chinese migration became even more complex. Today, it is migrants from the People's Republic of China who represent the majority of ethnic Chinese in many of the diaspora communities worldwide. During the 1990s, ethnic Chinese from the People's Republic began to emigrate in increasing numbers. As was the case with the Taiwanese, many of the earliest migrants from the PRC were students who settled in their new home countries after receiving their degrees and securing employment. Over time, an increasing number of entrepreneurial elites and middle-class migrants took advantage of the new immigration laws and settled in countries such as the US.²⁷ The changing internal composition of the global Chinese diaspora had repercussions for Fo Guang Shan's overseas temples.

While Taiwanese represented the vast majority of those who were involved in the Hsi Lai Temple in its early days, since then the situation has diversified significantly.²⁸ Over time, Sino-Vietnamese and Hong Kongese Americans came to represent a considerable portion of the BLIA Los Angeles membership. Many of the Vietnamese who migrated to the greater Los Angeles area were Sino-Vietnamese who were forced to leave Vietnam after relations between Hanoi and Peking worsened in 1978. These Sino-Vietnamese constitute an important sub-group at Hsi Lai. But during the 1990s the situation changed yet again with the arrival of the most recent group of Chinese immigrants from the People's Republic. In order to reach out to this demographic, the temple invites representatives from the overseas communities of both countries, the ROC as well as the PRC, to its activities.²⁹ As a result, BLIA membership is further diversifying. Although many of the leading positions within the BLIA subchapters are still

27 Y. W. Chan and S. Y. Koh, "Introduction", in: Chan and Koh (eds.), *New Chinese Migrations: Mobility, Home, and Inspirations*, London: Routledge, 2018, pp. 2–3.

28 The following section is based on fieldwork data.

29 Lin, "Journey to the Far West", p. 113.

held by Taiwanese Americans, a significant number are held by Southeast Asian Chinese. Most recently, some BLIA subchapters, particularly those in the highly affluent coastal neighbourhoods, already have first generation migrants from the PRC in leading positions. Furthermore, the abbot of Hsi Lai Temple is one of the few fully ordained Fo Guang Shan monastics from the PRC and the only abbot of PRC Chinese origin who serves at a Fo Guang Shan temple outside of the PRC. As mentioned above, Hsi Lai Temple maintains two youth groups or Young Adult Divisions (YAD 1+2): the first is composed of second and later generation American Chinese, many of whose parents originate from Taiwan, while the second group consists of exchange students from Asia, the majority of which originate from the PRC. Thus, we can see that the changing internal demographics of the global Chinese diaspora are also reflected in the Hsi Lai temple space. Overall, we can detect similar developments in South Africa, despite some differences due to the particularities of the country's history and politics.

The new South African government that came into power after the end of Apartheid decided to break off diplomatic relations with Taiwan and instead establish relations with the PRC. This resulted in an influx of migrants from the People's Republic.³⁰ Immigration of PRC Chinese to South Africa occurred in three waves. The earliest occurred in the late 1980s, followed by a second in the mid-to-late 1990s. Many of the second wave of migrants came from the wealthy Chinese provinces of Jiangsu and Zhejiang. The last and current wave of Chinese immigrants started to arrive after the turn of the millennium, mostly consisting of small traders and peasants who primarily originate from Fujian province.³¹ Compared to their predecessors from Taiwan and Hong Kong, the Chinese who migrated from the People's Republic to South Africa have a more diverse class background. Some of them also are entrepreneurs who operate factories in the country; others are the highly educated personnel of PRC state-owned companies, such as engineers. But many more are workers in Chinese-owned factories.

Hsing Yun states that there were about 30,000 Taiwanese in the country when Fo Guang Shan began to develop in South Africa.³² Almost thirty years later, according to one of my interview partners, the number of Taiwanese had decreased to 7,000 compared to 500,000 (including undocumented) PRC Chinese. Sino-African relations scholar Yoon Jung Park's numbers differ slightly; she estimates that as of 2009 there were about 10,000 local Chinese, 6,000 Taiwanese,

³⁰ Harris, "The Chinese in South Africa", pp. 186–187.

³¹ Park, "Recent Chinese Migrations to South Africa", pp. 156–157.

³² Hsing Yun, *Bai nian foyuan*, p. 263.

and about 200,000 to 350,000 migrants from the PRC in the country.³³ Like Hsi Lai Temple, Nan Hua Temple has reacted to those changes by trying to diversify its following. A former abbess of the temple continues to put great effort into reaching out to the PRC Chinese community. The order also regularly announces its activities in the local PRC Chinese media and, like Hsi Lai Temple, invites official representatives of both countries, the ROC on Taiwan and the PRC to its activities. I was told during my interviews that until the early 2000s the average BLIA South Africa member was Taiwanese, as were the average board member and president of the local chapters. But in recent years the situation has changed significantly. While the Fo Guang Shan monastics and the directors of the seven local South African BLIA chapters during the time of my fieldwork in fall 2017 were all still Taiwanese, 50 percent of the BLIA board members of the Johannesburg chapter already originated from the PRC. Furthermore, according to one of my interviewees, as much as 50 to 80 per cent of the ordinary BLIA members in the whole country, depending on the local chapter, are PRC Chinese.

But numbers are, of course, not everything. Besides looking at membership numbers, one also has to consider the degree of involvement of members in order to assess the impact the changing composition of the global Chinese diaspora has on Fo Guang Shan's overseas temples. When I attended the 2017 BLIA World Headquarters Africa Fellowship Meeting (*Guoji fuguang hui shijie zonghui feizhou lianyi hui* 國際佛光會世界總會非洲聯誼會) at Nan Hua Temple, for example, the majority of the participants were Taiwanese. I made similar observations at BLIA activities at Hsi Lai Temple. This shows that for the moment, Taiwanese still continue to be the most involved group at the order's overseas temples. There are several possible explanations. One is that as an order that originates from Taiwan, Fo Guang Shan is still better linked to the overseas Taiwanese community. But there is another explanation too. The Africa Fellowship Meeting began on a Tuesday and ended on the weekend. Asked for the reason for the discrepancy between membership numbers and the degree of involvement, one of my interviewees gave the following explanation: She noted that one reason for the lower presence of PRC Chinese is the fact that most of them have arrived in the country only quite recently and thus they were busy working. They can't just leave work on a weekday to participate in a weeklong activity at the temple. Many overseas Taiwanese on the other hand are well-off financially, professionally well-established, and often already retired. As a result, they have the money but also the time to support a Buddhist temple. The situation is different if one considers regular temple visitors who are not BLIA members and who

33 Park, "Recent Chinese Migrations to South Africa", p. 157.

come to the temple to pray or to just enjoy the surroundings. Within this group, the number of non-Taiwanese, including Chinese from the People's Republic, but also non-Chinese in general, is significantly higher.

Manoeuvring Diasporic Diversity

In 2018, Bodhi Day, the day Chinese Mahayana Buddhists commemorate the day the historical Buddha Shakyamuni is supposed to have experienced enlightenment, fell on a Wednesday.³⁴ In accordance with Chinese tradition, the day is celebrated on the eighth day of the twelfth month of the lunar calendar. As is customary, Fo Guang Shan temples worldwide celebrate the occasion by distributing at no charge the traditional food to be enjoyed on this day, Eight Treasure Congee *laba zhou* 臘八粥. At Hsi Lai Temple, the morning of this auspicious day begins with a big Dharma assembly. Morning services during the week are usually only attended by handful of people. Yet despite Bodhi Day falling on a Wednesday this year, there are about 20 monastics and 40 lay people taking part in the ritual. In addition to this morning's Dharma assembly and free distribution of Eight Treasure Congee, the temple holds festivities on the Sundays immediately before and after the actual day. Festivities are often moved to the weekends at Fo Guang Shan in order to accommodate people who have to work during the week. Hsi Lai Temple holds English and Mandarin language activities to celebrate the occasion. The English language festivity takes place on the morning of the first Sunday. The Chinese celebrations take place on the afternoon of the same day and all day the following Sunday. The following section is an ethnographic extract of both activities. I will discuss the Mandarin language celebrations first.

On the first Sunday, the Mandarin language Bodhi Day celebration begins at 1:30 p.m. and ends at 4 p.m. The auditorium of the temple is packed. Besides a small group of members of YAD 2, the Young Adult Division for exchange students, most people in the room are aged over 50. About two thirds of them are women. The average age of the participants is around 60 and many of them are of retirement age. Everybody except me is ethnic Chinese. As is common for BLIA activities, everybody is wearing their yellow BLIA westes (see Figure 5). Some people wear a similar weste in maroon, which signifies that they are Hsi Lai Temple volunteers. People sit in groups with fellow members of their BLIA subchapter. As is customary at Fo Guang Shan and BLIA activities, most

³⁴ The following ethnographic report is based on fieldwork data.



Figure 5: Mandarin Language Dharma Day, Auditorium of Hsi Lai Temple, USA.

participants wait in their seats for the activity to begin. As the special guests make their entrance, everybody stands up and the guests are introduced one by one by the host of the celebration. Today the special guests include the abbot, a group of senior monastics, and the president of the BLIA Los Angeles chapter. After being introduced, they walk to their seats in the first row. The opening ceremony of the celebration begins. It consists of a short welcome and, as is customary at BLIA activities, the singing of the “Homage to the Triple Gem”, a Buddhist hymn in Mandarin. The lyrics of the song which was written by Hsing Yun evoke Protestant hymns. In English the lyrics go as follows: “Namo Buddha-Ya / Namo Dharma-Ya / Namo Sangha-Ya / You are our redeemer / You are the truth / You are Our Master / You are the bearer of light / I seek refuge in Thee / I believe in Thee / I venerate Thee.”³⁵

The format of the celebration this afternoon resembles another Fo Guang Shan activity, the book club. Members of the BLIA subchapters meet at regular book club group meetings, where they read and discuss Buddhists texts. Similarly,

³⁵ “南無佛陀耶 / 南無達摩耶 / 南無僧伽耶 / 南無佛法僧/您是我們的救主 / 您是我們的真理 / 您是我們的導師 / 您是我們的光明 / 我皈依您 / 我信仰您 / 我尊敬您”. English translation as provided by Fo Guang Shan. Note that there are several slightly different English translations of the song circulating at Fo Guang Shan.

attendants today come to the front of the room where they have a certain amount of time to do a short presentation on something they have read and relate it to their life. The topics discussed range from practical applications of Buddhism to everyday life problems to more elaborate contemplations on the subtleties of the Buddhist doctrine. Most people who present have applied beforehand, but some also come up spontaneously. The atmosphere is very relaxed and lively and time passes quickly. After a little over two hours everybody says their goodbyes.

The Mandarin language Dharma Day resumes the following Sunday. The second day is the main day of the celebration and the activity takes longer than the week before. Registration takes place from 8:30 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. Again, everybody in the audience is ethnic Chinese and wears the BLIA veste. At the temple, I hear a lot of different Chinese dialects and languages including some from the PRC, as well as a lot of Cantonese being spoken by Hong Kongese and many Sino-Vietnamese. However, the majority of the participants speak Mandarin as it is spoken in Taiwan. As on the afternoon of the previous Sunday, most people are around the age of 60 and women outnumber men. But there are younger people too. An elegantly dressed woman in her late thirties who has moved to the US from the PRC and lives in one of the very affluent coastal neighbourhoods of Los Angeles hosts the day's events. She introduces the special guests, which, in addition to the abbot, a group of high-ranking monastics from Hsi Lai and from Taiwan, and the President of BLIA Los Angeles, today include some very senior lay Dharma teachers who have been associated with Fo Guang Shan from its beginning. The VIPs take their seats on the stage facing the audience. After the opening ceremony, which like the previous week consists of a short welcome and the singing of the "Homage to the Triple Gem", everybody files silently into the dining hall turned class room and sits down in accordance with his or her BLIA subchapter. From 9:15 am to 10:00 am, the annual Fo Guang Shan Buddhist study exam takes place. The exam consists of a four-page multiple choice test in Chinese. The questions cover doctrinal topics that range from the broader Chinese Mahayana tradition to issues related to Fo Guang Shan *renjian* Buddhism. They are picked from the study material distributed to every subchapter beforehand and have been studied at book club meetings over the past months. While some of the study material is very advanced and touches on complex doctrinal issues, the average participant can easily answer most of the exam questions. At 10 a.m., everybody takes a half hour break and from 10:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. the Dharma Day continues.

As on the first Mandarin Dharma Day the week before, the rest of the morning is given over to BLIA members sharing short stories about how they apply Buddhism to their life. Among the speakers is the wife of a pilot, an elderly gentleman, a Sino-Vietnamese middle-aged man, and a younger woman in her

thirties. The majority of the presenters are female, middle-aged and above, and judging by their pronunciation of Mandarin, originate from Taiwan. At 12 p.m. sharp it is time for our lunch break. Everybody gets up and we walk in single file to a big conference room on the opposite side of the main yard where vegetarian lunch boxes are handed out. At 12:45 p.m. the afternoon session commences. From 12:45 p.m. to 2:30 p.m., five Fo Guang Shan lay Dharma teachers give lectures. Compared to the morning, the topics covered by the lay Dharma teachers are significantly more doctrinal in nature. They ponder issues such as the relationship between Buddhist social engagement and Buddhist motivated withdrawal from society (*chushi/rushi* 出世/入世), or the relationship between relying on one's own effort for liberation (*zili* 自力) as opposed to seeking deliverance through faith in Amitabha's vows (*tali* 他力). Other lectures discuss the Surangama Sutra (*lengyan jing* 楞嚴經), the Dunhuang caves, and reflect on the Buddhist thought of Fo Guang Shan founder Hsing Yun.

After a half an hour afternoon tea break, the final lecture of the day is given by a very senior monastic who had been a professor before her retirement. As a former professor she is a very good public speaker. Despite the style and content of her presentation being quite academic, she is very skilled in making her speech comprehensible to everybody in the audience. She inserts many jokes and her lecture is very well-received by the assembly. The subject of her lecture is Buddhism and print culture. She begins by delving into the beginnings of writing and written characters in China. Then she goes on by elaborating on how Chinese writing culture relates to different historical moments in the canonization of the Buddhist scripture. She closes with an overview of all the different print and media endeavours of Fo Guang Shan. The whole talk is an entertaining yet intellectually demanding mixture of academic lecture on the history of the Chinese Buddhist canon, celebration of "traditional Chinese culture", and Dharma talk. She concludes her lecture at 4.30 p.m. and after a short fifteen-minute break the closing ceremony begins. Finally, the test results are announced and those who did best receive a certificate. At 5.30 p.m. the Dharma Day is brought to an end.

The ethnographic report above shows the importance of communality for Fo Guang Shan *renjian* Buddhist religiosity. Ethnic Chinese members of the BLIA of all national origins all wear the same yellow BLIA westes and sit with the co-members of their subchapters. Many of the participants exhibit a strong group identity that is linked to their common Fo Guang Shan membership. During my fieldwork at different Fo Guang Shan facilities worldwide, I noticed that many BLIA members speak of each other not as regular Buddhists, or even Humanistic Buddhists, but as Fo Guang People (*foguang ren* 佛光人). They thereby evince a sense of exclusive belonging to a particular Buddhist organization instead of a loose identification with Chinese Mahayana in general as is the case for more

traditional Chinese Mahayana Buddhists. Interestingly this sense seemed stronger and more exclusive in places such as Taiwan or Los Angeles, where the order has a very strong presence. In contrast, in South Africa, many of the Fo Guang Shan BLIA members were at the same time involved with other Taiwanese Buddhist groups such as Tzu Chi or Amitofo Care Centre. When I talked about the issue with some of the people who maintained multiple memberships, they noted that their situation differs to that in Taiwan. Since the Taiwanese Buddhist community in South Africa is so small, all Taiwanese support each other. I will return to this issue in chapter six and discuss the communal character of Fo Guang Shan *renjian* Buddhist religiosity in more detail.

It is also interesting to note that although participants of the Mandarin Dharma Day were from many different regional and even national backgrounds, everybody was ethnic Chinese and almost all were first generation migrants. One of the reasons therefore is, of course, language. Although many of the lay Buddhists had lived in the US for many decades and spoke English fluently, the same was not necessarily true of all the monastics. Many of them had moved around between different Fo Guang Shan temples and not all monastics stationed at an overseas temple possess knowledge of the local language. This applies even more to smaller temples that are not located in English-speaking countries. Using Mandarin not only ensures easy communication between monastics and laity, it also instils a sense of shared Chineseness in the audience. At some other smaller overseas Chinese temples I visited during my fieldwork that are not part of the Fo Guang Shan network, people often speak in local languages and dialects such as Taiwanese, Cantonese, Hakka, or one of the Jiangsu dialects. At these temples, temple visitors tend to share a similar regional background. However, at Fo Guang Shan's overseas temples, many people make an effort to speak in Mandarin, the version of Chinese that is understood by the majority of ethnic Chinese today. During my research people also often used the expression "we Chinese", thereby stressing a common identity that transcends their different regional and national origins.

The composition of the global Chinese diaspora community is complex and layered. Ethnic Chinese from different origins have emigrated in waves, which is also reflected at the order's overseas temples. The first and most important group at the temple continue to be the Taiwanese, since Taiwanese constituted the earliest subgroup amongst post-1965 ethnic Chinese migrants, the order was founded in Taiwan, and most of the order's monastics are Taiwanese. The next layer consists of Hong Kongese and other ethnic Chinese from Southeast Asia, who not only constitute a substantial portion of the laity but also a portion of the monastic sangha. In particular, some of the younger monastics originate from places such as Malaysia and to a lesser degree Hong Kong. The

monastics who are born in Malaysia and Hong Kong tend not only to be younger, but also known for their good English skills. The reason for this lies in the more advanced English language education available in their countries of origin. Many of them are therefore stationed at the order's overseas temples. The final, most recent layer is comprised of the current wave of migrants from the PRC. While many of the Taiwanese migrants have already reached retirement age, this last group is younger. Attracting this group is thus important in ensuring the future development of Fo Guang Shan overseas. In addition, the temple also aims to reach out to the second and later Generations. However, many who belong to this group prefer to communicate in the language of the country they grew up in. In order to better understand the issue, the following section presents an ethnographic report of the English language Dharma Day celebrations of the week before.

The English language Dharma Day takes place on the morning of the first Sunday. Celebrations start at 10 a.m. and end just in time for lunch at 12.30 p.m. The auditorium is slightly less filled than it was during the Mandarin celebrations. Most people attending are not wearing BLIA westes and there is some coming and going during the activities. Many of the participants are parents of the children who attend classes at the temple's Dharma School for Youth or the Dharma School for Children. Most are ethnic Chinese, but there are also some mixed families present. At the front of the auditorium sit some members of the Young Adult Division. In the back half of the room are about 50 students from a nearby college. These students happen to be participating in a seven-day retreat that the temple organizes annually. The language of today's celebration is English. At 10 a.m., the host of the celebration asks everybody to stand up. Then the special guests are introduced one by one as they make their entrance. As in the afternoon, this morning's special guests include the abbot, a group of senior monastics, and the president of BLIA Los Angeles. After a short welcome, everybody stands up and we begin to sing the "Homage to the Triple Gem". On most occasions, in accordance with the audience, the hymn is sung in Mandarin. Although the majority of those who participate in the English language Dharma Day are ethnic Chinese, the younger participants in particular prefer to speak English. Thus, on this morning we sing the hymn in English. In contrast to the Mandarin language celebrations, the English language Dharma Day takes place in the format of a talent or variety show. Most people who perform are second or later generation ethnic Chinese children or children from mixed couples. But there are also some adults, ethnic Chinese as well as Latino and non-Latino whites, who take part in the performances. The show starts with a group of young children who sing a song together. After the first song, five teenagers, who are students at the Dharma School for Youth, enter the stage. They have prepared a speech on how to withstand peer

pressure, which they share with the audience. After them, a young boy from the Dharma School for Kids sits down at a piano and performs a piece of popular music called the “Carol of the Bells”. His performance is followed by a dance performed by members of one of the YADs. Next, the college students who are participants at the annual retreat, most of them non-ethnic Chinese, sing a song called the “Dharma Song”. Next, one of the former YAD presidents gets on stage. He talks about how he applies the Buddhist teachings to his life. His speech is followed by a short musical piece about the story of a rich, dying man and his four wives. It is performed by a group of thirty-something to middle-aged women, all but one Chinese Americans. After they finish their performance, two youths from the Dharma School for Youth get on stage, one is Chinese American and the other European American. They share stories with the audience about how Buddhism has been of help to them in their life. They also report on the activities they have organized for the Dharma School for Youth, such as inviting guest speakers from companies such as Google. After them, a European American woman with a Chinese-sounding family name gets on stage and sings a song in English. The next performance is given by another group of the retreat participants. They share poems and spoken word reflections about the hardships they have had to deal with in their lives. They are followed by a Latina from the English language BLIA subchapter who reads a poem. After her, two YAD members present excerpts of an English language chanting service. This presentation is followed by an older European American BLIA member who presents quotes from a translation of Hsing Yun’s last book on Humanistic Buddhism and shares quirky stories about his wisdom freezer magnets. After him, a teenager sits down at the piano again and gives a very impressive performance of a Rachmaninov piece. He is followed by another young Chinese American who shares her thoughts on some quotes from Hsing Yun. The activity concludes with a hip-hop dance and rap performance by seven male college retreat participants.

The ethnographic report reveals the diverse backgrounds of the English speakers involved in Fo Guang Shan’s English language activities at Hsi Lai Temple. There are several different groups that participate in this morning. The first group are the second plus generation ethnic Chinese children and their (sometimes mixed) parents and families. They constitute an important demographic at the temple. Many of them attend the Chinese language classes provided by Hsi Lai and most of the order’s overseas temples. Another group are the members of YAD 1, the temple’s youth group for college kids. The majority of these are children of the first generation of Taiwanese migrants. The next demographic are the mostly non-Chinese college students who are participating in the retreat. What is interesting is the contrast between the performances of the guest college students and the young Chinese Americans. The performances of the

college students included, for example, a rap piece which was presented in a very emotional “confession-like manner” and touched on issues such as running away from home, teen pregnancy, and Marijuana consumption. Their performances stood in stark contrast to those of the Chinese-American youth, such as that of the young boy who impressed the audience with his piano skills. This contrast also reflects the high socio-economic status of Taiwanese migrants and their families in general and the adherents of Fo Guang Shan’s overseas temples.

Yet another important group consists of the members of the English language BLIA whose membership is mostly composed of Latino- and European Americans and descendants of earlier Chinese migrants. Although many of them are very involved in the BLIA and in the temple and even wear their BLIA westes, they are also somewhat isolated from the majority of the BLIA members due to their lack of Chinese language knowledge. This group also is significantly smaller in number; in total there are well over 20 members in the English language BLIA subchapter compared to almost 2000 BLIA members in the other subchapters in the Los Angeles area. Though small, the Hsi Lai Temple English subchapter is very engaged. They meet regularly at their book club meetings and participate in all of the temple’s activities. The situation at other temples is similar to the situation in Los Angeles. Most overseas temples host a local or English language group. In many of the temples the activities of this group centre on meditation. I will come back to the issue of the centrality of meditation for non-Chinese Buddhists in chapter six.

As can be seen from the ethnographic report above, ethnic Chinese of all generations are represented at the order’s overseas temples. The temple provides classes and activities for second generation ethnic Chinese of any age, from kindergarten to college, university, and graduate school level. For big celebrations such as Dharma Day or Lunar New Year, young parents also come to the temple with their children. Sociologist Lan Pei-chia has shown that middle class and above Chinese migrants in the US have developed two different parenting strategies to ensure a sense of cultural confidence in their offspring. One strategy consists of organizing “Americanized” extracurricular activities for their children in order to enhance their social skills and cultural competency in mainstream society. The other strategy consists in mobilizing homeland culture and cultivating their children’s transnational competence.³⁶ It is the latter group and their children that can primarily be found at the temple. The language and cultural classes, children and youth camps, and the Youth Adult Divisions all create linkages

36 P.-C. Lan, *Raising Global Families: Parenting, Immigration, and Class in Taiwan and the US*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018, p. 139.

with their parents' culture of origin and thereby enhance the transnational skills of the second and later generations.

However, in terms of numbers and degree of involvement, the middle-aged and above participants of the Mandarin celebrations undoubtedly represent the biggest demographic at the temple. This gap in representation is not unique to Fo Guang Shan's overseas temples. Many diasporic Chinese Buddhist temples struggle to attract the second generation.³⁷ In fact, compared to smaller temples or temples in countries with a smaller Taiwanese community, larger temples such as Hsi Lai and Nan Hua are still doing well. Both temples run very active YADs. Yet if we compare the general membership numbers of the BLIAs in South Africa and Los Angeles with those of their associated Young Adult Divisions, we can detect a significant discrepancy. The BLIA in South Africa has a total membership of about 1000 members, compared to about 40 core members of the YAD, most of whom are second generation. The situation is similar in Los Angeles. BLIA Los Angeles has over 1800 members in total and both YADs together have about 120 members, almost two thirds of them exchange students.

The second generation of ethnic Chinese migrants in non-majority Chinese countries – maybe with the exception of places such as Malaysia, which more closely resembles Taiwan in that it has a very strong youth involvement – grow up under very different circumstances than their parents. They identify as least as much if not more with the culture of the country they were born and grew up in than with the culture of their parents. In addition, Asian Americans are the ethnic or racial group in the US with the highest ratio of mixed-race marriages.³⁸ As seen above, several of the families of the English language Dharma Day celebrations had mixed race parents. It is very probable that mixed race families tend to raise their children more “Americanized” than families where both parents are ethnic Chinese. Furthermore, although studies show that for many second generation migrants becoming American means becoming more religious,³⁹ this mainly applies to monotheistic religions and is only slightly the case for Buddhism.⁴⁰ Additionally, the second generation often mistrusts religious authority and instead favours modes of religiosity that are characterized by an individualistic and

37 C. Chen, *Getting Saved in America: Taiwanese Immigration and Religious Experience*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008, p. 36.

38 C. Chen and R. Jeung, *Sustaining Faith Traditions: Race, Ethnicity, and Religion among the Latino and Asian American Second Generation*, New York: New York University Press, 2012, p. 71.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 19.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

therapeutic approach to spirituality.⁴¹ Many of them therefore might prefer to get involved in more Westernized forms of Buddhism than in the Buddhism of their parents. Thus, although Fo Guang Shan puts great effort into attracting the second and later generations, the order also aims at further diversifying its following. In order to ensure its successful overseas development in the future, Fo Guang Shan has managed to attract the latest, ongoing wave of ethnic Chinese migrants; Chinese from the People's Republic. Many of them are younger since they have migrated only recently. Integrating exchange students into the order's Young Adult Divisions constitutes yet another means to achieve this goal. Chinese from the People's Republic thereby not only become an important demographic for the order overseas, but those who eventually return to China may also choose to stay involved with Fo Guang Shan in their homeland.

One important tool for Fo Guang Shan to create linkages with the overseas Chinese communities, whether they are from the People's Republic, from Taiwan or Southeast Asia, or the second and later generations, is to deploy and maintain a sense of Chineseness. The next chapter discusses the important function of discourses and practices linked to "traditional Chinese culture" for Fo Guang Shan's global trajectory. Culture as understood at Fo Guang Shan not only serves as a means to spread a modernist *renjian* Buddhism; the order also presents itself as a preserver and transmitter of Chinese tradition worldwide.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 20.