

Fo Guang Shan and Global China as a Spatial Order

The initial task that I set out when I began the research for this book was to understand how the Taiwanese Buddhist order Fo Guang Shan has in just a few decades managed to develop from a small temple in post-war southern Taiwan into the leading global Buddhist order in the Chinese Mahayana tradition. The aim was to trace the order's transnational trajectory, not so much as the mere result of strategy, but by taking into consideration the underlying conditions and dynamics that continue to shape it to this day. To achieve this task, I brought into dialogue data collected through a multi-sited ethnography at the order's headquarters and several of its overseas facilities, with research on modern and contemporary Chinese religions and studies on ethnic Chinese migration. One of the conclusions to be drawn from this effort is that Fo Guang Shan's success would not have been possible without the global economic and political restructuring that began in the second half of the last century and the subsequent emergence of a globally minded Asian middle class. In the last chapter of this book I will discuss how studying Fo Guang Shan's modern Buddhist religiosity within the wider context of this global restructuring also enhances our understanding of the workings and fabric of globalization itself. Globalization, or the increasing integration of the world in the age of global modernity, as I understand it, is not an abstract process concerted by faceless multinational companies that descends upon individuals, organizations, and societies in order to remake the world after a Western image. Instead, considering the example of Fo Guang Shan suggests that globalization is a dynamic spatial configuration or meta-order that is comprised of and constantly reproduced through complex and multifaceted border-crossing involvements of a myriad of actors – individuals, networks, organizations, nation-states, etc. – from a multitude of places, and their mutual interactions. It does not follow that all actors involved in this process have identical starting conditions and that there exists a level playing field. Individual globalization projects are not completely autonomous but grouped and ordered in a multitude of ways in convergence with the changing global power equilibrium. Globalization as a higher order spatial configuration is comprised of several suborders. One of them, one that has been formative for the globalization project of Fo Guang Shan, could be called Global China. The term Global China is of course a reference to Yang Fenggang's notion of the Global East. Both notions, Global China, as well as the Global East challenge oversimplifying spatial divisions of the world into the Global South and Global North or "the West and the rest", by directing attention to

globalizing spatial orders that do not easily fall into the dichotomy of developed and undeveloped.¹

Global China in this sense does not just depict the global expansion of the People's Republic of China or even the post-1965 increase of ethnic Chinese migration movements worldwide. The term does not refer to a fixed geographic locality, but instead represents a globally dispersed social configuration. It is a complex, open, contested, and dynamic spatial order whose roots go back to the colonial era and that involves anyone and anything who interacts with it.² As social space it is comprised of internally diverse, dynamic and interrelated clusters of actors and their individual globalization projects, all of which are linked to another, albeit to different degrees, by a certain cultural, social, and linguistic proximity. Global China therefore includes the governments, transnational organizations, and mobile citizens of the PRC and the ROC, overseas Chinese diaspora communities *and* their host societies in Southeast Asia and worldwide, as well as the trade routes, mediascapes, and transnational networks that link these entities. The border-crossing activities of all the actors involved produce their own globalization projects, most of which are interconnected, overlap, and are, in a number of ways entangled. Yet despite their many commonalities, the relationship amongst them is not necessarily a harmonious one. In fact, the relationship may be characterized by intense competition and even conflict, the most well-known example being the cross-strait tensions between the PRC and Taiwan.

At the same time, Global China is not a clearly separate entity. As a social space it does not constitute a self-contained system, but is instead a dynamic spatial configuration that has co-existed, and continues to co-exist, overlap, and sometimes compete with other spatial orders such as the Western and Japanese imperialism of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the socialist bloc, the Global South, ASEAN, and the West. All these globalizing spatial orders are social configurations that are entangled and overlap in complex and multiple ways, sometimes conflicting, sometimes harmonious, and everything in between, such that in their totality they produce the global condition of our world. It follows that Global China is not exclusively comprised of ethnic Chinese. Non-ethnic Chinese businessmen involved in doing business with Chinese companies,

1 F. Yang, "Afterword", in: M. A. Lamport (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Christianity in the Global South*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018, p. 957.

2 The term "spatial order" refers to the theoretical framework of the Collaborative Research Consortium (SFB 1199). However, there are some minor differences in the application of terminology. For the usage of the SFB heuristic repertoire, see: M. Middell, "Category of Spatial Formats: To What End?", in: S. Marung and M. Middell (eds.), *Spatial Formats under the Global Condition*, Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019, pp. 15–47.

or non-ethnic Chinese students, academics, and language teachers who may live in Nanjing (南京), Singapore, or Tainan (台南), for example, equally are all parts of this spatial order. What is Chinese about Global China is not ethnicity alone nor a connection to the localities inhabited by ethnic Chinese, but rather the prevalence of Chinese languages (particularly, but not exclusively, Mandarin), and certain cultural practices and discourses within the context of this order. Fo Guang Shan's *renjian* Buddhist religiosity represents one Buddhist example of such discourses and practices.

Globalization as a meta-order not only provides the conditions for Fo Guang Shan's global development, it is concurrently navigated as well as (re) produced by the order. The transnational development of Fo Guang Shan constitutes a religious example of a non-Western globalization project. One that has consolidated into a global network of temples, practice centres, and other associated facilities. The majority of the order's overseas temples, including those discussed in this book, feature traditional Chinese architecture, which makes them physical markers of the spatial order Global China. Nan Hua Temple for example is clearly visible from the highway that links O.R. Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg with the country's most popular tourist attraction, Kruger National Park, and is surrounded by streets that bear Chinese street names (see Figure 10).

Yet Fo Guang Shan does not just build temples all over the world, it globally promotes *renjian* Buddhist practices and discourses. Fo Guang Shan is a Buddhist organization that originates from Taiwan, and that carries with it embedded ideas of what constitutes a modernist Buddhist religiosity as they have developed in Republican Era China. These ideas emerged during the European colonial era with its multitude of border-crossings and mobilities. They had their significant implications for the colonized and semi-colonized societies of the globe. One such implication was the invention of native language neologisms for terms such as "religion", "superstition", and "the secular", but also the creation of the term Buddhism as a generic category and the idea of Buddhism as one of several world religions.³ *Renjian* Buddhism represents one particular Chinese Buddhist response that emerged out of such transnational dynamics, which had linked China with Japan, and the West and its colonial spheres of influence in Southeast Asia and elsewhere. Although colonialism had set off the

³ On the term Buddhism as a generic category, see G. Obeyesekere, "Buddhism", in: M. Juergensmeyer (ed.), *Global Religions: An Introduction*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 64. On Buddhism as a world religion, see T. Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, p. 12.



Figure 10: Street Sign in Bronkhorstspuit, South Africa.

enterprise of Buddhist reformation, *renjian* Buddhists were far from being just passive recipients of Western ideas and practices. They rejected some aspects and accepted others. They translated foreign ideas into their religious, cultural, and social contexts by merging them with native discourses and practices, thereby consciously transforming the Chinese Mahayana tradition of late imperial times into a modern Chinese Buddhist religiosity. As discussed in this book, during the Republican Era, notions of modernity and modernization were inextricably linked to the idea of the nation-state and a modern religion was expected to take part in its construction. Thus, for early *renjian* Buddhists, to ensure the survival of their religion meant to reformulate it in a way that made it beneficial to modern society. The orientation of the *renjian* Buddhist reform project was therefore an explicitly modernist one; to make their tradition fit modernity as understood in Republican China. Half a century later, big Taiwanese Buddhist mass organizations such as Fo Guang Shan began to put into practice many of the modernist dreams of the earlier *renjian* Buddhists. One of the dreams was the global dissemination of *renjian* Buddhism. But by moving one particular modern Buddhist religiosity, one that developed in a specific place, into a global context, *renjian* Buddhists also had to negotiate multiple understandings of what constitutes a modern Buddhist religiosity.

Multiple Modern Buddhist Religiosities in the Age of Global Modernity

A whole tradition of scholarship has thought of modernity as something that was initiated in Europe and that will eventually spread over the whole globe. This view proposes a dichotomy of traditional and modern, where Europe or the West represents the apex of what it means to be modern, while the rest of the world is still caught in tradition. According to this teleological understanding of modernity, the non-Western parts of the world lag behind and need to catch up; to be modern is to be Western. In this narrative, as so famously proposed by Max Weber, a key role is reserved for Protestantism as the facilitator for modern capitalism and, thus, Protestantism is understood by many to be the modern religion par excellence. From this classical perspective, modernization necessarily leads to secularization, or the *disenchantment* of the world, and thus for a religion to be modern means either to be “Protestantized” or to be secularized. Both ideas have been applied to Buddhism, either by stressing the Protestant character of modern Buddhism in South Asia or by taking Western, more secular forms of Buddhism as the model for Buddhist modernism.⁴

This book takes a different approach by considering a spatial perspective on modernity, and thus modern Buddhism, a perspective that takes into account the immense transformations non-Western societies underwent during the Colonial Era. China historian Tani E. Barlow has criticized the narrative sketched above. She particularly disagrees with the idea that modernity is a thing in itself that is understood as being prior to colonialism. Instead, she argues that “the modernity of non-European colonies is as indisputable as the colonial core of European modernity”.⁵ Her notion of “colonial modernity” does not approach history through positively defined units, e.g., nation-states, stages of development, or civilizations, but instead sees it as “a complex field of relationships or threads of material that connect [and] multiply in space-time and can be surveyed from specific sites”.⁶ China, although never completely colonized, was still multifariously linked to this “complex field of relationships or threads” through the actions of Western and Japanese colonial powers. According to Barlow, the perspective of colonial modernity allows us to see contemporary

4 For Protestant Buddhism, see R. F. Gombrich and G. Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988; for Buddhist modernism, see McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*.

5 T. E. Barlow, “Introduction”, in: Barlow (ed.), *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1997, p. 1.

6 Ibid., p. 6.

Asian modernities that have been obstructed by the older dichotomy of modern and traditional, or, in our case, to recognize the obvious modern disposition of *renjian* Buddhism from the beginning of the last century in China. *Renjian* Buddhism's modern disposition is one that was shaped during the colonial stage of modernity. At the time it was mainly confined to the countries of East Asia; but today, in what some scholars call the era of global modernity, *renjian* Buddhists have expanded their sphere of influence over large parts of the globe, in the process encountering differing understandings of what constitutes a modern Buddhist religiosity.⁷

By exploring how Fo Guang Shan's globalization project navigates different actualizations of modernity and their associated ideas of what constitutes modern Buddhism we can see that modernity is not one all-encompassing entity producing one fixed universal form of modern Buddhism, but rather something that occurs in plural. Thinking of "modernities" allows us then to incorporate the many diverse developments that occurred outside of the West and is therefore more suitable for empirical research. The idea of multiple modernities is, of course, associated with sociologist Shmuel N. Eisenstadt. Eisenstadt argues that although modern societies, Western as well as non-Western ones, all tend to develop towards structural differentiation, a multiplicity of institutional and ideological patterns emerge from these processes.⁸ According to his understanding, modernity and Westernization are not identical. Similarly, Anthropologists Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini do not think of non-Western modernities as reactive to the West but construe them as "cultural forms that are organically produced in relation to other regional forces in the polycentric world of late capitalism; forces with new cultural ecumenes independent of older centers of power have arisen."⁹ It follows that there are not just multiple modernities each of which is attached to one particular place, such as Europe, Asia, Africa, or the USA, but multiple modernities can exist and interact even within one spatial configuration. Within the Chinese context, for example, Ong identifies two competing modernities: national discourses of modernity emphasizing essentialism, territoriality, and fixity, which she associates with the PRC, and discourses linked to the entrepreneurial capitalism of the Chinese diaspora

7 See, for example, A. Dirlik, *Global Modernity: Modernity in the Age of Global Capitalism*, Boulder: Paradigm, 2007; P. Duara, *The Crisis of Global Modernity: Asian Traditions and a Sustainable Future*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

8 S. N. Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities", *Daedalus* 129 (2000) 1, pp. 1–2.

9 Ong and Nonini, "Introduction", p. 15.

that are marked by hybridity, deterritorialization, and fluidity.¹⁰ I am further complicating the picture by adding that both logics of Chinese modernity, state-centred and diasporic, play a role within the PRC as well as in the diaspora, albeit to different degrees. There is a difference between Beijing's statist views and the more transnational perspectives prevalent, at least until recently, in the mega cities of China's south, such as Guangdong (廣東), Shenzhen (深圳), and Hong Kong. Diaspora communities on the other hand are not just marked by hybridity, deterritorialization, and fluidity but are themselves part of nation-states with their own territorially bounded discourses and practices of modernity. The case of Taiwan even further convolutes the matter because the island is in many ways situated in between the PRC and the diaspora. Statist forms of modernity such as views that merge notions of ethnicity, culture, and territory have played a very formative role in the post-war history of Taiwan. However, the country is likewise shaped by its transformation into a democratic society with an open market economy and its most recent turn towards the "New Southbound Policy" with its subsequent shift towards neoliberal multiculturalism.¹¹

Thus we can see that state-centred and diasporic Chinese modernities in several distinct renderings are shaping the matrix of Global China as a spatial order. They produce multiple views (and associated practices) on the nature of modernity, what defines a modern nation-state, the way in the state is situated within the global, and what constitutes a modern religion or modern Buddhism in this context. Fo Guang Shan's *renjian* Buddhism represents one of multiple possible modern Buddhist religiosities, one that is neither Protestant nor secular, but that has managed to successfully navigate this matrix. The order has adapted to the diasporic experience of the many overseas Chinese communities worldwide and their interactions with their respective host countries. Fo Guang Shan's *renjian* Buddhist religiosity resonates within the diaspora because of overlapping histories and shared cultural roots but also because of a similar views on the space a modern religion should occupy within society. Thus in most countries where the order maintains overseas temples, just as it does in Taiwan, Fo Guang Shan interacts with its surrounding society on many levels and in many ways. Fo Guang Shan even flourishes in the PRC, despite the many restrictions on religious organizations imposed by the state.

¹⁰ A. Ong, "Chinese Modernities: Narratives of Nation and Capitalism", in: Ong and Nonini (eds.), *Ungrounded Empires*, p. 172.

¹¹ P.-C. Lan, "From Reproductive Assimilation to Neoliberal Multiculturalism: Framing and Regulating Immigrant Mothers and Children in Taiwan", *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 40 (2019) 3, pp. 318–333, at 318.

The reason for Fo Guang Shan's success can be found in the way the order defines Buddhist social engagements. One field of Buddhist social engagement as understood by Fo Guang Shan is culture. For Fo Guang Shan, culture first and foremost serves as a tool to attract people to the Buddhist Dharma. Yet within the context of the order's global trajectory, culture takes on a more complex meaning: The overseas Buddhist temple generates an accessible, open Buddhist *and* Chinese space that holds cultural activities in ways that are compatible with global event culture. The exhibited Chineseness of the order's overseas temples also attracts many non-Chinese who visit the temple particularly because of its role as a global ambassador of Chinese culture. At the same time, such a global and cosmopolitan deployment of Chinese culture is underpinned by an ongoing twentieth-century ethno-cultural discourse of Chineseness. This multivalent entwinement of differing renderings of Chineseness has contributed to the order's successful development overseas because it transcends the particularities of national origin amongst overseas Chinese by retrospectively linking the community back to an "imagined" China. But the prominent role that notions of Chineseness play in Fo Guang Shan's *renjian* Buddhism has also facilitated the establishment of connections with the People's Republic of China and facilitated its development there in recent years.

Engagements in the fields of charity and education constitute another important aspect characterizing Fo Guang Shan's modern Buddhist religiosity. Like the order's involvement in culture, civic engagement transcends particularistic identities within the diverse Chinese diasporic community, but is achieved in a different way. Within a global context, Fo Guang Shan's countless educational and charity undertakings represent a cross-cultural move, from out of the temple space into the mainstream non-Chinese society. The order creates new kinds of linkages that connect the temple, the diaspora community, and the non-Chinese mainstream of the host society. It establishes itself as a civic actor in its new homeland while at the same time generating spaces for intra- and cross-cultural interaction. In addition, the order's contributions to societies overseas also produces an effect back in Taiwan. Its global civic engagements are communicated back through the order's media, thereby reassuring adherents' sense of the order's universal goodness and helping it attract further donations. Here the situation differs from the People's Republic, however, where the activities of religious actors are highly regulated and mainly confined to official religious sites such as the temple space.

Finally, at Fo Guang Shan religious cultivation constitutes a form of social engagement in itself. Through the Buddha's Light International Association, religious cultivation and communality are inextricably entwined. While the order's doctrinal outlook is still deeply embedded in the mainstream Chinese

Mahayana, the order deemphasizes delving into doctrinal abstractions. At Fo Guang Shan, the Dharma is meant to be put into practice. A very strong emphasis is put on ethical behavior and altruism. Buddhism should serve contemporary society by helping the individual to become a harmonious part of a group, be it one's family, workplace, country, or the whole of the globe. Yet it does not follow that *renjian* Buddhism is simply a secularized form of Buddhism. Rituals such as Dharma assemblies play an important role at the order's temples. According to Buddhist doctrine, although every form of religious cultivation produces merit for the practitioner, each has its specific purpose. The motive for participating in the Emperor Liang Dharma Assembly described in the previous chapter is to repent one's past wrongdoings and vow to adjust one's future behaviour. The practitioner thereby eradicates bad karma and creates positive merit for him or herself, and also for deceased family members. The Chinese language website of Hsi Lai Temple states:

What should be taken into consideration when participating in a repentance? First of all, the practitioner must understand the content of the repentance text and the procedures of the ritual. She or he has to sincerely vow to not to repeat the committed offence. The practitioner has to firmly believe in the ability of the power of the Buddha to provide support and to purify the practitioner's heart. Furthermore, in order to generate a correlative resonance with the Buddha and to create infinite merit, it is very important to chant mindfully.¹²

As we can see from the quote, it is not enough just to feel some remorse, resolve to do better, and thus exhibit the right state of mind. In order to acquire the desired merit and extinguish one's negative karma, the participant needs to have faith in the power of the Buddha, she or he needs to correctly understand the content of the scripture (orthodoxy) to be recited, and the elements and structure (orthopraxy) of the ritual. Thus, repentance rituals and other Dharma assemblies at Fo Guang Shan do not only constitute secularized modes of religious cultivation that, for example, are supposed to work only on the psychological level. They are thought of as efficacious means to reduce negative karma and generate merit for oneself, one's deceased family members, and all sentient beings. Modes of religious cultivation such as repentance rituals and other Dharma assemblies lie at the heart of Fo Guang Shan's *renjian* Buddhist religiosity. If one were to only want to practice *renjian* Buddhism through

¹² “拜懺時要注意什麼呢？首先要了解懺文內容及拜懺程序，並真誠發露懺悔不復再犯外，更要信願佛力的攝受加持，激發內心的清淨。另外也需心觀、口唱，才能與佛心感應道交，產生不可思議功德。” <http://www.hsilai.org/tc/cal/df.php>.

philanthropy, one could choose to become involved in a Buddhist charity such as Tzu Chi, which is of course a choice that is made by many. But many of those people I talked to during my fieldwork told me that they chose to become “Fo Guang People” specifically because they were looking for a more intrinsically religious approach to *renjian* Buddhism.

Western scholarship on *renjian* Buddhism sometimes highlights the secularized aspects of *renjian* Buddhism. Chandler for example writes:

The exhortations to experience Chan in daily life and to establish a pure land in the human realm underscore a defining characteristic shaping all interpretations of Humanistic Buddhism: the secularization of Buddhist practice. In other words, the divisions between supramundane and mundane and between monastic and lay life are blurred. The otherness of buddhas as sacred beings and of pure lands as radically different is minimized in favor of accentuating the possibility of enlightenment for all and the accessibility of purity even in our saha world. Secularization also incorporates an element of laicization; that is to say, lay and monastic spheres of performance merge. Clerics are urged to return their focus to this mundane world, primarily by instructing lay devotees how to bring an element of the sacred into their lives. The holy life of the monastics is secularized while the secular life of laity is sacralized.¹³

Chandler presents two arguments here. The first one is a buddhological one: by emphasizing the applicability of Chan and Pure Land to one’s life in a modern world, *renjian* Buddhist organizations such as Fo Guang Shan merge the spheres of the sacred and the profane and thereby diminish the sacred otherness of the buddhas and pure lands in favour of “the possibility of enlightenment for all and the accessibility of purity even in our saha world”. His second argument operates on a more sociological level: By focusing on what *renjian* Buddhists call “going into the world”, the line between monastics and laity becomes more porous, which on the monastic side leads to a laicization of the sangha. However, doctrinal claims about the interpenetration of the sacred and the profane are a staple of mainstream Chinese Mahayana, particularly in the Chan tradition. Surely, the notion of a pure land on earth has a strong secular connotation. It reflects the discourse of *renjian* Buddhism, advocated by Taixu, his student Yinshun, and others. At the end of the nineteenth century, many Buddhists perceived their own tradition as in decline. The reformers thought that over the centuries it had been corrupted by elements of Chinese folk religion, which supposedly caused the sangha to be overly concerned with supernatural beings and practices like chanting for the dead. The reformers response was to promote a Buddhism that

¹³ S. Chandler, “Buddhism in China and Taiwan: The Dimensions of Contemporary Chinese Buddhism”, in S. C. Berkwitz (ed.), *Buddhism in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives*, Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2006, p. 188.

focuses more on the living and makes a positive contribution to society. They therefore absorbed the popular concept of a Buddhist pure land into the notion of the pure land on earth, a concept that deemphasizes otherworldly elements within Chinese Buddhism in favour of a modernist version of the religion that is more affirmative of worldly matters. However, it does not follow that the notion of a pure land on earth is completely secularized. Doctrinally it is linked to mind-only (*weixin* 維心) ideas that do not stress the pure land as a physical place independent of the mind, but instead relate it to its purification.¹⁴ If one's mind is purified than the world will be purified too. This idea is based on a concept from the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* (*weimo jing* 維摩經): "When the mind is purified, the Buddha lands will be purified."¹⁵ Historically, equating a pure land with a purified mind is a Chan approach to resolving doctrinal tensions between Chan and Pure Land systems of thought.¹⁶ *Renjian* Buddhists add a modernist twist to this complexity by expanding the mind-only understanding of a pure land from the individual to society as a whole. *Renjian* Buddhists responded to a modernizing world by reconfiguring the relationship between the Buddhist temple and its surrounding society. By enhancing the interaction between the sangha and the laity, and through its countless cultural, civic, and religious engagements Fo Guang Shan erase the demarcations between the sacred space of the temple and the secular space of society. The order therefore not only cause its monastics "to return their focus to this mundane world" but, as Chandler himself rightfully notes, "sacralizes" the secular life of the laity. Thus, although on the surface, *renjian* Buddhists seem to have secularized Buddhism through their extensive involvement in the secular sphere of society, by radically expanding the idea of the interpenetration of the sacred and the profane to today's urbanized and globalized world, they are actually reclaiming secular society itself as a sacred space. That is why Main and Lai claim socially-engaged Buddhism to be a response or "mirror image" of secularization.¹⁷ Subsequently, it is the particular entwinement of communality, culture, civic engagement, and religious cultivation that lies at the core of the modern disposition of Fo Guang Shan's *renjian* Buddhist religiosity.

By expanding its particular modern Buddhist religiosity over a large portion of the globe, Fo Guang Shan has to navigate not only the various Chinese modernities with their associated ideas on the role of a modern Buddhist religiosity, but also non-Chinese modernities. Global China might be the order's formative space

14 H.-C. Shih, *The Syncretism of Ch'an and Pure Land Buddhism*, New York: Lang, 1992, p. 146.

15 "隨其心淨，則佛土淨", *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra Weimojie suoshuo jing* 維摩詰所說經, T 475, 14.537a04–557b26, <https://21dzk.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/SAT/satdb2015.php> (accessed 11 November 2018).

16 Shih, *The Syncretism of Ch'an and Pure Land Buddhism*, pp. 146–147.

17 Main and Lai, "Reformulating 'Socially Engaged Buddhism' as an Analytical Category", p. 4.

of engagement but it is not its only one. It overlaps and interplays with several other spatial orders, their associated notions of modernity, and the role religious traditions are supposed to play in this narrative. The spatial order that is of course the globally dominant one is what we call the West. Although Western notions of modernity have a long history of influence in the non-Western regions of the world, Western ideas of what constitutes modern and modernist approaches to Buddhism have so far produced only limited impact in Asia.¹⁸ Modern Buddhism's sparring partner in Asia continues to be evangelical Christianity because of the latter's ever increasing engagement on the continent. Yet in the diaspora communities outside of Asia *renjian* Buddhists also encounter modern Buddhism in its Western form. California, the home of Hsi Lai Temple, which is geographically located within the periphery of Global China, simultaneously lies in the heartland of the West. The state is not only home to Hollywood and the Silicon Valley, but also hosts a thriving local Buddhist scene, one that holds very different ideas on what constitutes a modern Buddhist religiosity. The development of what I call a two-track model of religious cultivation at Fo Guang Shan's overseas temples described in the previous chapter is a response to such a differing Western understanding of modern Buddhism.

While the temple's cultural and civic engagements produce cross-cultural linkages – non-Chinese visiting the temple to experience the Lunar New Year festivities, eat Buddhist vegetarian food at the Water Drop Tea House, or receive an education by going to one of the order's educational institutions – religious activities often remain separated along lines of language and ethnicity. This results precisely from different understandings of what constitutes a modern Buddhist religiosity in Asia and in the West. In the West, Buddhism is equated with meditation. In its modern form Buddhism is imagined as secularist, individualistic, consistent with science, and leans towards psychological interpretations of key Buddhist doctrines. Yet Western Buddhism too is highly transnational. North American ideas and notions of what constitutes modern Buddhism are transmitted globally via global English-language mediascapes and the transnational circuits of US Dharma teachers, with the result that outside of Asia it is the Western understanding that sets the standard for Buddhist modernism. The textbook example for this approach is the mindfulness movement, which supposedly represents the uni-

¹⁸ Which is not to say that they have not had an impact. On the influence of Western Buddhism in Asia, see R. B. Joo, "Countercurrents from the West: 'Blue-Eyed' Zen Masters, Vipassanā Meditation, and Buddhist Psychotherapy in Contemporary Korea", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79 (2011), 3, pp. 614–638.

versal essence of Buddhism stripped of its “cultural baggage” from Asia.¹⁹ In this context, the Buddhism of European Americans, so-called convert Buddhism, becomes universalized. Buddhist modernism becomes a positively defined entity that is unaware of its spatial particularity and claims an ahistorical universalism. The distinctive Americanness of the mindfulness movement, for example, consisting of the promotion of “the narrative of scientific progress, the belief in the individual as the sole nexus of meaning, [and] an entrepreneurial ethos” is completely hidden in this picture.²⁰

The Other of Western Buddhist modernism is tradition as understood from a Western Christian perspective. Since the West has only a very short native Buddhist tradition, tradition or traditional Buddhism often becomes a signifier for the many Buddhist traditions from Asia. Within this bifurcated picture, a modernist Western Buddhism is dichotomized with a supposedly traditional Asian Buddhism. All Buddhist traditions practiced by Asians, no matter which meta-tradition, specific country or region, modernist or traditionalist orientation, etc., they belong to, become merged into one. Within a Western Buddhism understood this way, Asians may play a role as an oriental monk and teacher such as the Dalai Lama or Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche.²¹ But a Buddhist organization, the majority of whose adherents are of Asian origin, no matter how modernist the branch of Buddhism they practice, can by default only represent “traditional Buddhism”. But as shown in this book, *renjian* Buddhism undoubtedly represents a modernist approach to the Buddhist tradition. The difference is that the Other of *renjian* Buddhist modernism is not some sort of (racialized) tradition, but a Buddhism that is seen as tainted by folk beliefs and practices and a mode of practice that takes place somewhere up in the mountains completely detached from modern society. I argue that modern Buddhism, like modernity, is something that occurs in plural. Through the notion of multiple modern Buddhist religiosities we can avoid the problematic dichotomy of modern Western Buddhism and a supposedly traditional Asian Buddhism. By understanding modern Buddhism not as one universal entity marked by positively defined attributes but instead taking into consideration the many specific modern and space-bound Buddhist histories, it becomes possible to acknowledge the diversity of multiple modern Buddhist religiosities in the age of global modernity.

¹⁹ R. Purser, *McMindfulness*, London: Repeater Books, 2019, p. 14.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

²¹ On the image of the oriental monk, see J. N. Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism: Asian Religions and American Popular Culture*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

The Future of Fo Guang Shan's Transnationalism

The aim of ethnography is to scientifically describe peoples and cultures with their customs, habits, and mutual differences. Ethnography is no predictive science and the ethnographer is no prophet. However, before concluding this book I will briefly discuss some key issues that will most likely influence the order's further global development. The first matter concerns the demographic the order is targeting to ensure its future success. There are three issues that relate to this point: The first is the current and future waves of ethnic Chinese migration; second, the ongoing development of Fo Guang Shan's *renjian* Buddhism in the People's Republic of China; and, finally, the role of second and later generations of ethnic Chinese migrants. All three matters are intertwined. The main driving force of Fo Guang Shan's globalization project, particularly in the early days, were first generation Taiwanese migrants, many of whom belonged to the middle and upper classes of their country of origin. It is they who, through their generous donations and tireless voluntary work, provided the foundation for the order's global success. Yet Taiwanese migration peaked in the 1980s and 1990s, and by now many first generation Taiwanese migrants have reached retirement age. Thus, if the order wants to ensure its further development it needs to diversify its following. Fo Gung Shan has long recognized the issue and has already begun to develop strategies in response. One response to the challenge has been to attract the most recent wave of ethnic Chinese migrants from the PRC. The understanding of *renjian* Buddhism at Fo Guang Shan may differ from that of the Buddhist Association of China, the official supervisory organ of Buddhism in the People's Republic of China. But despite the differences, shared roots in the history, doctrines, and cosmology of Chinese Mahayana make Fo Guang Shan's *renjian* Buddhism very accessible to PRC Chinese. Some PRC migrants may have encountered the order as overseas students, some after relocating permanently to their new home countries; others visit the order's temples and cultural centres in the People's Republic. Those who find their way to Fo Guang Shan overseas may continue to stay involved after their return to the PRC. In fact, several of the people I spoke to at Fo Guang Shan facilities in the PRC have told me that it was during their time overseas that they first encountered the order. Thus the popularity of Fo Guang Shan in the diaspora also has an impact on its popularity in China. Yet the future of Fo Guang Shan's *renjian* Buddhism in the People's Republic is difficult to predict. The space religion occupies within Chinese society may have recovered from the devastation of the Cultural Revolution, but it nevertheless remains a very vulnerable one. At the time of writing, it appears that the PRC may yet again be entering a phase of increasing religious restrictions. Furthermore, the dynamics that shape cross-strait relations between the PRC and Taiwan are even harder to

foresee. However, it seems safe to assume that they will influence the order's future development on the mainland.

The third factor that comes into play is the promotion of *renjian* Buddhism to the second and later generations of ethnic Chinese migrants. This too is a strategy that Fo Guang Shan has already pursued for some decades. Temples such as Hsi Lai and Nan Hua regularly organize activities for children and youths and have very active Young Adult Divisions. The children and grandchildren of Taiwanese, Sino-Vietnamese, PRC Chinese who have migrated to new lands possess valuable cultural and linguistic literacy in both the culture of their parents and grandparents and the culture of the new home countries. They constitute an important demographic for the future development of the order in themselves, but are also one of the order's most valuable assets for the possible further advancement of *renjian* Buddhism's interactions with non-Chinese mainstream societies. The second and later generations have different religious needs to their parents and attracting them requires different strategies than those that target first-generation ethnic Chinese or even overseas students. Use of the local language as well as an interest in and openness for the culture they grow up in will be of importance in further developing activities and services that attract this demographic. This is crucial, because even if Fo Guang Shan focuses on the next wave of overseas Chinese migration, their children too will one day make a decision about whether to go to the temple. Fo Guang Shan is of course a very big organization, whose members, monastic and lay, young and old, have a variety of inclinations in regard to how to advance its future global development. Some of the people I have talked to see the future of the order in increased localisation, while others stress its importance for future generations of ethnic Chinese migrants. At the moment it seems that of the discussed strategies, the order is most successful in targeting the current and ongoing wave of ethnic Chinese migrants from the PRC. But it is still reasonable to assume that the order will continue in its attempts to attract a variety of people, be they first generation migrants in a dynamically changing global Chinese diaspora, second and later generation ethnic Chinese migrants, or non-Chinese. The degree to which they succeed in attracting each group depends on the local conditions.

In the course of this book I have tried to avoid an oversimplifying bifurcation of Chinese and non-Chinese, such as Chinese and African, and Chinese and Western, etc. There exist many cultural differences between the various Chinese societies in Asia. By attracting overseas Chinese who originate from the People's Republic, Vietnam, Malaysia, etc., into the order's temples, spaces that some three or four decades ago were almost exclusively frequented by the Taiwanese diaspora, Fo Guang Shan is already involved in cross-cultural engagements. At the same time, the societies at the points of departure for ethnic Chinese migrants

are, like those at the points of arrival, not stagnant but in constant flux. The ethnic fabric of countries such as the US and Australia as well as the countries of Europe will continue to diversify in the decades to come. Equally, in response to the problem of an aging society, Asian countries such as Taiwan have begun to promote foreign immigration, which increasingly challenges the former system of *jus sanguinis* citizenship still so common in East Asia.²²

Finally, no matter what the future brings, Fo Guang Shan's particular model of Buddhist transnationalism already has a life beyond the organization itself. The order's model of monastic education is very influential not only in Taiwan, but also in the PRC, and even more so in Southeast Asia. Fo Guang Shan is particularly famous for its emphasis on modern management skills and foreign language learning. Many abbots of small and medium-sized temples in Taiwan received their monastic education at Fo Guang Shan and some are involved in their own globalization projects, even if on a much smaller scale. In addition, Chinese Mahayana orders in the PRC have been closely following Fo Guang Shan's success over the last decades. They find inspiration in the order's modernist Buddhist religiosity and have tried to imitate many of its elements. Student camps at Buddhist temples organized in a very similar fashion to those at Fo Guang Shan are increasingly popular on the mainland. An even more striking example of the order's impact is the transnational development of the Longquan Temple (龍泉寺) from the outskirts of Beijing and its associated nunnery in China's south. Longquan Temple has launched its own, very similar, globalization project and while it does not yet created a global temple net as vast as that of Fo Guang Shan, it already runs temples all over the world, including in Africa, Europe, and the US. Furthermore, as in Taiwan and the People's Republic, there are also many smaller Chinese Mahayana temples in Southeast Asia that are also attempting to globalize. And while the impact of Fo Guang Shan on the transnationalism of other Buddhist orders and temples has yet to be examined in more detail, one thing seems to be clear, at least for the time being: Fo Guang Shan's mode of transnationalism is here to stay.

22 Lan, "From Reproductive Assimilation to Neoliberal Multiculturalism", p. 320.