

Generating Global Pure Lands

Americans founded many Christian universities in China, and so looking at the issue from a perspective of cultural exchange, we should repay the United States and build a University in the US as a gift to express our gratitude.¹ Hsing Yun

Socially-engaged activities in the fields of charity and education as Buddhist contributions to society have their roots in the process of adapting Buddhism to the Republican Era nation-state building project.² As with the cultural engagements described in the previous chapter, engagements in the field of charity and education transcend the particularities of an internally diverse diaspora. Like engagements in the field of culture, civic engagements link the diaspora temple with the mainstream culture. However, this is achieved not by a rearward motion that links the community back to an “imagined” China, but through active involvement in the betterment of their new home societies. Contributions overseas also produce effects back in Taiwan. The order’s civic engagements anywhere in the world are communicated globally through the order’s media complex, thereby reassuring the adherent’s sense of Buddhism’s universal goodness while also helping the order to attract continuing donations. Furthermore, Fo Guang Shan’s civic engagements are also noticed in broader Asian Buddhist circles.

The engagements discussed in this chapter, particularly those in the field of charity, exhibit many similarities to Tzu Chi’s transnational philanthropic work. This is not surprising, since both organizations identify as *renjian* Buddhist, originate from Taiwan and developed around the same time. But there are significant differences too. Fo Guang Shan is a religious order in a more customary sense. Its understanding of Buddhist social engagement is much broader than that of Tzu Chi in that it also includes the fields of education, culture and religious practice. As a result, there are many overlaps between the different modes of Fo Guang Shan social engagement and the line between them cannot always be clearly drawn: a class on Buddhist tea culture is as much linked to education as it is linked to culture; financing a university that has low tuition fees and provides many scholarships can be seen as charitable act or a contribution to education; and providing free chanting services for deceased family members of overseas Chinese is a way of providing charity but is also linked to religious cultivation.

1 “那時候我有一個想法，我認為美國人在中國興辦了很多教會大學，站在文化交流的立場，我們也可以回饋美國，在美國辦一所大學以示酬謝。” Hsing Yun, *Bai nian foyuan*, vol. 5, pp. 142–143.

2 An earlier version of this chapter was published as “Generating Global Pure Lands: Renjian Buddhist Civic Engagement within and beyond Chinese Diaspora Communities Worldwide”, in: Clart and Jones (eds.), *Transnational Religious Spaces*, pp. 283–303.

This chapter provides a picture of the role of Fo Guang Shan civic engagements by mainly focusing on its undertakings in the USA and in South Africa. As a religious order, Fo Guang Shan's space for civic engagement within the PRC is limited. This is another thing that differentiates it from Tzu Chi. Tzu Chi as a humanitarian NGO can operate differently in the PRC.³ This chapter first examines the order's engagements in education by looking at University of the West and the Nan Hua Performance Group. The second half of the chapter discusses different modes of charity within and beyond the Chinese diaspora community.

Global Outposts of *Renjian* Buddhist Education

One of the main objectives of the Buddhist reformers at the beginning of the last century was to modernize Buddhism through education. Not surprisingly, education continues to play a key role at Fo Guang Shan today. At Fo Guang Shan, education has three separate but overlapping meanings. It refers to the religious and secular education of the monastic *sangha*; to religious education of the laity; and to the involvement of Buddhist actors in secular education. Fo Guang Shan has made contributions to all three fields. The first, the enhancement of the education of the monastic *sangha*, was particularly relevant for the development of modern Chinese Buddhism. Very early on, Fo Guang Shan began to establish foreign language training for its monastics. The order also runs Buddhist seminaries overseas, yet they tend to be short-term programmes. The complete Buddhist monastic training takes place at the main seminary at the order's headquarters in Taiwan.⁴ The training here not only includes standard training in Buddhist scripture, liturgy, and monastic conduct, but also modern temple management and foreign languages. During my fieldwork in Taiwan at Fo Guang Shan and other Buddhist temples, I often heard people praising the standard of monastic education at Fo Guang Shan.

The second meaning, to provide religious education for the laity, represents one way of enhancing Buddhist knowledge and spreading the Buddhist Dharma for Fo Guang Shan.⁵ Religious education here is to be understood in the broadest sense. It not only includes preparation for doctrinal examinations but also

³ For a case study on the development of Tzu Chi in the PRC, see Laliberté, "The Growth of a Taiwanese Buddhist Association in China".

⁴ For an examination of the order's monastic education, see Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth*, pp. 118–124.

⁵ See also *ibid.*, pp. 124–131.

learning ways to apply Buddhism to one's daily life.⁶ Besides classes on sutras or different modes of religious practice, Fo Guang Shan's courses for lay Buddhists cover topics such as calligraphy, flower arrangement, tea culture, and traditional Chinese musical instruments, to mention just a few. Many of these classes could have been discussed in the previous chapter too since they also function as preservers of traditional Chinese culture. In Taiwan, Fo Guang Shan has founded several institutions with this goal. The Srimala Buddhist Institute (*Shengman shuyuan* 勝鬘書院), for example, is an institute that aims specifically at young women for whom it organizes domestic and international study trips. In 1992, Fo Guang Shan founded a community college, which since 2005 has operated under its current name "Fo Guang Shan Open University", (*renjian daxue* 人間大學, English: Human Realm University), with branches in every Taiwanese county. Fo Guang Shan also operates an eLearning Buddhist College that gives its adherents the opportunity for online study.

Fo Guang Shan also organizes book club meetings for the same purposes.⁷ During the regular club meetings, Fo Guang Shan adherents read and discuss a text together. What kind of text they read depends on the proficiency in Buddhist doctrine of that particular group. The readings can range from a song or poem written by Hsing Yun to more difficult texts, such as Buddhist scriptures. The acquired knowledge is then tested on a regular basis through Buddhist studies exams. This practice is maintained not only in Taiwan but also at some temples overseas. As described in the ethnographic report in the previous chapter, all subchapters of BLIA Los Angeles gathered at the temple on a weekend before the 2018 Lunar New Year celebrations to take the annual Buddhist studies exam together. However, though this is already a staple of Fo Guang Shan religiosity in Taiwan and in the US, the order has only recently begun to promote the practice in South Africa. The next chapter provides an ethnographic report of this effort that took place during the evenings of a big repentance Dharma assembly. Fo Guang Shan is also well-known for its many media enterprises. Fo Guang Shan's media undertakings include a daily newspaper, several academic periodicals, countless books and online presences, and even a television station.⁸ Hsing Yun had already appeared on public TV in Taiwan as early as the 1960s. In 1997, the order then established its own TV station for the purpose of distributing accessible

⁶ The following data is based on: Foguangshan zongwu weiyuanhui (ed.), *Foguangshan kaishan sishi zhounian jinian tekan*, vol. 3, chapter 3 and 4.

⁷ The following section is based on fieldwork observations.

⁸ Fu, *Bright Star, Luminous Cloud*, pp. 224–229.

knowledge about Buddhism.⁹ Fo Guang Shan's adoption of modern media for the dissemination of Buddhism can be only noted in passing here, since it would require an entire study in itself to examine its full scope.

The third meaning of education refers to the contributions of Buddhists to the secular education of society.¹⁰ Of the three fields of education Fo Guang Shan is involved in, it is secular education, together with charity, that constitutes a mode of civic engagement, since it directly aims at enhancing the greater good of society. In addition to several kindergartens, child education centres, elementary and middle schools Fo Guang Shan operates in Taiwan, the order also operates five universities. Two of them are located on the island: Nan Hua University (*Nanhua daxue* 南華大學) in Chiayi (*Jiayi* 嘉義) and Fo Guang University (*Foguang Daxue* 佛光大學) in Yilan; the remaining three are abroad: the University of the West in the US, Guang Ming College in Manila in the Philippines,¹¹ and its most recent addition, the Nan Tien Institute in Wollongong, Australia.¹²

Of Fo Guang Shan's higher institutes of education, the University of the West was established first. Its campus is located in Rosemead in the Los Angeles San Gabriel Valley, only a 20-minute drive from Hsi Lai Temple. Like the temple, the university is located in the San Gabriel Valley ethnoburb. After construction of Hsi Lai Temple was completed, Hsing Yun began to consider founding a liberal arts university in the US. The quote at the beginning of this chapter originates from this time period. Hsing Yun thought that since Americans had established many Christian universities in China, the order should establish a university in the US.¹³ The university was initially established on temple grounds. But over time the project grew and in 1991 the temple and the university became officially separate.¹⁴

The University of the West, which was originally called Hsi Lai University, adopted its current name in April 2004. It is a private, non-profit, non-sectarian,

⁹ Foguangshan zongwu weiyuanhui (ed.), *Foguangshan kaishan sishi zhounian jinian tekan*, vol. 10, pp. 79–81.

¹⁰ See also Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth*, pp. 131–134.

¹¹ The following data is based on: Foguangshan zongwu weiyuanhui (ed.), *Foguangshan kaishan sishi zhounian jinian tekan*, vol. 3, chapter 3 and 4.

¹² Fo Guang Shan, Nan Tien Institute, "Nan Tien Institute", <https://www.nantien.edu.au/about-us>.

¹³ "那時候我有一個想法，我認為美國人在中國興辦了很多教會大學，站在文化交流的立場，我們也可以回饋美國，在美國辦一所大學以示酬謝。" Hsing Yun, *Bai nian foyuan*, vol. 5, pp. 142–143.

¹⁴ If not otherwise referenced, the following information is taken from: T. Storch, *Buddhist-Based Universities in the United States: Searching for a New Model in Higher Education*, London: Lexington Books, 2015, pp. 11–20.

co-educational institution that is organized under the Non-Profit Public Benefit Corporation Law. In 2006, the University of the West became accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). At the time of this research it maintains four undergraduate programmes – Business Administration, English, Liberal Arts, and Psychology – and four graduate programmes – Buddhist Chaplaincy, Business Administration, Psychology, and Religious Studies.¹⁵ In addition, it runs certificate programmes that include Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), an Undergraduate Certificate in Business Administration, a Graduate Certificate in Business Administration, and a Post-MBA Certificate in Business Administration.

Despite being founded by a Buddhist order, the University of the West is a secular university that does not require its faculty or students to be Buddhist.¹⁶ However, the values and mission of the school are defined in Buddhist terms.¹⁷ There are classes that teach the books of Fo Gang Shan's founder Hsing Yun, and sometimes a monastic gives classes on certain Buddhism-related topics, such as *renjian* Buddhism and management. Furthermore, the business programme has a learning through service component, and all the students enrolled in undergraduate programmes are required to take at least one course in religious studies. However, these courses focus more on general life education than on Buddhist doctrine or on the academic study of religion. The university contributes to the community by providing an affordable education. As one of the faculty members told me, it has the lowest tuition fees for a private university in the state of California and provides many scholarships for its students.¹⁸

Although the school is an independent organization, it still maintains a close connection to the temple. The presidents of the University of the West and Fo Guang Shan's Taiwanese universities meet regularly, and the school maintains regular exchanges with the order's educational institutes in the Philippines and Australia. Because of its affordable fees and many scholarship opportunities, the school is not completely self-financed. In fact, Fo Guang Shan provides most of the university's financial support. In addition, the temple also provides

¹⁵ Fo Guang Shan, University of the West, Academics University of the West, <http://www.uwest.edu/academics/>.

¹⁶ If not otherwise indicated, the following section is based on data collected during my fieldwork at Hsi Lai Temple in the spring of 2018.

¹⁷ "Our Mission. The mission of University of the West is to provide a whole-person education in a context informed by Buddhist wisdom and values, and to facilitate cultural understanding and appreciation between East and West." Fo Guang Shan, University of the West, Mission, University of the West, <https://www.uwest.edu/about-uwest/our-mission/>.

¹⁸ President's Scholarship, Dean's Scholarship, and UWest Scholarship, Lotus Scholarship, Bridge Scholarship, IBEF International Buddhist Education Foundation Scholarship for monastics.

opportunities not only for internships and voluntary work, but also meditation retreats. Some of the university's students have even found jobs at the temple after their graduation.

The University of the West has a highly diverse student body. About half of the students are international students. The ratio is roughly even in all four main tracks, with psychology attracting slightly more domestic students and the MBA programme on the other hand attracting more international students. The school's biggest programme is Business Administration, while chaplaincy and religious studies are relatively small programmes. The school aims to have a fifty-fifty balance of undergraduate and graduate students, but at the time of my research it had slightly more graduate students. In recent years, the school has registered a rise in the number of Hispanic Americans in its undergraduate programmes, which reflects recent demographic developments in the San Gabriel Valley. Most of the international students who are enrolled at the University of the West come from Asia. There are significantly more students from Asia than there are Asian American students. Of the overseas students from Asia, the majority comes from Chinese-speaking countries, particularly from Taiwan and the PRC. To enhance its appeal to local non-Chinese students, in 2004 the university abandoned its original Chinese name and renamed itself the University of the West. At the same time, international students prefer to receive a diploma from a university with an English name. The name change has led to an overall increase in student numbers. The University of the West also has a high number of Buddhist monastics amongst its student body. The school has managed to develop a reputation in high-ranking Buddhist monastic circles in Asia. Its Religious Studies and Chaplaincy departments especially attract elite Buddhist monastics from different Asian countries, including, but not limited to, the PRC and Thailand. Hsing Yun's establishment of the University of the West can thus be seen as the fulfilment of his teacher's Taixu's unsuccessful efforts to establish a pan-Buddhist university in Republican-Era China.

As mentioned in this chapter's introduction, the line between charity and education is not always clear and there is often an overlap. The second example of Fo Guang Shan Buddhist civic engagement, the Nan Hua Performing Arts Group, a performance arts boarding school for young South African women from rural areas based at Nan Hua Temple in South Africa, represents such a case where education and charity combine.¹⁹ While the University of the West and the Nan Hua Performing Arts Group both represent Fo Guang Shan undertakings that are

¹⁹ The following section is based on data collected during my fieldwork at the Nan Hua Temple in late 2017.

directed towards the society of their host country in general, the latter is much more closely integrated into temple life. The Nan Hua Performing Arts Group is a performing-arts boarding school for rural South African women that is integrated into the physical building complex of Nan Hua Temple.

While the founding of the University of the West in some ways represents the fulfilment of an ambition that dates back to the Republican Era, the founding of the Nan Hua Performing Arts Group on the other hand is a response to a more contemporary social issue. When I interviewed one of the monastics at Nan Hua Temple about the motivation for establishing the programme, he told me that only a single-digit percentage of black women in South Africa have a university degree. He also stated that after finishing high school, many young women get married, have children, and do not continue their education. The temple therefore decided to do something in response to the issue. Fo Guang Shan's aim was to provide learning opportunities for those young women who live in underdeveloped and rural areas and who otherwise have a limited chance of establishing a professional career. In 2013, the Nan Hua Performing Arts Group was founded, and student enrolment began shortly afterwards in 2014.

The group represents one of the most current attempts by the temple to contribute to South African society. Its other efforts include the Nan Hua Academy, an educational institution that provides free three-month computer and Mandarin language courses for unemployed people in the neighbouring townships in order to assist them in finding employment, and a scout programme the temple has initiated in order to provide recreational activities for under-privileged children from neighbouring townships. An earlier example of such efforts is an African Buddhist seminary once operated by the temple.²⁰ The Nan Hua Performance Art Group offers a three-year programme. It is free of charge, includes free board and lodging, and covers the travelling expenses for its performance tours. Students who have proven themselves to be responsible and diligent enough have the option to continue for a further two years during which they can serve as teaching assistants. In December 2017, the first round of students received their degrees. Some of the graduates decided to stay at the temple to work as teaching assistants. Occasionally, the students also help out with the scout programme.

The background of the young women is quite diverse. They come from different South African ethnic groups and different parts of the country. New students often come from the same groups as current ones, having heard about the programme from their friends. But Fo Guang Shan also advertises the programme in

20 Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth*, pp. 296–298.

local newspapers. A prerequisite for enrolment is that students have to be female, 18 to 25 years old, and unmarried. An interview is conducted at the temple to see if they are a good fit for the programme. So far, 131 young black South African women have been enrolled in the programme. However, many of these did not persevere. The current 30 were selected from a group of 200. There are several possible reasons for them giving up: some of the women are unable to adjust to the vegetarian food, while others have problems getting used to strict temple life. Others again may just have difficulties with the content of the classes and do not pass the exams that are held regularly. The classes designed for the young women include computer courses and Mandarin language classes, but the main focus is on performing arts. Traditional Chinese and African drumming, traditional African dancing, African marimba xylophone playing, modern dance, Chinese martial arts, and traditional dances, are all part of the curriculum. The classes are taught by local South African as well as Taiwanese teachers. During the first year, students begin by studying African performance arts taught by local teachers. From the second year, they are also taught by Taiwanese teachers flown in from Taipei. The Taiwanese teachers normally stay for about four weeks at a time and teach intensive classes in Chinese drum, dance, and performance.

The overall artistic quality of the young performers, particularly the senior students, is so impressive that the temple was even approached by a TV station and asked to participate in the popular TV show “South Africa’s Got Talent”. After a period of consideration, the temple decided to give it a try and let the young women of the second and third year of the Nan Hua Performing Arts Group participate. The process happened to take place during my fieldwork period at the temple. The group turned out to be quite successful and even made it to the semi-finals. In addition, the group also performs regularly at different venues in Gauteng Province, often at events that are organized by the local Taiwanese and PRC Chinese communities. But the young women of the Nan Hua Performing Arts Group also perform internationally. Once a year the second- and third-year students go on tour and perform at different Fo Guang Shan temples in Asia. So far, they have travelled to Taiwan, the PRC, Malaysia, and the Philippines. One monastic told me that the audiences, mostly consisting of ethnic Chinese, are very touched to see young African women perform traditional Chinese arts at such a high professional level. Thus, the Nan Hua Performing Arts Group not only constitutes a form of civic engagement in the context of South African society but also has positive repercussions for Fo Guang Shan back in Asia. It enhances the profile of the order as a contributor to a global civil society. The temple plans to further professionalize the training by expanding its cooperation with other Chinese and Taiwanese groups.

The young women live on the temple grounds and are fully integrated in the daily life of the temple. Three times per day, they eat together with the monastics, the long-time volunteers, and the temple staff. Although the temple does hope to convey Fo Guang Shan Buddhist values, students are not required to become Buddhists or even to participate in the daily morning service that is conducted in one of the shrine halls. In fact, none of the students during my time of fieldwork was Buddhist; one student was a Muslim and all others were Christians. I had the opportunity to teach two classes to the students and learn more about the students' perspective on temple life. The first class, which was given to the whole student body focused on the methods, advantages, and pitfalls of Mandarin language learning. The second one was specifically for first-year students focusing on Taiwanese culture and *renjian* Buddhism in general. During the discussion time of the classes students vividly discussed their experiences at the temple, shared their perspective on Fo Guang Shan Buddhism, but also opened up about their lives in the programme. The students reported how the Chinese Buddhist iconography at the temple (in particular the statue of the thousand-armed Avalokitesvara) had irritated them in the beginning, but added how they had got used to it over time. They were very impressed by the disciplined way the volunteers at the temple practice Buddhism. While most also reported that they had little problem adjusting to the vegetarian cuisine – they particularly liked the Buddhist mock meat dishes – several students found the temple too quiet and noted that there were too many rules.

While there are surely cultural differences between Taiwan and the black South African communities the students originated from – including the food, and the way people talk and socialize – some of these issues might be less related to cultural differences and more to the fact that Nan Hua Performing Arts Group is integrated into a Temple. A temple is of course not any kind of Taiwanese space but a religious space that has many rules and regulations. A Buddhist temple, even one as industrious as the *renjian* Buddhist temples of Fo Guang Shan, is a space of Buddhist practice (*xiuxing* 修行). The students of the Nan Hua Performance Group on the other hand are young women at an age when people tend to be more interested in having fun or going to the movies than living the quiet life of a monastic. Thus, some students leave the programme after a while. But those who have stayed have adjusted to the somewhat strict environment remarkably well. The young women in the Nan Hua Performing Arts Group are an integral part of temple life. Although it is the temple that sets the basic rules, Nan Hua Temple has also adapted to the situation. Compared to Fo Guang Shan's other overseas temples, the atmosphere at Nan Hua is much livelier and many rules are not enforced as strictly.

The global civic engagement of Nan Hua Temple and University of the West constitute means of contributing to the societies of South Africa and the USA. But at the same time, they also represent an effort to spread *renjian* Buddhism to the local non-Chinese population. It does not matter that the students of the University of the West or the young women of the Nan Hua Performance Arts Group, like the vast majority of non-Chinese beneficiaries of Fo Guang Shan's educational and charity engagement worldwide, do not immediately convert to Buddhism. Compared to the strong missionary zeal of some Christian groups, Fo Guang Shan takes a soft approach to proselytization. When I asked him about the relationship between a *renjian* Buddhist religiosity and the order's civic engagement in South Africa, the abbot of Nan Hua noted:

We organize many activities for Buddhism to develop roots in Africa. We need to train talent for the localisation of Buddhism in the future. That is very important. What we can do is encourage the South African Chinese to donate and invest in the training of local talent for the future development of Buddhism in Africa. That is what is important to do and what we are able to do. That is why we have to be open, so when people ask why we spend so much money on charity, on the Nan Hua Academy for example, and how is that related to Buddhism, I respond that training Buddhist talent cannot be achieved overnight. It is about planting a seed. Humanistic Buddhism means to do what the Buddha said, what humans need, to do that which purifies and beautifies (佛說的, 人要的, 淨化的, 善美的). It is about contributing to society!²¹

Through its local performances and television appearances the Nan Hua Performing Arts Group functions as what one BLIA member has called “cultural ambassadors” for the temple. But the reach of the group also exceeds the borders of South Africa. In March 2018, the Nan Hua Performing Arts Group was even invited to participate in the conference of the UN Women's Commission on the Status of Women held in New York. Furthermore, by touring other Fo Guang Shan temples in Taiwan and Southeast Asia and by appearing in Fo Guang Shan media, the Nan Hua Performance group, just like the University of the West, represents a successful example of Fo Guang Shan's transnational civic engagement and thereby helps to attract donations and generate revenue.

Cosmopolitan Goodness

Much like the global charity engagements of Tzu Chi, Fo Guang Shan's civic engagements are linked to what Weller, Huang, Wu, and Fan call “civic serving”, a

21 Interview conducted in Chinese, own translation; Nan Hua Temple, South Africa; fall 2017.

modern generation of selfhood of an individual who “chooses to become an active volunteer, who accepts the wider authority of a religious organization and discipline, who seeks cultivation and fulfilment through a broader civic responsibility to society and humanity, who sees herself cosmopolitan even though she may never have left home, and who achieves this end by accepting new forms of embodied action”.²² Fo Guang Shan volunteers are involved in charitable causes all over the globe. In Taiwan, Fo Guang Shan maintains a wide range of charity endeavours.²³ The order organizes regular children’s camps, and maintains a children’s home, an educational centre for elementary and middle school children, four senior citizens’ homes, two clinics and a mobile clinic, and a columbarium. In addition, Fo Guang Shan runs prison visit programmes, a drug addiction rehabilitation programme, disaster relief programmes, reconstruction programmes for earthquake victims, memorial services for the victims of natural disasters, winter relief programmes for the poor, community service programmes, a hospice, environmental protection programmes, blood donation campaigns, and various training programmes for volunteers.

Overseas, Fo Guang Shan engages in philanthropic work in Asia, the Americas, Africa, Oceania, and, on a smaller scale, Europe. In the People’s Republic of China, the order has provided disaster relief aid and constructed an elementary school and a clinic.²⁴ It runs prison visit programmes and charity programmes for the needy and elderly in Hong Kong. In Japan, Fo Guang Shan provided disaster relief work after the Kobe earthquake in 1995 and operates visit programmes to senior citizens’ homes. In Malaysia, the Philippines, India, and Sri Lanka it runs several charity and disaster relief programmes. To Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Myanmar it has donated wheelchairs and other goods. It has constructed a junior high school in Myanmar and provided free medical services in Northern Thailand and Indonesia. In Indonesia, the order operates several charity and disaster relief programmes. Fo Guang Shan has also provided donations to Iraq. After the 2004 tsunami, a US\$ 500,000 emergency fund was created by the order’s headquarters, and a variety of local BLIA chapters worldwide provided further donations and disaster relief and reconstruction programmes for the victims. Furthermore, Fo Guang Shan has performed several memorial services to ensure a good rebirth for the deceased and thereby alleviate the suffering of the bereaved.

²² R. P. Weller et al., *Religion and Charity: The Social Life of Goodness in Chinese Societies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, pp. 125–126.

²³ The following data is based on: Foguangshan zongwu weiyuanhui (ed.), *Foguangshan kaishan sishi zhounian jinian tekan*, vol. 5, chapter 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 130–171.

Fo Guang Shan is also very active in the Americas.²⁵ In the USA, the order operates a vast range of programmes, including winter relief, disaster aid, medical services, bone marrow donations, computer donations, academic scholarships, charity programmes for the elderly and homeless, and environmental programmes such as recycling activities and community clean-ups. Fo Guang Shan even runs two columbaria in the country: one in L.A. and another in Houston. In Canada too, the order operates several charity programmes. In Brazil, the order provides medical services and runs educational and professional training programmes for local children and youths. It has even formed a football team for children from a disadvantaged background. In Paraguay, it has constructed a clinic and operates several donation and charity programmes, including sponsoring of the construction of two pedestrian overpasses. Fo Guang Shan has donated wheelchairs to Chile and provided a winter relief programme there.

On the African continent the order runs a small branch centre in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and was in the past involved in charities in Malawi. However, Fo Guang Shan's main site of activity is South Africa, where it runs several donation and charity programmes.²⁶ Fo Guang Shan's African headquarters, Nan Hua Temple, runs the above-mentioned scout programme for children from disadvantaged backgrounds and Nan Hua Academy, which provides free professional skills training to underprivileged communities of the Kungwini Local Municipality. The school's programmes include lessons in accounting software, word processor and other software, and Mandarin. In Australia and New Zealand, Fo Guang Shan operates community service and several donation and charity programmes. In Papua New Guinea, the order maintains a free kindergarten and runs several donation and charity programmes.²⁷ Finally, in Europe, it has donated wheelchairs in France and organizes community services such as clean-up days in London.²⁸

This list, which is not exhaustive, shows that overseas Fo Guang Shan's civic engagement is geographically linked to Taiwanese migration. Fo Guang Shan is particularly involved in areas of the world where there is a large overseas Taiwanese community, such as Southeast Asia or the United States of America. Whether at home or overseas, *renjian* Buddhist charity as provided by Fo Guang Shan or Tzu Chi, represents a specific mode of "religious philanthropy characterized by notions of a universal good, embodied through cosmopolitan volunteers driven by generalized feelings of love, and institutionalized

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 172–191.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 192–198.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 199–202.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 203.

to be large scale, accountable, and rationalized”.²⁹ What differentiates contemporary *renjian* Buddhist civic engagements from earlier efforts in the past, is that former modes of religious civic engagement that were once linked to the specific nation-state projects of China and Taiwan, facilitated by the global flows of post-1965 Chinese migration, have been deterritorialized and expanded over the globe. What has changed in this process are the recipients of the benefactions. Outside of Taiwan, and in contrast to the situation back home, Fo Guang Shan’s overseas civic engagements primarily target a non-Chinese audience. Thus, within a global context, Fo Guang Shan’s civic engagements represent a cross-cultural move out of the temple space into the mainstream non-Chinese society. They create new kinds of linkages that connect the temple, the diaspora community, and the non-Chinese mainstream of the new host society. Just as the temple is a cultural Chinese space that also functions as a sightseeing hotspot, Fo Guang Shan’s transnational civic engagement produces spaces of cross-cultural interaction.

Post-1965 ethnic Chinese migrants have developed an array of voluntary associations that are organized around functional life needs in an urban diasporic setting. Philip Kuhn calls the new migrant organizations “despatialized, non-particularistic groupings”, because, in contrast to earlier forms of organizing such as the hometown organizations, new migrant associations transcend the particularities of national and regional origin. They provide a huge variety of services that include job training and placement, senior citizen services, English lessons, housing development, assistance with negotiating language-intensive and bureaucratic tasks, as well as weekend Chinese schools and religious services.³⁰ Many of these new voluntary associations also reach out into the larger non-Chinese community. New migrant associations, like Fo Guang Shan, for example, invite local American politicians to their events and participate in local community through a range of economic, political, social, and cultural activities.³¹

Fo Guang Shan can be seen as a Buddhist variant of such a new migrant association. Instead of just protecting the migrant from discrimination by mainstream society, new associations such as Fo Guang Shan create links to it. Through charity and educational endeavours, the order contributes to the non-Chinese mainstream society. It links Chinese with non-Chinese but also, by transcending particularistic identities, bridges the intra-cultural divides within

²⁹ Weller et al., *Religion and Charity*, p. 12.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 362.

³¹ H.-S. Chen, *Chinatown No More: Taiwan Immigrants in Contemporary New York*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992, p. 56.

the internally diverse Chinese diasporic community. Through charity and education Fo Guang Shan establishes itself as a civic actor in the host society while at the same time generating spaces of intra- and cross-cultural interaction. The cross-cultural interactions are in some cases limited in degree, particularly those of the order's charity endeavours that take the form of non-recurring contributions (e.g., donations). Others, such as the educational undertakings discussed above, create stronger linkages. Furthermore, all Fo Guang Shan's civic involvements enhance the order's visibility in the mainstream culture of its host societies. Below, I provide two ethnographic extracts that exemplify the order's charity projects. The first is a typical example of modern religious charity – providing relief to the poor – while the second is somewhat different in that it is directed towards their own community and blurs the line between charity and religious cultivation.

During my fieldwork at Hsi Lai Temple in California, I participate in an event that is organized by the English-language Dharma book club.³² Once a year, the temple cooperates with St. John Vianney Catholic Church to provide food for some of the many homeless people in Los Angeles.³³ The Fo Guang Shan activity is attended not only by members of the English-language book club but also by members of several other BLIA subchapters. Around 5:30 p.m. about 40 people, some with a Hispanic background, some non-Hispanic whites, and many Chinese Americans, gather at the church. Led by a monastic, we bring trays packed with vegetarian food and about 100 sleeping bags to hand out to the needy. The church hall is already packed with people sitting around tables. Most people in the room are European Americans, Hispanic Americans, and African Americans. Some people are already in an adjacent room, where camp beds are provided for people to spend the night. Others are at the back of the building taking advantage of one of the mobile showers installed for the occasion. However, most sit around the round tables of the church hall and wait for their food. In the meantime, Fo Guang Shan volunteers heat up the vegetarian food that had been prepared at the temple beforehand in a small kitchen. Right before dinner, the Catholic priest and a Fo Guang Shan nun welcome the guests with a speech and a little prayer. Temple volunteers and I who act as waiters then serve the food.

³² The following ethnographic report is based on fieldwork data.

³³ According to the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) there were about 55,000 people living on the streets in 2017. USC Neighborhood Data for Social Change, "Homeless people L.A.". <https://usc.data.socrata.com/stories/s/Homelessness-in-2018-A-Snapshot-of-Los-Angeles-Cou/g8ge-um6u/> (accessed 11 November 2018).

The scene shows how Fo Guang Shan's civic engagement is rooted in early twentieth-century *renjian* Buddhist religiosity that has developed in reference to Christian modes of philanthropy. Chinese Buddhist civil engagement was informed by Western ideas and practices conveyed by European American Protestant missionaries. In Chinese diasporic communities today, the situation seems to have flipped. Now it is Buddhists who are more involved in philanthropy. Chinese Christians in the diaspora tend to limit their charitable engagement to their own group. Comparing a Taiwanese Protestant Church with a Buddhist temple in Southern California, Carolyn Chen concludes that while the church limits its outreach to the ethnic Chinese community and mainly focuses on proselytization, the temple is heavily involved in charity work and has extended its public mission beyond the ethnic Chinese community.³⁴ Kenneth J. Guest, too, notes that many Chinese Christian churches focus on providing services for the diaspora community and assisting immigrants in adapting to their new lives.³⁵ Yang Fenggang makes similar observations about Chinese American Christianity. He traces the reluctance of Chinese American Christians to get involved in society as a whole through political participation or social service to their evangelical faith and Confucian cultural heritage.³⁶ Interestingly enough, several of the Fo Guang Shan adherents with whom I had informal conversations about the issue particularly made reference to Confucianism in order to *legitimize* their religion's high degree of involvement in society. Likewise, Taiwanese scholar Yang Huinan argues that *renjian* Buddhist social engagement is less rooted in a reevaluation of Indian Mahayana sutras, as some reformers argue, but is instead linked to Confucian practice and discourse.³⁷

Providing food for the homeless is a way of contributing to society common for religious organizations today. But by relocating it in the context of a non-majority Chinese country, it adds some complexity not only in terms of cross-cultural but also cross-class dynamics. While the Fo Guang Shan volunteers are a mixed group, the majority of them are ethnic Chinese belonging to the middle and upper strata of society. Although the recipients of the charitable work too were of a variety of backgrounds, not one of these recipients appeared to have

34 Chen, "The Religious Varieties of Ethnic Presence", p. 215.

35 K. J. Guest, *God in Chinatown: Religion and Survival in New York's Evolving Immigrant Community*, New York: New York University Press, 2003, pp. 195–196.

36 F. Yang, *Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, Assimilation, and Adhesive Identities*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999, p. 191.

37 Yang H. 楊惠南, "'Renjian fojiao' de jingdian quanshi: shi 'yuan ru fo' huo huigu Yindu?" 「人間佛教」的經典詮釋 – 是「援儒入佛」或是回歸印度? *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal* (2000) 13, p. 479.

a Chinese background. We encounter a similar situation in South Africa where relatively well-off ethnic Chinese volunteers hand out goods to the local non-Chinese needy. Through their global civic engagements, Fo Guang Shan Buddhists refute the old anti-Chinese stereotype of Chinese migrants as sojourners who keep only to themselves, instead presenting themselves as responsible members of their new society. While giving away actual capital, they are at the same time increasing the cultural capital of their community, not only within their new home countries but also back in Taiwan.

But the fact that Fo Guang Shan's overseas temples reach out to mainstream society does not mean that they contribute nothing to the local Chinese community. The services they provide to the diaspora community differ from those that target mainstream society. They focus less on alleviating the consequences of poverty and more on providing religious and funeral services to the diaspora. As mentioned above, Hsi Lai Temple operates a columbarium in the area and provides chanting services for the deceased. During my fieldwork at the temple, I had the chance to participate in one of the chanting services. The following fragment is a brief ethnographic extract from my temple stay at Hsi Lai. On a Sunday in the spring of 2018, a group of ten volunteers and two female monastics pick me up from a side entrance of Hsi Lai temple's main shrine. We drive to a big cemetery located not far off from the temple. Together, the monastics, lay volunteers, and I are on a mission to conduct a funeral service. A Fo Guang Shan Buddhist funeral service consists of a solemn ritual and chanting assistance for the family of the deceased. A particularly important element of the ritual is to chant the name of the Buddha Amitabha to assure rebirth of the deceased in the Western Pure Land of Sukhavati. When we arrive at the Buddhist chapel, everything is already decorated with lavish flower arrangements and the atmosphere is calm and dignified. The funeral congregation is small and consists mainly of the family of the deceased and our group of Fo Guang Shan volunteers. After the service our group proceeds to the graveyard for the burial of the deceased (see Figure 8). The deceased was not a member of the BLIA, and normally the temple is not able to provide this service to non-members in Los Angeles. There are just too many people in the LA area and the BLIA lacks the manpower to provide the service to everybody. But today is an exception. Providing a Buddhist funeral is not only a service to the diasporic community, but also represents a possibility to spread the Dharma. During my fieldwork at Nan Hua Temple in Bronkhorstspuit, South Africa, I interviewed a leading BLIA Johannesburg member, a very elegant, elderly Taiwanese lady, who told me that she had only joined the BLIA after Nan Hua Temple had offered chanting assistance for her deceased parent. Before that she had not even identified herself as a Buddhist. The generous offer and solemn ritual



Figure 8: Fo Guang Shan Funeral, Los Angeles County, USA.

conducted by the temple had moved her so much that she began to get involved with Nan Hua Temple.

This example shows that certain ritual services when offered for free can constitute a form of Buddhist charity. At the same time, they are, of course, a mode of religious cultivation and can even function as opportunities for proselytization. As a Buddhist order, religious cultivation lies at the heart of Fo Guang Shan religiosity. The following chapter examines how religious cultivation is practiced at Fo Guang Shan. *Renjian* Buddhism is not practiced as an individual, in solitude withdrawn from society, but in a social and communal fashion that links the individual to the group.