

Chapter 1

Introduction

As a Chinese Buddhist in Malaysia, I have been unconsciously entangled in a historical process of the making of modern Buddhism. There was a Chinese temple beside my house in Penang, Malaysia. The main deity was likely a deified imperial court officer, though no historical record documented his origin. A mosque serenely resided along the main street approximately 50 meters from my house. At the end of the street was a Hindu temple decorated with colorful statues. Less than five minutes' walk from my house was a Buddhist association in a two-storey terrace.

During my childhood, the Chinese temple was a playground. My friends and I respected the deities worshipped there but sometimes innocently stole sweets and fruits donated by worshippers as offerings. Each year, three major religious events were organized by the temple committee: the end of the first lunar month marked the spring celebration of a deity in the temple; the seventh lunar month was the Hungry Ghost Festival; and the eighth month honored, *She Fu Da Ren*, the temple deity's birthday. The temple was busy throughout the year. Neighbors gathered there to chat about national politics and local gossip. The traditional Chinese temple was thus deeply rooted in the community.

In terms of religious intimacy with different nearby temples, the Chinese temple ranked first, followed by the Hindu temple and finally, the mosque, which had a psychological distant demarcated by racial boundaries. I accompanied my mother several times to the Hindu temple. Once, I asked her why she prayed to a Hindu deity. She explained that the Chinese shared some deities with Hinduism. My mother

represented a Chinese elder with a tolerant attitude towards most religion. Her attitude, however, differed towards Islam because of the historical ethno-religious divide between Chinese and Muslims in Malaysia. I never ventured into the mosque. My only contact consisted of overhearing the complaints and prejudices from some older men and women about the “morning call” of *Azan* (morning prayer) and the heavy vehicular traffic caused by weekly Friday prayers.

The Buddhist association was a typical terrace house. Architecturally, it did not conform to my perceptions of what a Chinese temple should look like. It also lacked the temple’s traditional functions. I did not attend its religious activities. Unexpectedly, the Buddhism promoted by the Buddhist Association significantly influenced my sister and me while we grew older. I soon realized that the association was a member of a national Buddhist youth group, the Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia, which has promoted the establishment of Buddhist doctrinal classes for Chinese communities to cultivate a new Buddhist generation that could better understand the Buddha’s teachings.

My mother’s flexible religious attitude was not a problem of family until my oldest sister and I received informal Buddhist education in a dharma class that was offered by a Buddhist society in our secondary school. “Religious tension” between my mother and my oldest sister erupted on several occasions when my sister criticized my mother’s practices as *Mixin* (superstitious). In later years, I echoed my sister’s beliefs. My mother could not understand why the Chinese belief practices she inherited and maintained were being challenged by her children.

My thesis departs from my personal interest of family’s “religious conflict” and reactions and seeks to explore the context of a new way of understanding Buddhism amongst Malaysia’s ethnic Chinese communities. It looks at the processes

and outcomes of the Buddhist revitalization movement and its associated transnational connections. Lee and Ackerman (1997) associate Buddhist revitalization in Malaysia with the Chinese communities' ethno-cultural assertion starting in the 1970s. By contrast, Tan (2000 & 2006) problematizes Lee and Ackerman's hypothesis by arguing that Buddhist revitalization is not simply an ethno-cultural assertion. He encourages exploring the internal dynamics of Chinese Buddhism as possible contributing factors to the process of revitalization. Lee, Ackerman, and Tan have limited the studies scope of Buddhist revitalization in Malaysian context. My research advances Lee and Ackerman's initial contribution and Tan's hypothesis by focusing on the revitalization's internal dynamics of its religious, political, and transnational dimensions.

Buddhist revitalization in Malaysia is a religious modernization movement that has directly or indirectly linked with the reformism or revivalism of larger Buddhist world. Lee and Ackerman (1997) and Tan (2000, 2006) use the term Buddhist revitalization to signify the aggregate phenomenon of the reassertion, rationalization, reorganization, and reinterpretation of Buddhism (Lee & Ackerman 1997: 57-58; Tan 2000: 299 & 2006: 303). In fact, they refer to similar practices of religious revivalism in other parts of the world under the rubric of increasing rationalization. I define Buddhist revitalization as a phenomenon of strengthening Buddhism as a more organized religion through exchanges of new ideas of Buddhism from historically and contemporarily connected regional ties. This religious revitalization transplants elements of modern religion to different parts of the Buddhist world from Buddhist majority societies. The revitalization is triggered by the social and political transformations and the related processes used to control and

negotiate the discourses and resources to transform Buddhism to fit the modern category of “religion” as defined by the dominant discourse of modernity.

No explanation is provided for the choice of the term by Lee, Ackerman, and Tan who used it as an accepted term in their studies. However, they cautiously choose the term “revitalization” rather than “revival” or “revivalism”. Tan (2006) explains the preference for the word “revitalization” to “revivalism”. Tan (ibid. 303) urges scholars to remove the “preconceived idea” of using the term revivalism. The term is problematic because “Islamic revivalism has a long history involving the conflict between the Muslim world and the Christian industrialized countries” (ibid). By referring to existing scholarship on this matter, I suggest two reasons to justify the choice of the term in the case of Malaysian Buddhists: the level of revivalism and the lack of a revivalist religious leader.

Ling (1992) suggests that Chinese Buddhism in Malaysia was “revival without revivalism”. He argues that there are different levels of revivalism in Buddhist community and explains that in Malaysia, it happened “quietly and unobtrusively” (ibid.326). In other words:

“The word ‘revivalism’ usually indicates that the noisy kind is the subject of discussion; it may indicate also that a strongly ideological element is present, just do the word ‘conservatism’, ‘socialism’, ‘Marxism’, and so on. The twentieth century revival and growth of Buddhism that has taken place in Malaysia can be seen as an example of the basically quiet kind” (Ling 1992: 326).

According to the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, the main emphases of revivalism will be “denunciatory, militant, utopian, millenarian, etc” (Burrige 2005: 7784-7790). In comparison with religious revivalism, the Buddhist revitalization in Malaysia is “the quiet kind” that happened peacefully and carefully avoided and tolerated the sensitive issues that have arisen.

The emergence of a charismatic revivalist religious leader is important in many cases of religious revivalism, not only in Christian and Islamic traditions but also in Buddhist majority countries such as Sri Lanka.¹ Malalgoda (1978) investigates the main “spiritual genealogies” of the Buddhist revivalist group in Sri Lanka from 1750 to 1900. Religious leaders were significant in reforming declining Buddhism in Sri Lanka with “impressive achievement” (ibid.262). Revivalist leaders in Sri Lanka are important in the religious rebuilding process. The reformist leader Anagarika Dharmapala redefined Buddhism in Sri Lanka and the role of monks to be more engaged with society and even involved in some political parties (Seneviratne 1999: 25-55). Dharmapala reinterpreted Buddhism “to give up the ritualism characteristic” (ibid.29) as it was currently practiced. Seneviratne (1999: 29 & 30) describes Dharmapala’s “past society image based on the *Mahavamsa*” as “utopia”. Dharmapala was actively involved in the Buddhist Theosophical Society. He also founded the Maha Bodhi Society to restore the site of Buddha’s Enlightenment in Bodh Gaya.

By contrast, religious leaders in Malaysia use resources from larger Buddhist majority societies to promote their reformist agenda. Their reformist agenda is imported, borrowed, and reproduced and not internally created. With this transplantation of a reformist agenda from beyond Malaysia, religious leaders could only selectively promote suitable programs to the Buddhist community in Malaysia. Hence, the scope and depth of “revivalism” have been interrupted or possibly sobered after arriving of first generation Buddhist monks and nuns in Malaysia

Since Malaysia’s independence from the British in 1957, the country has been plagued by contestations and tensions among different ethnic communities. The four main pillars of the foundation (*Sida Zhizhu*) of the Chinese communities, i.e., Chinese

¹ Taixu served a similar role in the reinterpretation of Mahayana Buddhism in China. He influenced the future development of Mahayanists in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Chinese communities in Malaysia (Pittman 2001).

education, Chinese newspapers, traditional Chinese organizations, and Chinese business groups, are also entrapped by the ethno-religious rhetoric in Malaysia. According to the Malaysian government's statistical data since the 1970s, the ethnic Chinese is in the highest income group of all ethnic groups in the country. Nevertheless, the Chinese communities are struggling with many issues. Within the communities, there are considerable inequality and disparity of opportunity in social, education, and economic pursuits. Individuals who cannot cope with Malaysia's rapid social and economic changes will be marginalized without sufficient support from the community or the state.

My thesis pursues four sets of research questions. The first set addresses the historical processes that occurred since the 1950s. How has Buddhist revitalization developed in Malaysia since the 1950s? Who were the main actors and what did they do? The second set of questions is related to the arrival of modern Taiwanese Buddhist groups into Malaysia. What strategies do Buddhist groups from Taiwan use to adapt to the Malaysian Chinese communities? How do Taiwanese Buddhist groups contribute to the process of revitalization? The third set of questions investigates the meanings of the revitalization in the broader Malaysian historical, cultural, and political contexts. Have the Malaysian Buddhist groups and Taiwanese groups shaped an alternative vision of a better society? Can the alternative vision of a better society offer the Chinese communities a way to transcend the racialized divide within the Malaysian nation-state? The fourth set of questions assesses the implications of the Buddhist revitalization on the other Chinese religious practitioners. To what extent has the Buddhist revitalization impacted traditional Chinese religious practitioners? How have the other Chinese religious practitioners responded to the Buddhist revitalization?

Most studies on religion in Malaysia have investigated Islam (Nagata 1984; Chandra Muzffar 1987; Husin Mutalib 1990 & 1993; Peletz 2002; Farish Ahmad Noor 2004; Liow 2009). A few scholars have examined the revival of Hinduism, with a focus on the Indian community's social and political marginalization (Kent 2007; Lee 1989; Lee and Rajoo 1987; Loh 2003; Prorok 1998; Ramanathan 1996; Willford 2002, 2003, 2005 & 2006). Few studies examine revitalizations within Christian communities (Newton 1988) and Chinese folk religion (Ackerman 1993 & 2001; Clark 2000; DeBernardi 2004 & 2006; Chia 2012). Lee and Ackerman (1997), in the book *Sacred Tensions: Modernity and Religious Transformation in Malaysia*, devote a chapter to the Buddhist revitalization movement in Malaysia, but no volume has been published to address the Chinese Buddhist revitalization within and beyond Malaysia.

My study focuses on the Chinese-educated² Buddhist community. Hence, other Buddhist communities, such as the Malaysian Thai, Sinhalese, and Burmese communities, are excluded from the analysis. Although my target group was primarily Chinese-educated Buddhists, important exchanges and interactions do occur between the English-educated and Chinese-educated groups. In addition, some Chinese Buddhists are bilingual and active in both groups. The term “Chinese Mahayana Buddhism” or “Chinese Buddhism” used in thesis refers to the Buddhism practiced by Chinese Buddhists in Malaysia rather than an academically defined tradition of Mahayana Buddhism. Hence, Chinese Mahayana Buddhism blends Mahayana Buddhism, traditional Chinese religion, and traditional belief and practices found in Malaysia. “Who are Malaysian Chinese Buddhists?” is a simple question with a complex answer. In fact, Chinese Buddhists practice Mahayana, Theravada, Tibetan,

² There is a Chinese education movement since the 1950s that successfully maintained a basic six year of Chinese primary school within the national education system. See Tan Liok Ee (1997) for the politics of Chinese education.

ancestor worship, and popular religions. Some Chinese adhere to one religion, but most Chinese believe in at least two religions concurrently. Given this wide spectrum of religious practice, I prioritize Chinese Buddhists who are more inclined to Chinese Mahayana Buddhism and those who mainly favored to Chinese Mahayana Buddhism but remain attracted to Theravada Buddhism and traditional beliefs.

The Origins of Buddhist Revitalization

Malaysia presents one example of Buddhist revitalization that exhibits distinct ambiguities of a second wave of Buddhist modernism in the contemporary world. I consider the Buddhist modernization movement in the early 19th century as the first wave of Buddhist modernism. Buddhism experienced a first wave of religious reformation, which was started during colonial times since the 19th century that was triggered by religious competition with Christian missionaries. The first wave had used the foundational framework of religion that implied a religion should comply with the standard notion of modernity. The reformation that happened in Buddhist majority countries has spread to other Buddhist communities to form the second wave in contemporary times. However, the notion of what constituted the criteria of religion in the modern world has continued to influence the interpretation of Buddhism.

A term religious modernity has emerged in academe to capture the social reality of the existence of religion in the modern world (Goossaert & Palmer 2012: 303-306). This term is used loosely to describe the continued proliferation of religions in the contemporary world. However, there is a lack of conceptual formulation of religious modernity. There is a trend of rediscovering the religious dimension of modernity. Saler (2006) traces how “elites have enchanted themselves with the spell of disenchantment” through what he termed as “historiography of ‘modernity and

enchantment’”. Landy and Saler (2009) further edit a book on the various types of modern enchantments to rethink the “broken knowledge” of modernity (Simon, 2009: 38-55). The ongoing redefinition of the hypothesis has largely arisen from historicist and empiricist evidence. The “long-standing sociological view that modernity is characterized by ‘disenchantment’” (Saler 2006: 692) has been critically challenged in non-Christian contexts (Asad 1993) by various traditions (Van der Veer 1994; Yang 2008). Moreover, religion itself as a category has been questioned by scholars who conduct research in non-Christian societies.³ The second wave of Buddhist modernism in contemporary times continues the legacy of previous framework that does not have this nuance of understanding religion.

Colonization and Modern Religion

There are substantial discussions and reflections on the relationship of modernity and religion and the fundamental rethinking of the definition of religion. However, the conventional understanding of religion has continuously affected the transformation of many religious traditions that sought a modern outlook. This influence was first evident from colonization and the notion of modern religion by the elites in colonized societies as standard criteria for religious reformation. Colonization has imposed an understanding of religion according to the dominant view of modernity that perceives this modern world as compatible with scientism. There is a trend of increasing notions

³ For example, when Clifford Geertz encountered “religion” in Indonesia, he “faced not with an ant-hill assemblage of myths, spirits, and psychical practices to label and sort out, but with massive, deeply historical, and conceptually elaborated social and cultural formations, complete with officials, texts, economies, and ratified names. Complex societies, ‘civilizations’ if you wish, some of them as large as subcontinents, with multicultural populations, bundles of languages, and spiritual connections across half the world, presented those of us who, trained on benge and Blessing Way, came to be engaged with them not just with a new object of study, but with a revised conception of how to study it – what it was we wanted to find out” (Geertz, 2005: 3). For Geertz, the conceptual equipment to understand religion “was sparse and cursory... for describing competing traditions animating common situations, all seemed inadequate to the tumbling intricacy and intensity of things” (ibid.3).

of scientism and western rationality since the Enlightenment (Tambiah 1990). The idea of religion as scientific, organized, and institutionalized has been created and defined by the European tradition since the 17th century through colonial scholarship in various regions of Asia, and the idea has been implanted in the local communities in these regions without appropriate adjustments and reflections. This understanding gradually developed through colonial administration, Christian missionisation, and colonial scholarship.⁴

Colonial administration categorized and defined the religious identity of native subjects according to the foundational framework for understanding religion. Through censuses, a specific category to classify beliefs and spiritual aspects called religion was created for the colonial administration. While completing the census, a particular religion that did not conform to that definition of religion was considered lower belief systems. In Malaya, colonial census enumerators were uncertain as to the category of Chinese religions seen all over the country. In 1921, the census enumerator reported that “[it] is difficult to say what is the religion of Chinese” (Nathan 1922: 102). Hence, aside from Christianity and Islam, there was a category of “Other Religions” grouped ancestor worship, Chinese Buddhism, and Chinese popular religions together.

Through the learning from Christian missionaries, Buddhist community gained ideas for religious modernization. The Buddhist majority population responded to the religious competition when Christian missionaries attempted to proselytize them. Buddhist communities in a colony integrated practices of Christianity to their belief. Hence, the colony’s Buddhist religious practices were not exclusively determined by

⁴ There is a reflection on this dominant view on the influence on Buddhism by colonization. Hallisey (1995) suggests an “intercultural memesis” approach as a counterbalance to the one-sided negligence of Buddhist agencies in the interpretation of Buddhism. He notices that “without the element of colonial domination or a sharp confrontation between Buddhists and Christian missionaries so visible”, Thai Buddhism also transformed in the quite similar patterns as in Sri Lanka (Hallisey, 1995: 48). The local approach can help “a better estimation of the extent to which Asian patterns left a mark on European representation of Buddhism” (ibid.49).

Christian missionaries, but sometimes the Buddhist majority also integrated practices of the religion of colonial powers with their existing traditions.

Colonial scholarship directly influenced the redefinition and self-understanding of religion in the Buddhist world, including the archeological excavation of Bodh Gaya (Trevithick 2006), the compilation of Buddhist texts by scholars in Europe, the translations of Buddhist texts, and the writing of the histories of Buddhism and the Buddha (Almond 1988: 7-23). The British “discovery” of Indian Buddhism resulted in the “process of textualization”, the emergence of historical Buddhism (Almond 1988), and the remodeling of Buddhist beliefs after the encounter of Christian missionaries with Buddhism (Harris 2006). The Buddha was demystified from an ancient god to a human figure (Almond 1988: 54-79). The British discovery established the so-called scientific analysis of Buddhism, which rejected and removed all the mystical aspects in Buddhism, and allowed for the religious reformation in Sri Lanka that was developed from interactions of the Theravada tradition among missionaries, colonial officers, and local clerics. Western scholarship established an interpretation of Buddhism by understanding the religion based on Christian traditions (ibid.139-41).

Buddhist modernism emerged from this imprint of colonization on religion. It was part of a transformation of a civilizational discourse that started in the last quarter of the 19th century “beginning with the Christian-Buddhist debates in Sri Lanka” and the “international links between Buddhists in Sri Lanka, Japan, and the West” (Duara 2001: 102). Similar debate and concern also happened in China, Japan, and Thailand. The transformation of Buddhism has also adopted the foundational framework of modernity, which considers the elimination of “superstitious” and mystical elements in the religion necessary to cope with the world.

Buddhist Modernism and Chinese Religions

The idea of a “modern” interpretation of religion has impacted Buddhist communities in South, East, and Southeast Asia. Reform movements, particularly in Buddhist majority countries, emerged during the colonial period. Reformist Buddhists attempted to re-interpret Buddhism as a religion that was compatible with a new modern world. The legacy of reformism has continued to this day, influencing the subsequent generation of Buddhists who search for ways to practice theoretical Buddhism in the modern world.

Webb (2005: 213) summarizes 12 features of Buddhist modernism as outlined by Heinz Bechert from the experiences of Buddhist majority countries: “(1) a tendency towards relying on an independent and non-traditional understanding of the Buddha’s teaching found in the early sources; (2) a process of “demythologisation” of Buddhism; (3) the characterization of Buddhism as a “scientific religion”; (4) the emphasis on Buddhism as a “philosophy” rather than a creed or religion; (5) on its being a “philosophy of optimism” in contrast to Western criticism of “Buddhist pessimism”; (6) in terms of more practical issues, the emphasis on “activism” as forming an important feature of the Buddhist way of life; (7) in terms of social relations, valuing “social work”; (8) the claim by modernists that Buddhism “has always included a social philosophy” that is described as a “philosophy of equality”; (9) the demand that a Buddhist society should be democratic; (10) the emergence of Buddhist nationalism; (11) the tendency of modern Buddhists towards “rewriting history in accordance with their particular understanding of national history”; and (12)

the revival and popularization of Buddhist meditation as an important development in Buddhist religious practices”.⁵

McMahan (2008: 6) deepens our understanding of Buddhist modernism. He argues that Buddhist modernism “emerged out of an engagement with the dominant cultural and intellectual forces of modernity”.⁶ Hence, Buddhist modernism rejects superstition and believes in scientific findings (McMahan 2008: 4 & 5). However, it stresses the inner experience and maintains its religious position with a doubtful attitude towards positivistic way of thinking (ibid). The notion of Buddhist modernism can be used to understand the development of Buddhism worldwide (ibid.10). This development has established an international linkage beyond the geographical and cultural boundaries (McMahan 2012: 160). Furthermore, in the age of globalization, the network “creates conditions for rapid innovation” and multiplication of many new traditions (McMahan 2008: 259). However, alongside the trend of Buddhist modernism, the existing mutual relationship between Chinese Buddhism and Chinese religions will be affected.

Chinese Religions

Scholars in Sinology or China studies have difficulty defining Chinese religions, notably if an understanding of religion by referring to experiences from the West is adopted. DeGroot (1912) refers to western ideas such as divinity, holiness, omnipotence, ritual, asceticism, and immortality to comprehend Chinese religions. By

⁵ Harris (2006: 168) asserts a similar view of the basic idea of Buddhist modernism. It is “a search for the rational; a this worldly, energetic lay asceticism directed towards attaining nibbana in this life; an individualism that privileged personal spiritual attainment over the collective merit-making of a group; an undercutting of the traditional distinction between lay and ordained; intolerance of other faiths; rejection of ritual and “superstitious” practices linked with exorcism and “spirit religion” and the appropriation and privileging of doctrines” Harris (2006: 168).

⁶ The chief elements of the intellectual forces of modernity include “European Enlightenment, scientific rationalism, Romanticism and its successors, Protestantism, psychology, and modern social and political thought” (McMahan 2012: 160).

referring to the notion of religion, particularly Christianity, Weber (1922) describes the polytheism of Chinese religions as a “magic garden”; Granet (1922) categorizes Chinese religions as peasant religion, a feudal religion, and the official religion; and Yang (1961) depicts Chinese religions as the unorganized religion.

Scholars in later generations have realized Chinese religions are reflections of relationships with social reality. Wolf (1978) discovers that Chinese religions are intertwined with gods, ghosts, and ancestors; Weller (1987) elucidates the communal role of temples in Taiwan. Dean (2003) proposes a “syncretic field of Chinese religion” that captures the fluid nature of Chinese religions. The “field is a constantly self-differentiating field... marked by complex, hybrid forms of religious ritual and collective experimentation. The syncretic field has taken on very particular configurations and actualizations as it changes over time” (ibid.353). Moreover, the ritual events of the field “mould temporary autonomous zones... which can only exist in movement and transformation” (ibid.358). His study in Southeast China discovered that the religious event “is communal self-expression” that “accumulated within the reservoir of local cultural memory” and is non-stable (ibid).⁷

The inclusive nature of Chinese communities’ attitude will face the new way of practicing Chinese Buddhism that is more exclusive, as “Buddhist modernism is becoming the lingua franca of Buddhism” (McMahan 2008: 259). Despite the reflections in academia to diversify religion from the dominant view, the trend of practicing religion according to the dominant view endures. The Buddhist

⁷ Another type of studies of Chinese religion indicate that the popular religious event of the masses has displayed the “strength of local communities to reassert their autonomy and to resist the state” (Feuchtwang 2000, cited Chau 2006: 7). Chau (2006: 10) terms this religious space as the “agrarian public sphere in rural China”. This religious public sphere differs from “the bourgeois public sphere discussed by Jurgen Habermas in the context of Western European sociopolitical development on the 18th and 19th centuries” (ibid.11). Chau explains that “[t]hrough the rebuilding of the temple and the reestablishment of rituals, these men reassert their authority as ritual specialists and the moral leadership roles” (ibid.13). Furthermore, popular religion is used to express public opinion and to build communal authority (ibid.59-76).

revitalization is shrouded by the religious modernization in Buddhist majority countries and Buddhist modernism has provided ideas for the revitalization. The encounter of Buddhist modernism and Chinese religions in Malaysia provides a significant opportunity for the exploration of a case of a second wave of Buddhist modernism.

Buddhist Revitalization and Chinese religion in Malaysia

The Flexible Chinese Attitude towards Religions

The Malaysian Chinese attitude towards religion is generally tolerant and inclusive. Religion is pragmatically practiced, not strictly followed, by ordinary Chinese. Most have maintained their traditional beliefs, particularly ancestor worship, and patronize many traditional Chinese religions, world religions, the worship of new deities, and a number of new religions from abroad, such as Soka Gakai, Nichiren Shoshu, and the Unity Sect.

The nature of the Chinese religious system is also responsible for this tolerant attitude. Traditional Chinese popular religion is very complex with its pantheon of gods, ancestors, and complex ritual calendar. Tan (1990: 1) argues that the “Chinese [r]eligion is best seen as a single complex system, which encompasses the ‘traditional’ beliefs and practices of the Chinese people: domestic and public, diffuse and organized”. The act of praying in Buddhist temples is solely to seek deities’ protection, and devotees are seldom wholeheartedly committed to a particular religion or sect. The Buddha is treated as a deity in the Chinese Buddhist temple. Hence, most monks and nuns in Mahayana and Theravada temples in Malaysia have tolerated the practices of followers of Chinese religions and this culture complexity of the Chinese religious worldview.

Studies on Chinese religions in Southeast Asia could draw a similar conclusion, with the only difference being a matter of linguistic preference, such as “syncretism” or “hybridization”. Chinese Buddhism is supposedly part of the so-called complex system of Chinese cultural belief. Formerly, Chinese Buddhists respected many type of beliefs and deities without adopting a particular doctrine or school of thought. Chinese Buddhism belongs to a Chinese religious system that inclusively tolerates other religious practices.

On Malaysian context, economic factors could partially explain the fluidity Chinese attitude towards religion. The factors have influenced the religious expectation of the Chinese, particularly during the early settlement period in the 18th and 19th centuries. When Chinese migrants first immigrated to Malaya, religion was expected to generate good fortune because of the miserable working conditions in their new land. Migrants required a religion that could offer immediate assistance and psychological appeasement. Hence, Chinese Buddhism’s monks and nuns at the time helped “mainly with chanting and performing ritual” (Ong 2005: 35) rather than with the other transcendental concerns. This practice has continued until nowadays.

Buddhism in the Contestation of Religious Proselytizing in Malaysia

Islamic revivalism in Muslim majority countries in the Middle East has spread to other parts of the Muslim world, particularly Southeast Asia in the late 19th and early 20th century. Encouraged by developments in the Middle East, the early stages of Malay nationalism in the 1950s were also imbued with the flavor of Islamic revivalism. Following Malaysia’s independence, Islam was declared the official state religion in the Constitution. Consequently, the Malay states began to establish or expand their department of Islamic affairs in the 1960s. In response to the more

Islamic demand of local Muslims and political contestation with the Islamic political party Parti Islam Semalaysia (PAS), from the 1970s to the post-Mahathir period, the Islamization policy intensified under the UMNO-dominated ruling coalition.⁸

The implementation of Islamization policies such as Islamic judicial system, finance, Islamic *dakwah* (proselytization activity), Islamic education in national schools and universities for citizen, has created two religious fields in Malaysia: the Islamic and the non-Islamic. In 2010, approximately 61.3% of Malaysia's population consisted of Muslims. Buddhists, Christians and Hindus represented 19.8%, 9.2% and 6.3% of the total population, respectively (Census 2010: 9)⁹. Approximately 83.6% of the Malaysian Chinese were identified as Buddhists¹⁰, and formed the largest minority religious group in the country. The “distinction between the Islamic and non-Islamic religious fields suggests important differences in religious rationalization in terms of ideological cohesiveness, legal prerogatives, and bureaucratic development” (Lee & Ackerman 1997: 21). There is no officially established government body to regulate non-Muslim religions, thus indicating a lack of state funding and direct religious doctrinal control for religions other than Islam. The distinct position of Islam in Malaysia has implications for public policy formulation and allocation. For example, from 2005 to 2008, Muslims received RM428.2 million for religious advancements, whereas non-Muslim religions received only RM8.16 million (Bernama 2008). Moreover, all other religions must share this modest funding.¹¹

⁸ See the literature on political Islam in Malaysia (Farish Ahmad Noor, 2004; Hussin Mutalib, 1990 & 1993; Liow, 2009; Nagata, 1984; Peletz, 2002).

⁹ Department of Statistics, Malaysia, Census 2010, http://www.statistics.gov.my/portal/download_Population/files/census2010/Taburan_Penduduk_dan_Ciri-ciri_Asas_Demografi.pdf, accessed 4 January 2013.

¹⁰ This figure was tabulated from the Census 2010.

¹¹ “From the RM8.16 million, RM3.39 million was allocated for Hindu temples, RM3.17 million for Buddhist temples, and RM1.6 million for churches” (Bernama 2008).

The Malaysian Constitution prohibits the propagation of other religions to Muslims. In the attempt to propagate Islam, followers of traditional Chinese religions and self-proclaimed Buddhists are the prime targets. Followers of the traditional Chinese religions tend to have fluid religious commitments. The proportion of followers in the category of “traditional Chinese religions” has dropped significantly since the 1980s. From the various census reports, the number of Chinese Muslims rose from 0.2% in 1970 to 1.0% of the population in 2000 but dropped to 0.7% in 2010. Meanwhile, among the Chinese communities, the followers of Christianity increased from 3.5% in 1970 to 9.5% in 2000 and to 11.1% in 2010.

Before Malaya’s independence, Christianity was protected by the colonial power, with certain privileges in land acquisition and financial support for their missionary activities, and its followers had a higher social economic status in society. After Malaya’s independence in the 1960s, when compared with Christian groups, Buddhist groups were outdated in their religious proselytizing machinery in terms of their “technology of proselytizing”, particularly, cleric training and organizational capacity. Those underdeveloped aspects alarmed clerics and lay Buddhist groups. The religious competition among non-Muslims and state-led Islamic *dakwah* triggered local Buddhist groups to strengthen their religious communities through organizational development and various activities (Lee & Ackerman 1997).

The Transnational Reconnection of Mahayana Buddhism

Buddhist monks or nuns who served their Chinese-speaking followers in Malaysia mainly arrived from China. The direct import of Buddhist clerics continued for many years until China’s political system drastically changed to communism. The supply of Mahayana monks to Malaya suddenly ceased after the Communist Party of China

(CPC) assumed power in 1949. Under the CPC, the suppression of religion and the Cultural Revolution weakened the institution of Mahayana Buddhism. Bilateral relations between Malaya and China were also influenced by the Cold War, which ended the religious flow of Mahayana Buddhism from China. Malaysian citizens were prevented from visiting China until the immigration relaxation started in the 1990s.

Fearing Maoist influences on the Chinese communities, Britain tightened its immigration policy regarding the entry of Chinese monks to and from Malaya. This resulted in a shortage of monks in the early 1950s (*The Straits Times* 1953). In 1953, the abbot Chee Koon of Kek Lok Si temple in Penang informed the press that only 22 monks remained in the temple and that they had to help in other states. Because of shortages, some junior monks were assigned as abbots in other temples (ibid). This stricter immigration law has remained after independence and has ended the religious supply of monks and nuns from China.

The linguistic orientation in written and spoken language, and the expansion of tertiary education in the 1990s, led to another Buddhist network, namely, Taiwanese Mahayana Buddhism, to infiltrate larger Chinese communities in Malaysia. The linguistic orientation of Chinese communities is important in shaping religious preferences. Malaysia's national language policy has partly destroyed the colonial legacy of English education and its institutions. In Chinese communities, more parents have chosen Chinese education rather than national schools, thus producing more Mandarin speakers since the 1970s (Tan 2005: 225-226). In 2007, the Malaysian Ministry of Education revealed that approximately 90% of Chinese children studied in Chinese primary schools (Malaysiakini 2007). In the 1990s, with the declining English-educated population in universities, the Chinese-educated generation began to

dominate Buddhist societies on university campuses, which had previously received most of its participation from English-speaking Chinese Buddhists.

The expansion of higher education has contributed to the emergence of a Chinese-educated middle class in Malaysia that seeks religious rationalization. The growth and diversification of tertiary education in Malaysia since 1990 has been drastic. The total number of students enrolled has approximately doubled, from 230,000 in 1990 to 385,000 in 2000 (Lee 2002), with 1.13 million students recorded in 2010.¹² This modernization project through formal education has generated “the process of religious rationalization” (Lee& Ackerman 1997: 18 &19). The younger and educated elite’s growing awareness of Buddhist doctrines provides them with a sense of self-assurance and confidence (ibid.57 & 58), and this “religious rationalization” provides a search for a scientific way of religious understanding and organizational competency in religious propagation activities (ibid.4).

The international relationship between Taiwan and Malaysia has facilitated a transnational reconnection for Mahayana Buddhism. International relations and trade linkages between Malaysia and Taiwan were significantly closer than the linkages between Malaysia and China from the mid-1970s to the early 2000s. Under Taiwanese ex-President Lee Teng Hui’s leadership, Taiwan’s “southward” foreign policy set the stage for the international relationships between Taiwan and Southeast Asian countries. Even before Lee Teng Hui’s rise to power, Taiwan had established a representative institution¹³ in 1974 in Kuala Lumpur, the Far East Travel and Trade Center, to overcome diplomatic restrictions in foreign countries because of pressure from the China. In 1977, Malaysia established its own representative institution in

¹² *Indikator Pengajian Tinggi 2009-2010*, Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi Malaysia, p.7, http://www.mohe.gov.my/web_statistik/indikator_pengajian_tinggi_2009-2010.pdf, accessed 16 August 2012.

¹³ It was then changed to the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in 1992 (Chen 2002: 82).

Taipei, the Malaysian Airline Taipei Branch, followed by the Malaysian Cultural and Trade Exchange Center in 1983.¹⁴ Taiwan has been one of the top ten trade partners and a major source of FDI for Malaysia since the late 1980s.¹⁵

Mahayana Buddhism's religious flow recurred when Taiwan emerged as an important exporter of contemporary Buddhism to the world. Because Chinese-educated Malaysian Buddhists enjoy many cultural and language similarities with the Taiwanese, they have enthusiastically adopted this development. Taiwan's abundant resources and the close foreign policy ties between Taiwan and Malaysia have smoothed the transfer of ideas and materials to Chinese-speaking Malaysian communities. The arrival of Taiwanese Buddhist organizations in Malaysia has been ongoing since the late 1980s. Fo Guang Shan, a Taiwanese Buddhist group, established a temple at Klang in 1989. The Tzu Chi branches were established in Melaka and Penang in the early 1990s. These Buddhist organizations then spread from the city centers to rural areas in West and East Malaysia. Now, most of their activities are funded, organized and executed by Malaysian Buddhists.

Despite their charismatic religious masters being in Taiwan, these groups are localized in terms of management and funding. Malaysia has become their second-most important base, after their Taiwan headquarters. In the 2000s, they were accepted by Chinese Buddhist communities as important groups in the Malaysian religious sector. When Taiwanese groups first arrived in the early 1990s, many Malaysian Buddhist groups felt uneasy because of the competition in resources posed by them. However, they are now considered a constructive agent in the development of Buddhism in Malaysia because they are involved in not only the propagation of

¹⁴ In 1988, it was renamed the Malaysian Friendship and Trade Center (Chen 2002: 83).

¹⁵ Taiwan ranked as the third top foreign investor from 1988 to 1998 in Malaysia (Chen 2005: 108).

Buddhism but also social development, such as in conducting fundraising activities for Chinese schools and community welfare projects.

Studying Chinese Buddhists and Buddhism in Malaysia

There are only a handful of literature on Chinese Buddhists and Buddhism in Malaysia. The studies have primarily addressed issues of history, ethnicity, globalization, and Islam.¹⁶

There is an introductory study on Malayan Buddhisms targeted readers who are curious about Buddhism in Malaya (McDougall 1956). Another book is observation of Buddhist practices in Malaysia (Teoh 1963). Liow (1989) writes about the histories of all major Buddhist temples and organizations in Penang. There are two publications in the Chinese language that revolve around history of Chinese Buddhist in Penang. One explores Chinese immigrants and Buddhism in Penang during the colonial period (Tang 2004) and the other is a local history of Buddhism in Bukit Mertajam, Penang (Ooi 2009). Four unpublished honors theses have investigated Buddhist institutions in Malaysia: a history of the Youth Buddhist Association of Malaysia from 1970 to 1990 (Liew 1991/2), the Sangha institution (Ooi 1994/5), welfare activities in Penang (Tang 1995/6), and the role of vegetarian halls (Tang 1990/91).

Judith Nagata (1999: 242) notes that Fo Guang Shan's founder Hsing Yun is involved in the "politics of identity both among overseas Chinese" and is "a potential

¹⁶ There is another important group of studies about the cultural adaptation of Thai Buddhists in multiethnic societies. In Kelantan, Buddhism has been an ethnic boundary marker for the minority group. In an early investigation of the adaptation of the ethnic minority, the Thais, Golomb (1978: 14-17) observed that the "community spirit among the Thai villagers was expressed most commonly in terms of identification with, and responsibility toward, their temple". Another study by Mohamed Yusoff Ismail (1993) explored the relationship between Buddhist and Siamese ethnicity through the social organization of a Buddhist temple. The boundary of ethnicity is strengthened with the continuity of Theravada Buddhism, which has reconfirmed the role of religion in creating the ethnic boundary in a multi-religious society. However, the creation of the Thai Kelantanese ethnocultural identity is not fixed, but has been actively redrawn (Johnson, 2004: iv; 2012).

mediator between Taiwan and China". She (1999: 242 - 243) observes that Malaysian Chinese Buddhists are involved in the "shadow politics" of transnational groups and the politics of the Chinese identity of the global networks of Fo Guang Shan Monastery. Huang (2002) examines the case of a transnational Buddhist group, Tzu Chi, based in Melaka. Tzu Chi promotes the "local need for Buddhist reformism" (Huang 2009: 265). It transplants the teaching of "creating universal humanitarianism by relieving suffering" (ibid.250) to Malaysia. Their activities mainly concern welfare for the poor and elderly, recycling projects, the organization of disaster rescue teams, and the building of hospitals and schools (ibid.2). Although the emotion of Malaysian Tzu Chi members are "distinctly embodied" by the transnational headquarter and Tzu Chi's founder, Cheng Yen, Huang discovers that "Taiwan means not much" (ibid.264) to the local Malaysian Buddhists and that the "mission they perceived is firmly locally grounded" (ibid.265).

Some scholars have asserted that more puritan forms of Buddhism in Malaysia can be explained as a response to state-dominated Islamization policies. According to Lee and Ackerman (1997: 57), "Buddhist revitalization is occurring within a context in which Chinese popular religion and mysticism coexist with Buddhism and are not clearly distinct from it". Revitalization is a response to a Muslim-dominated political system and is thus a "process of ethnic revitalization" through religion (ibid.81). In facing proselytization activities of educated Muslim middle class and Christian evangelism, Buddhist reformists believe a learning of Buddhist canon is essential for a building of stronger Buddhist community (ibid.80 - 81).

Lee and Ackerman propose the anxiety over an increasing Islamization has led to religious revitalization.¹⁷ By contrast, when Tan (2000: 299) claims “there is a revitalization of Buddhism in Malaysia”, he cautions that the revitalization of religion has more complex dimensions, and “[t]hus the dynamics of religion cannot be seen from the ethnic model only” (Tan 2004/2005: 779). He encourages us to explore the internal dynamics of Chinese Buddhism as a possible contributing factor to Buddhist revitalization in Malaysia and explains that “the dynamic within the Chinese community, like a local community building a bigger or grander communal temple as the community prospers - - this should not be taken to be an ethnic response to Malay dominance or Islamic resurgence” (Tan 2006: 303). I reflect on this contradiction proposed by both views, ethnic model versus internal dynamic of Chinese Buddhism, and provide a broader view of Buddhist revitalization. In addition, my emphasis on both local and transnational factors to explain the process of Buddhist revitalization in Malaysia represents an original contribution to our understanding of the subject by departing from previous studies of Chinese Buddhism in Malaysia.

Methodology

I selected four Chinese Buddhist organizations to represent the Buddhist revitalization movement in urban and West Coast Peninsular Malaysia: the Malaysian Buddhist Association (MBA), the Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia (YBAM), Fo Guang Shan Malaysia (Fo Guang Shan), and the Buddhist Tzu Chi Merit Society Malaysia (Tzu Chi). These four organizations were chosen because they have impacted Chinese Buddhist communities through their formal organization, a formalization that has legitimized them to attract more members and become major

¹⁷ Aside from Buddhism, there are numerous studies on Hindu revivalism and Chinese religions that I also include in this framework.

organizations that can represent Buddhist communities. In terms of their basic demographic profile, the MBA attracts local monks, nuns, and older generations of Chinese Buddhists; YBAM works mainly with youth and local universities graduate; Fo Guang Shan's members are from Chinese middle and upper classes; and Tzu Chi continues to be female-dominated and attracts younger generations who are more inclined to volunteer.

I started my research by doing with archival work in libraries in Singapore and Malaysia. Then, I began my fieldwork for about six months, which comprised two components: visiting the four organizations to look at their archival records and interviewing office bearers and members. I joined these individuals during their activities. I focused on four aspects of Buddhist revitalization in my research, histories, networks, media attention events, and activities:

- 1) Histories – These consisted of histories of Buddhist revitalization in Malaysia
- 2) Networks – These consisted of religious and political linkages of Buddhist organizations had with each other.
- 3) Media attention events – These included issues and activities noted by the media.
- 4) Activities – These included annual festivals and celebrations and small-scale activities.

The four Buddhist organizations have branches throughout Malaysia. I examined their headquarters but did not visit all their branches. However, I observed some of each organization's branches that were highly active. These included the Taiping Buddhist Association, the Melaka Buddhist Association, Fo Guang Shan's

publishing house and cultural center, and Tzu Chi's cafe. I visited three main branches of the Tzu Chi, in Penang, Kuala Lumpur and Melaka, to understand the nature of the regional differences of their projects and activities.

I interviewed 15 members from the four organizations. The formal interview was typically conducted in the organizations' offices. In addition, many informal conversations and interactions occurred at various occasions, such as conferences, the Wesak Day celebration, after dharma talks, and on Facebook. I discussed their involvement in Buddhist activities in different periods and their understanding of Buddhism and Malaysian society. To protect my informants from sensitive issues or conflicts of interest, I cited most of them anonymously in my analysis. I quoted only the names or surnames of office bearers who consented to be named.

In the field, unexpected events required me to adjust my research. Because of the unforeseen office hour closure of Fo Guang Shan's main temple, I visited traditional Chinese temples in Jenjarom and collected important data. I also attended a Buddhist conference organized by YBAM in Kuala Lumpur that contributed to the content. During the course of study, some incidents also helped me to understand my research questions, such as the case of the talking Buddha statues in Kuala Lumpur whose meaning I reconsidered in relation to the larger Buddhist revitalization context. The passing of my grandfather and my father also directly contributed to my research data on the relationship between reformist Buddhism and Chinese religions. Informally collected data also provided in-depth and significant insight.

Chapter Overviews

Chapter 2 elaborates on the historical connection between Malaya and the larger Buddhist world. Chinese Buddhism's roots in Malaya started when the immigrant

communities that arrived as laborers in tin mining and rubber plantations brought their religious beliefs. Burmese and Sinhalese brought the Theravada traditions that influenced Chinese Buddhist, while the Chinese inherited a loosely defined Mahayana Buddhism mixed with Chinese custom and popular religions. The idea of modern Buddhism was brought by religious leaders of various traditions to revitalize Buddhism.

Chapter 3 maps several initiatives of the Buddhist revitalization movement in Malaysia. Focusing on two groups, the MBA and the YBAM, the history and process of Buddhist revitalization that occurred through local efforts will be examined.

In Chapter 4, the role of two Buddhist groups from Taiwan is analyzed. This section provides a larger overview of Buddhist revitalization in Malaysia in the age of globalization that has taken on particular significance since the late 1980s. To understand this transnational force, two important organizations were selected, namely, the Fo Guang Shan Malaysia and the Buddhist Tzu Chi Merit Society Malaysia. These two Taiwanese groups have started to bring different styles and forms of propagating Buddhism to the local Buddhist community and to provide idea of practicing and propagating Buddhism. Fo Guang Shan, for instance, is attracting Chinese middle class in their activities and supporting Chinese education and fund-raising activities. Tzu Chi has been attracting many housekeepers to participate in their charity and recycling projects since the early 1990s. Such developments represent the emergence of new social and political engagements at community and everyday levels.

The meaning of Buddhist revitalization for the Malaysian Chinese is the major theme of Chapter 5. In this chapter, the role of a prominent monk, Chi Chern, a

second-generation Mahayana Buddhism religious leader, is explored. Then the new social engagement of Tzu Chi and Fo Guang Shan is discussed.

Chapter 6 discusses the forces that countered what reformist groups promoted. Incidents reported in the newspapers, encounters from the field sites, and personal experiences provide sources of data on counterforces to the Buddhist revitalization. Then I will discuss the politics of Buddhist unity.

Chapter 2

A Brief History of Buddhist Transnational Connections

This chapter traces the two channels by which Buddhist modernism arrived in Malaya. This was facilitated by the openness in receiving multiple sources of religious flow occurred in the 19th century during British rule and allowed the transplant of different traditions of Buddhism to Malaya through a series of transnational connections.¹⁸ The first route involves Theravada Buddhism from South and Southeast Asia, and the second trail is Mahayana Buddhism from China. A tracing of these transnational connections established the historical background of Buddhist modernism in Malaya that happened concurrently with responses towards colonialism and social change in Buddhist world.

This chapter begins by providing the histories of Theravada Buddhist communities in colonial times. Then, the section is followed by the histories of Chinese Mahayana Buddhism during colonial times. After providing a brief history of both Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism, in the next section, the two routes of

¹⁸ As an important crossroad of the Maritime Silk Route Peninsula Malaya was a meeting point of world religions in the early century. Peninsula Malaya was used by the traders from India on their way to China and vice versa and the coastal areas of Peninsula became major sites of the entrepot since the first century. They were the temporary meeting points for the traders to rest and prepare for the journey. The local inhabitants were also involved in the commercial activities of foreign traders by providing them with jungle produce as well as mineral resources like gold and tin. Various early kingdoms that were generally influenced by Hindu-Buddhist and aborigine worldview were formed (Jacq-Hergoualac'h 2002: 63).

The Hindu-Buddhist past of Peninsula Malaya has often been not emphasized in the writing of Malaysia's mainstream national history of Malaysia. But the archeological discovery of Buddha, Avalokitesvara, and other Bodhisattva statues showed that Buddhism was present in the peninsula from an early period. 'Images of traditional Buddhism', 'Mahayana images', 'votive tablets', and 'stupas' from the 5th to 8th centuries were found at the archeological sites of an old small kingdom called Panpan located in Kelantan and Terengganu (Jacq-Hergoualac'h 2002: 143-160). In another kingdom called Langkasuka, archeologist discovered 'objects of Buddhist devotion' and 'sculpture' (ibid.175-187). Langkasuka was located at Northern Kedah and Southern Thailand. The Chinese pilgrim Yijing describes Langkasuka as 'a favourite stopping-off place for pilgrims' in the seventh century (ibid. 112). Meanwhile, Buddhist inscriptions in Pali and Sanskrit and Buddha statues were discovered in Jiecha in South Kedah (ibid.207-228).

transnational connections between Malaya and three Buddhist majority countries will be traced.

Theravada Buddhist Communities in Malaya

Early histories of three Theravada communities in Malaya, Thai, Burmese, and Sinhala will be traced with focus on the influences of their temples in Chinese communities. The Thai Buddhist community was more significant than Burmese in terms of the size of its population and the number of worship places that were built. Compared with the Burmese, the influence of Thai Buddhism was important among Chinese Buddhists as part of their popular religion. Another two Theravada Buddhist communities, Burmese and Sinhalese, Burmese built temples for their own communities with some Chinese Buddhists also became their patron. However, with a small number of temples, the influence of Burmese towards Chinese Buddhist was limited. The influence of Theravada Buddhism by Sri Lankan community on Chinese Buddhists was important with the effort of some religious leaders especially with the coming of charismatic monks who could convincingly address English-educated Chinese.

Thai Buddhist Temples and their Influence on Chinese Communities

According to the census report of 1911 there were 16,957 Siamese in Malaya. 10 years later, the number increased to 18,178 and 93% of Thais were locally born (Nathan 1922: 90). Thais settled down in Malaya earlier than the Burmese, Sinhalese and Chinese migrants. The Northern states of Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu, and Perlis paid tribute to Siam before the British fully controlled Malaya in 1909. Penang was known as “*Koh Mak*” (betel nut) when the territory was under the Siam rule.

There were movements of people, trading, and political networks between Northern part of Malaya and Siam (King 2009; Skinner 1993; Songprasert 2002; Wong 2008).

In 1845, the oldest Thai temple in Penang Wat Chaiyamangalaram was built to provide religious services to Thai migrants, rather than as proselytizing “activities towards non-Buddhists” (Liow 1989: 61). The influence of Chinese Buddhists on this Thai temple was seen only in the later years. Chinese influence on the architecture of Thai temple buildings was obvious with “Chinese inscriptions in the main Shrine Hall” (ibid). Funding of the temple was partially obtained from wealthy Chinese sponsors. Unlike Sinhalese monks in 19th century Penang who were invited by Buddhist associations, such as the Penang Buddhist Association, to deliver dharma talks to Chinese Buddhists, Thai temples were more a religious prayer site for the island’s Chinese devotees, with some Thai monks being able to communicate in Hokkien and English (Liow 1989: 67).¹⁹

Even though there is lack of written records, the influence of Thai Buddhism on Chinese Buddhists in perceiving a more institutional Buddhism should not be underestimated. In the Northern Malay states, there are some Thai temples with mainly Chinese followers.²⁰ I would argue that the influence of Thai Theravada Buddhism on the Malaysian Chinese Buddhist community has transmitted through two important ways. Thai temples are a site for religious function similar to popular form of Chinese religion practices where they can offer joss-stick and small sum of *dana* in getting protection from Buddha either in wealth, illness or personal matters.

¹⁹ But there was also a small Thai community living in Penang who traced kin associations with groups in Kedah. Today, Wat Chaiyamangalaram is the center of the Malaysian Thai Buddhist Association which is heavily influenced by the Kedah-Perlis sangha.

²⁰ In 1960 McDougall recorded that there were 2 Thai temples in Kuala Lumpur; 5 in Penang; 19 in Alor Star district of Kedah; 8 in Perak; 2 in Perlis (1960: 49). There are around 87 Thai temples in Malaysia now located in Kedah (47), Kelantan (22), Perak (8), Penang (5), Kuala Lumpur (2), and one in Terengganu, Melaka, and Negeri Sembilan. (<http://www.mir.com.my/leofoo/Thai-amulets/htmls/Listings.htm>, accessed 26 April 2010).

Hokkien community calls Thai monk as *pho than*, which is different from the naming of Mahayana monk. It is the linguistic infusion from Southern Thai. In Hokkien, the word *zuo he shang* (be a monk) is sometimes used light-heartedly, for example, one might call an unmarried man a *zuo he shang* (becomes a monk). Compared with the inadequate Mahayana cleric training institution available in Malaya, Thai monk has the religious training institute for the award of novice status or higher rank for those clerics who are committed in their cultivation. In the eyes of the Chinese Buddhists who seek supernatural power protection, Thai monks are more “powerful”. However, the influence at this stage was only at the surface. This limitation was changed by the emergence of local Malaysian monks who were ordained under the Thai monastic order.

Burmese Temples and their Influence on Chinese Communities

The population of Burmese in Malay Peninsula was and is far smaller than Thais. In 1921, there were only 1,054 Burmese recorded in the census. Burmese came to Malaya mostly as security guards of the British. 860 Burmese were in the regiment troop in 1921 (Nathan 1922: 90). Some were merchants and laborers who sought fortune in Malaya. The oldest Burmese temple in Malaysia, Dhammikarama, was built in Penang in 1828 “for the Burmese community to have a proper place of worship” (Liow 1989: 67). The first Wesak Day in Penang was celebrated at this Burmese temple (ibid). The interaction of Chinese Buddhists with Burmese Buddhism is perhaps less significant compared with Thai temples that are scattered throughout Malaysia. The influence of Burmese Theravada Buddhism on Chinese Buddhists was

a later phenomenon and occurred with the emergence of Malaysian monks who attracted to Burmese Buddhism after the independence.²¹

Sinhalese Temples and their Influence on Chinese Communities

In the early 20th century, English-educated Sinhalese in Malaya were mostly employed by the colonial administration. Sinhalese Buddhist set up the first Buddhist society in Malaya called the Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society in Brickfields in Kuala Lumpur in 1894.²² Meanwhile, the Sinhala Mahindarama Temple was founded in 1918 in Penang by the monk Attudawe Pamaratana who came from Dikwella in Ceylon (Liow 1989: 68). These Sinhalese Buddhist temples were important sites for the teaching of Buddhism to English-educated Chinese. The English-educated Chinese then facilitated the interactions of Theravada and Mahayana, and impacted the spread of Buddhist modernism from Sri Lanka to Malaya.

Like other temples built by immigrant communities, Mahindarama in Penang first targeted the Sinhalese community. Then it was gradually dominated by Chinese Buddhists in the early 20th century. A prominent Penang woman, Lim Siew Chin donated \$5,000 to the temple for the building of shrine hall, kitchen and monks' quarter (Tang 2004: 149). Its management was officially opened for Chinese on Wesak Day in 1930 and Chinese were appointed as trustees. To adapt to Chinese followers, besides the celebration of Wesak, Kathina, Magha puja, and the Sinhalese New Year, the Chinese New Year was also celebrated in the temple (Liow 1989: 70). The idea of Wesak Day as a public holiday was proposed by the abbot of the temple K. Gunaratna to the colonial government in 1926 (Tang 2004: 186).

²¹ For example, Venerable Sujivo, a graduate from University of Malaya, ordained under Burmese. He practiced Sayadaw U Pandita in Sasana Yeiktha in Yangon, Burma. Sujivo establishes a meditation center in Kota Tinggi.

²² In Pali language, the name of this society could be translated as 'Religious Reform Society'.

Mahindarama had close relations with the Penang Buddhist Association (PBA), a Mahayanist organisation. The interaction between Mahindarama and PBA involved the Buddhist teaching as well as financial support. The founder of the Sinhalese temple was invited to deliver lectures at the PBA in the late 1920s. In fact, the PBA did share a similar aim with Theravada Buddhist (Liow 1989: 76). The PBA adopted the celebration of Wesak Day which once belonged to the Theravada tradition and followed the date accepted by Theravada countries.

Buddhist Maha Vihara during Colonial Times

The Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society established the Buddhist Maha Vihara temple in 1894 at Brickfields in Kuala Lumpur. Addiction to alcohol became a serious social problem for Sinhalese community in the early 20th century. Many Sinhalese became poor and “lost their land property to Chettians” (de Silva 1998: 72). The aims of the society were to seek “a proper place of worship for the Sinhala Buddhists in accordance with their Theravada tradition as well as for a burial ground for the community” (ibid.24). According to the inaugural meeting minutes of the temple, the appointment of the temple abbot should be from Ceylon and administration of the temple should be Sinhalese (ibid). This principal of maintaining the control of the Sinhalese became a constraint on the development of the temple until it was rebuked in the later years.

First incumbent bhikhu Venerable Patthalagedera Sri Dhammananda Maha Thera from Sri Lanka arrived in 1895. He was once a famous preacher and after the age of forty he “concentrated on foreign missionary work” (ibid.173). The society’s president invited him to come to Malaya. In his letter to the press, the monk explained to his followers why he came to Malaya. The Society’s president arranged a tour for

him to go to Penang and Perak. When he arrived at Taiping he “took the opportunity to preach the Dhamma to a few Sinhala residents” (ibid.175). He also observed “the prevailing immoral and corrupt ways of life of the above-mentioned places” (ibid.176).

Even though the Sinhalese legitimately controlled the management of the temple, the involvement of Chinese Buddhists in temple affairs had been ongoing. The list of donors in 1896 who contributed the building fund showed that Chinese donated a huge sum of money (ibid.82). The largest sum of donation was from Yeap Quang Seng, who was the Chinese Capitan in Kuala Lumpur. In 1928, a resident monk observed that “on their arrival in Kuala Lumpur a vast crowd of Sinhala and Chinese Buddhists accorded them with a warm welcome” (ibib.185). According to de Silva (1998: 97), Chinese devotees became increasingly significant after 1920.

Early Mahayana Buddhism in Malaya

British Labor policies encouraged Chinese coolies to work in tin mines and plantations along Peninsular Malaya’s West Coast. In the 19th century, the aggressive expansion of British in Malaya started with the acquisition of Singapore in 1819 and Melaka in 1824. The signing of the Pangkor Treaty with the Sultan of Perak in 1874 marked another important turning point of British colonial advancement in Malaya. This development coincided with important historical junctures in China. Before 1860, China’s Ching government prohibited her subjects from going overseas. Those who went abroad would be “permanently expatriated” (Godley 1973: 118). The status of emigration for Chinese was only legalized after the British “demanded the inclusion of a clause in the Peking Convention... to establish a legal basis for the coolie trade” (ibid.121).

The arrival of monks and nuns from China contributed to the development of Mahayana Buddhism in Malaya. Basic spiritual needs of the life cycle of Chinese migrants such as birth and death celebrations were provided by these Mahayanist clerics. The wealthy merchants who made their fortune in *Nanyang*²³ enthusiastically involved in the building of Buddhist temples and the setting up of lay organizations. Nonetheless, the large number of Chinese followers who supported the temples through their “incense money”²⁴ would be one of the core factors for the growth of Mahayana Buddhism in Malaya.

The term “early Mahayana Buddhism” is used here to refer to the popular form of Buddhism as practiced during colonial times. The “early Mahayana Buddhism” was inseparable from Chinese religions and it was treated as Chinese religions without clear notion of Buddhism as a religion. In the census report in 1921 and 1931, besides Christian and Islam, the other Chinese religions were categorized as “other religions”. The census in 1921 stated that “it is difficult to say that what is the religion of those Chinese who are neither Christian nor Muhammadan” (Nathan 1922: 102). The 1931 census repeated the same rhetoric of “impossible to classify” the mass religion of Chinese (Vlieland 1932: 88). It was because “the religious persuasions and forms of worship of the vast majority of Chinese are of a nature essentially different from the beliefs to which the term religion is commonly applied in Western” (ibid.87). The census redefined “Other Religions” category of Chinese in 1921 as “Chinese national religion” in 1947. The explanation given was “the great majority of Chinese hold to the national religion of China which some describe as Confucian and others prefer to regard as ancestor-worship” (Del Tufo 1949: 123). There was no category as Buddhism for the Chinese in the census. The early development of Mahayana

²³ *Nanyang* refers to Southeast Asia.

²⁴ ‘Incense money’ is the donation given to temple through buying incense.

Buddhism in Malaysia was mainly centered on Chinese Buddhist temples and with some degree of the propagation role too played by a small number of lay organizations and Penang was the center for Chinese Mahayana Buddhism in Malaya.

Kek Lok Si (Temple of Paradise)

Kek Lok Si was built in 1893 by a Mahayana monk Boew Lean from China who was the abbot of the famous Yong Quan Temple of Gu Mountain in Fujian.²⁵ In 1889, Boew Lean came to Penang to collect funds for the temple in China and was invited by the trustees of Kong Hok Temple to take charge of the oldest Chinese temple in Penang. The colonial administration was suspicious with the present secret societies in the temple's religious functions. Hence, they appointed new trustees to take charge of the temple. New trustees sacked all clerics in the temple. The protest of the monks, the internal politics of trustees of the temple, and the tension between the Chinese communities and British colonial administrators caused Boew Lean to make a decision to leave the temple. Boew Lean then decided to look for a place to build a Mahayana temple. A 10-acre piece of land far from the city center at Air Itam in Penang was donated by a Buddhist as a new site for temple. With the support of wealthy merchants, the temple was gradually expanded. In 1898, the Tower of Sacred Books was constructed for the storing of Mahayana Buddhist scriptures (Liow 1989: 71). In 1905, Kek Lok Si was awarded the Imperial Sanction by Emperor Kuang Hsu. It received "an artistically craved tablet, painted in red and gold, accompanied by a fine piece of yellow silk bearing Chinese characters", and together with 70,000 volumes of Buddhist scriptures. This was the only Imperial Sanction granted outside China recorded in history (ibid.72).

²⁵ Yong Quan Temple was built during Five Dynasties period in 908. In 1929, reformist monk Xu Yun resided in the temple and started a meditation rule and invited famous monks for Buddhist teaching. Cited http://www.chinahotel.com.cn/ch_scenic_info.php?sl41_No=1272, accessed 12 May 2010.

The second abbot of Kek Lok Si, Poon Teong, who was more inclined to Pure Land Buddhism²⁶, established a Pure Land Society to encourage more local Chinese Buddhist to practice Buddhism only by chanting six words mantra, Namo Amitabha. He even built a Guan Yin Temple in Burmah Road, Georgetown in 1922. Pure Land and Guan Yin represented a more popular form of Chinese Buddhism. According to the one early traveler, besides the Mahayana Buddhist statues, Kek Lok Si also allowed Chinese popular deity, Guandi, to be located in the temple (Liu 1930 cited Xue 2009). These decisions by Poon Teong can be interpreted as the adaptation initiatives of early Mahayana Buddhist monks towards the local followers of Chinese religions. The adaptation of this Mahayana temple with the local Taoist religious landscape was also seen in its close relation with Theravada Buddhism. In 1930, the Pagado of Ten Thousand Buddhas renamed as Pagoda of Rama VI because the Thai King officiated the foundation laying ceremony. The pagoda incorporated Chinese, Thai, and Burmese architectural elements. The first abbot Meow Lean transplanted the ideal form of Mahayana Buddhism from China to Malaya, however, the second abbot Poon Teong has to adjust to the local need to propagate popular form of Chinese Buddhism. At the same times, he also further mingled with the local environment to seek recognition and legitimation from the Southeast Asian Buddhist countries.

Kek Lok Si once played a role as a temporary center for monks and nuns to congregate after the Japanese occupation. In May of 1948, 180 nuns and 18 monks were ordained by abbot of Kek Lok Si (*The Straits Times* 1948a). In July of 1948, there were more than 350 monks and nuns underwent initiation rites to become *chujia*

²⁶ Pure Land Buddhism is 'a wide array of practices and traditions within Mahayana Buddhism directed to the Buddha Amitabha and his realm' (Getz 2004: 698). In the late Qing Dynasty, Pure Land Buddhism in China recited the name of Amitabha (*nian fo*) to reborn in the realm of Buddha Amitabha and continue the practice.

ren (sangha) at Kek Lok Si. According to a 1948 newspaper report, the rite was conducted by Kek Lok Si's abbot Wan Eng²⁷ and this was the first time this ceremony was held in Malaya. Prior to this, monks and nuns attended the ordain ceremony in China (*The Straits Times* 1948b) because there was no proper Mahayanist temple which qualified to conduct the initiation.

Kek Lok Si was a symbolic religious center for Mahayana Buddhism in Malaya. In 1959, Malaysia's first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman was invited for the opening ceremony of the Malayan Buddhist Association. Kek Lok Si was chosen by the Buddhist community as a venue for that historical moment. The recognition of Kek Lok Si as a symbolic religious center of Mahayana Buddhism was followed by the criticism in the later years. Kek Lok Si has to maintain its pagodas, halls and daily utilities. It was estimated by a local daily that the cost of the building construction was as high as \$500,000 (Chia 1947). In 1913, the second abbot Poon Teong started an agricultural company that cultivated coconut, rubber, sugarcane, and etc. However, because of World War I and lack of expertise, this experimentation of Buddhist entrepreneurship failed. Poon Teong responded to criticisms on the involvement of Kek Lok Si in business by saying that it was not wise for a temple to rely merely on donations from followers in the longer term. He had planned to establish a Buddhist university if the business project was successful (Zhao 1936: 25 & 26 cited Xue 2009). To solve the problem of maintenance and daily expenses, Kek Lok Si transformed itself into a regional tourist destination. The acknowledgement of its tourist destination, to quote *The Straits Times'* article,

“perching in picturesque splendour on the luxuriant hillside of Ayer Itam,
the five-tiered Kek Lok Si proudly tilts its magnificent, yellow-painted

²⁷ Wan Eng was the president of Buddhist Association in China (*The Straits Times* 1948b).

pagoda into the blue sky.... Today Kek Lok Si is spread over thirty acres of hewn-out hillside, inspiring world tourists into writing reams about its beauty” (Chia 1947).

The Penang Buddhist Association (PBA)

K Sri Dhammananda once commented that “lay devotees are leading their friends to practice the noble teachings by leading fellow Buddhists along the path. They even build and run viharas, orphanages, old folks homes, and clinics to serve the community” (Dhammananda n.d.). The Penang Buddhist Association (PBA) had been socially engaged by Buddhist communities even before Malaya’s independence in 1957. Before formation of the PBA in the early 1920s, there was a group of Buddhist who gathered at the Pitt Street Guanyin Temple²⁸ to hear Buddhist talks by monks invited from China in Mandarin translated into Hokkien on the venue (Teoh 1957:10). From these gatherings, that group of Buddhist felt that there was a need to start a Buddhist organization to introduce Buddhist teaching to the public. Thus the PBA was formed in 1925.

Interestingly, the PBA was established by lay persons who promoted the similar reformist Buddhist idea in the early formation period. The initial idea of this lay organization was “to study the Buddhist doctrine that was free from the defective influence of local superstitions and from their degrading practices” (Teoh 1957: 10, cited Francis 1974: 1). In an interview by Teoh, the PBA’s secretary once stated that the practices of Buddhism at the Pitt Street Guanyin Temple was “a corruption of actual Buddhist doctrines” and Buddhism should

²⁸ Pitt Street Guanyin Temple was set up by Cantonese and Hokkien dialect groups in 1800. It ‘functioned as the apex Chinese organization in Penang before the Chinese Town Hall came into existence in 1881’ (Tan 2007: 208)

be “based on reasonable thinking, not a thoughtless, spiritual practice that could not survive the trial of intelligent thinking” (ibid).

PBA’s Buddhist modernism was inspired by reformist monks in both Theravada and Mahayana traditions. The office bearer of the PBA had established a good relationship with Sinhalese monks in the Mahindarama Temple. A story about the formation of PBA linked PBA’s founder Lim Boon Chin with the Sinhalese monk Pamaratana. According to the story,

“[O]ne night as the Venerable was resting in his room in the Mahindarama Buddhist Temple in Kampar Road, he saw a vision of a man resembling Mr. Boon Chin entering his room. The vision then addressed him to tell Mr. Boon Chin to carry out what he had in mind that was indirectly telling him to start the formation of the Association. A short time after the departure of the vision, Mr. Boon Chin, in person, arrived at the temple. The Venerable told him all that he had seen and heard” (Penang Buddhist Association n.d.).

This story showed the influence of Sinhalese monk to the PBA and not only that, Pamaratana brought the Buddhist modernism that happened in Sri Lanka to Penang. In fact, the Sinhalese monk was the religious teacher of the PBA. Together with a Mahayana monk Venerable Hai San, Pamaratana was invited to deliver the first Buddhist lecture of the PBA. Besides Mahayana Buddhist celebrations, Wesak Day was also an annual celebration for the PBA which followed the date recognized by Theravada countries (Liow 1989:76).

The PBA had monks stayed in their quarters since the early years of its formation. The PBA practiced a system which differed from Buddhist majority countries. The management committee of laypersons “employed” and

“controlled” monks so as to provide services for the community. In 1946, there was a protest by monks. They asked for extra pay and refused to conduct daily religious duties. Monks who resided at the PBA premises wanted “an extra allowance of one dollar for each of the three special prayer sessions”, which the association organized for its members every week (*The Straits Times*, 1946). The report also stated that monks of the association had been paid “monthly salary of \$20 each in addition to free food and lodging” (ibid). This protest showed that the PBA had established a modern administration of monks in their association to provide religious services.

The PBA showed an early effort at Buddhist modernism. In 1927, when the reformist monk Kee Tong became PBA’s Chief Monk, he and the management committee outlined a document entitled *Bye-Laws Relating to Funeral Rites and Ceremonies*, which aimed to simplify Chinese funeral practices. It recommended that the association’s members follow these new cultural rules that included “no joss papers or paper houses shall at anytime be burnt, nor shall joss papers be placed in the coffin”, “noisy music of any kind shall not be allowed in the house before burial”, “the customary morning and evening wailing, the calling of the deceased to rise and to sleep to take breakfast and dinner shall be discontinued”, and the “funeral shall be as simple as possible” (Francis 1974: Appendix III). Instead of seeking out merit through lavish expenditures incurred in rites, the association encouraged members acquire merit by “giving alms to Buddhist priests”, “the poor and sick”, “donation to charitable, religious and education institution”, and “publishing any Buddhist books in memory of the dead” (ibid). These initiatives of the PBA have been continued by the reformist groups in the later years.

Pan-Asian Phenomena of Buddhist Modernism

The emergence of Buddhist revitalization in Malaysia has to be historicized within larger forces of colonialism and modernity that shaped the interactions of religion and politics in the nation state. It is part of a pan-Asian phenomenon of Buddhist modernism. Colonial administrators used their political authority to reorganize the colonized societies' belief and institutionalized them as "religion" according to the way religion was defined in European Christianity. Colonialism has also impacted the redefinition of Buddhism according to Western understandings. Western scholarships have crystallized the compilation and canonization of Buddhist scriptures since the 19th century. It is the construction of Buddhism as a "religion" under colonial scholarship that has subsequently caused certain trends of interaction of religion, modernity, and politics. The responses of Buddhism to Christian missionization have also triggered the so-called Buddhist modernism project started concurrently in Sri Lanka, Thailand, and China in the mid to late 19th century.

The core idea of Buddhist modernism is in fact similar but with the different contexts within their own nation building histories, religious traditions, the contestation with the other religions, the emergence of reformist leaders, and internal political circumstances as well as international climate that influenced them. Hence, scholars have used different names for the Buddhist modernism that happened around the Buddhist majority countries, such as Reformed Buddhism, Protestant Buddhism in Sri Lanka, *Rensheng Fojiao* in China or merely called rational Buddhism, modern Buddhism or new Buddhism in general. The first wave of this Buddhist modernism happened in the late 19th century to the early 20th century during the colonial rule in the Buddhist majority countries that faced the harsh challenges of Christianity and

Western modernity. The new Buddhist idea was spread regionally to various Buddhist communities in the Asia through the exchanges of trading, travelling, and proselytizing.

Buddhism in Malaysia is part of the extended networks of Buddhist modernism. The reorientation of Buddhism from merely for personal gain praying to emphasize the rational learning of dharma in life is orchestrated by the transnational as well as local religious leaders. It is fragmented in a sense that, usually, the exchanges of religious idea are selectively transplanted and experienced. Even with this fragmentation of religious doctrine, there are visible genealogies of Buddhist modernism that can be traced. I contend that there are at least two important trajectories of Buddhist modernism in Malaya and later Malaysia. They are the Theravada traditions from Thailand and Sri Lanka, and the Mahayana tradition from China.

Reformed Buddhism: Thai Lineage

Colonialism has impacted the self-definition of Buddhism. Buddhist modernism that happened in the mid-19th century in Siam instituted a “shift in the interpretation of Buddhist thought... on the basis of assumptions derived from the new world-view” (Keyes 1989: 123). Even though unlike Buddhist countries suffering under the yolk of colonialism such as Burma and Sri Lanka, Buddhism had “been forced to undergo a major transformation” in Siam (Ishii 1986: 67). Recompilation of the Tripitaka and the subsequent reorganization of Sangha by King Mongkut (Rama IV)²⁹ have impacted the modernization of Buddhism in Thai.

²⁹ Mongkut was a monk for from 1824 to 1851. He became King in 1851 (Keyes 1989: 124).

Mongkut was influenced by the Buddhist-Christian religious missionaries' competition in Sri Lanka and the decline of Buddhism in Burma. Mongkut was alerted by developments in the Buddhist world and made his own reflection "to reconcile the dhamma and modern science" (Tambiah 1976: 214) after "his extensive discussions with Christian missionaries, first Catholic and later Protestant" (Keyes 1989: 124 & 125). Tambiah (1976: 231) describes Mongkut's reformation as "to initiate changes and to champion Buddhist rationalism to meet the intellectual challenges of the nineteenth century". To launch his "reformed Buddhism", he was helped by "a group of monks who shared his interest in eliminating traditional Buddhist practices they thought obscured the fundamental truths of the religion" while he was in monkhood (ibid.125).

Mongkut's reforms were instituted under Prince Vajiranana in 1893 who established new religious education for the Sangha as well as in new secular schools³⁰, which contributed to the emergence of a new world view that was "very different" from that of the past that was based "in traditional rituals and traditional religious education" (Keyes 1989: 126). Keyes (1989: 126) argues that this new religious world view shifted "from practice centered on communal rituals" to self-cultivation. Their idea of "reformed Buddhism" continued to influence King Chulalongkorn and in a series of social reforms, the old religious system was undermined (ibid.126 & 127) but not the whole denial of the traditional Buddhist rulership. In contrast, the King skillfully reformed the traditional Buddhist institution. With the influence of Orientalist "interpretations of and judgement upon indigenous cultural traditions"³¹,

³⁰ Mongkut established some new secular schools together with his brother, Prince Damrong Rajanubhab (Keyes 1989: 126).

³¹ Orientalist scholars see Jatakas as 'pollution and superstition', which 'had obscured the original message' (Jory 2002: 892).

Chulalongkorn redefined the Jatakas³² to serve in his modern nation-building project (Jory 2002). His writing of the Jatakas “had for the most part relied on the work of a group of European scholars” who were trained in Pali textual studies (ibid.897). Since the mid-19th century especially the expansion of imperialism in Ceylon and Burma, Buddhism was brought to the public attention of the Western world. Western scholars had a more positive view about Buddhism. However, Western scholars in general alleged that the practice of Buddhism was “so corrupted from the religion’s original purity” (ibid. 897 & 898).

Thai monks who came on their own accord might also be affected by the religious modernization project in Thailand. Those monks have to attend novice training that has incorporated the modern religious education that has been reformed since the 19th century. The coming abbot directly from Thailand to some of the Thai temples in Northern Peninsula Malaysia could maintain a proper monastic order and discipline. Some Thai monks who could speak Chinese would spread Theravada Buddhism to Chinese religion followers who went to Thai temple to seek religious services. Nonetheless, with the linguistics constraint and limited resources, the influence might not be far reaching.

The influence of reformed Buddhism in Thailand on the Buddhist revitalization movement in Malaysia might be unclear from the beginning until the emergence of Malaysian Chinese clerics who have trained or ordained under Thai sangha system. From the sources of informants in the field, meditation centers in Thailand have attracted some Chinese Buddhists and they see Thai Buddhism as more “authentic”. All these contributed to the rise of Chinese monks who has inclined towards Thai Buddhism. In the next section, the case of Piyasilo will be analyzed.

³² The ‘popular stories of the Buddha’s former lives in the Theravada Buddhist tradition’ (Jory 2002: 891).

Besides him, there is another important monk, Venerable Kai Zhao who was active since the mid-1990s to embark on the mission of setting up a forest monastery in Malaysia.³³

Piyasilo and His Contribution

Piyasilo was a Chinese who was trained in Thai Buddhism and played an important role in the propagation of Buddhism among college and university students in Malaysia. He was born in Melaka in 1949 and ordained in 1972 in Bangkok by Somdet Phra Vanarat who later became the 17th Supreme Patriarch of the Thai Sangha. Piyasilo received his religious training in Bangkok at Wat Saket from 1971 to 1976 with two years in the Buddhist Faculty in Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University. The university was established by King Chulalongkorn in 1896 and it was named Mahachulalongkorn Royal College. It aimed to provide “Tipitaka studies, and higher education, not only for monks and novices, but also for laypeople”.³⁴ The philosophy of the university is to become “the leading center of Buddhist education integrating Buddhism with modern sciences for greater mental and social development”.³⁵ From the background of the founder and its philosophy, it is clear that the University is part of the project of reformed Buddhism in Thailand.

³³ In the mid 1990s, Venerable Kai Zhao became a popular meditation instructor among Malaysian college and university students. He was invited by Buddhist societies in universities throughout Malaysia to teach meditation. He was a charismatic religious teacher. His talks were very popular as were his meditation courses for university students entitled *Chuji Jingxiu Ying* (Basic Retreat Camp). Kai Zhao has been paying regular visits to prisons to preach the dharma to Buddhist inmates for many years. Drawing on this experience, he edited and published a book about the repentance of prisoners who face the death penalty. The book was a bestseller and attracted media attention. Kai Zhao used the personal account of reflection by prisoners to remind Buddhists to avoid wrongdoing and appreciate life. He was called *Jianyu Fashi* (Venerable with Prisoners) by the Chinese media. His popularity has marked the emergence of a Chinese-speaking generation of Theravada clerics in the Chinese Buddhist community. He set up a meditation centre called Malaysian Nibbana Meditation Center (MNMC, Jijing Yuanlin) but it was failed after the internal conflict broke out.

³⁴ Official Website of Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University. ‘Historical Background’, <http://www.mcu.ac.th/En/history.php>, accessed 9 October 2012.

³⁵ Official Website of Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University, ‘Philosophy/ Commitment / Vision / Mission’, <http://www.mcu.ac.th/En/philosophy.php>, accessed 9 October 2012.

As a monk trained in Thailand, Piyasilo started propagation activities influenced by his religious training and experience. Wat Saket and Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University have been part of the discourse of reformed Buddhism expounded by the religious modernization project since King Mongkut. During his years in Thailand, he became close friends with Chaokhun Prayudh Payutto, and the Buddhist social activist, Sulak Sivaraksa, both of whom were activist thinkers in engaged Buddhism and founded the International Network of Engaged Buddhists. After completing basic monastic training, Piyasilo returned to Melaka and was appointed as resident religious advisor of the Seck Kia Een³⁶. He lived in Melaka and started Buddhist works around the country by preparing various courses for undergraduate Buddhist training programmes.

The influence of reformed Buddhism on Piyasilo was obvious. The editor³⁷ of the 10th year commemorative magazine of The Friends of Buddhism Malaysia (FOB)³⁸ also expressed a similar view. “The older generations cling strongly to their superstitions and ignorant beliefs resulting from a lack of information and proper understanding of Buddhism. This danger will spread to the younger generation if nothing is done to correct them” (Soon 1986: 78). They criticized the practices of mediums, séances, charms, and *fengshui* in Chinese communities. Hence, Piyasilo embarked on modernist vision and activities which included systematic Buddhist doctrinal learning for college and university students and “brought Buddhist meditation outside the temple walls” (Piyasilo 1988: 279).

Piyasilo was indirectly influenced by the Thammathut movement emanating from Bangkok in the 1960s through the interactions with many friends in the movement. He initiated an intensive Buddhist course called Dharma Preacher’s

³⁶ It was the Melaka Buddhist Association.

³⁷ A student of Piyasilo.

³⁸ It was set up by Piyasilo to help him in various Buddhist courses and camps (Soon 1986: 2).

Training Course (DPTC) in Melaka which subsequently expanded to the national level. This course provided Buddhists with intensive knowledge on Theravada Buddhism and modern methods in missionary works. DPTC comprised of lectures on Pali suttas and doctrines. He then reviewed this “too doctrine-centred course” to make it a more interactive experience which he called National Dharma Interaction (NADI). This combined textual study with interactive games such as ice breaking, team building, and problem solving activities for the young, and Buddhist music created by university students with the song lyrics used Buddhist terminologies and teachings. The participant doubled with this more flexible approach (Siddhartha 1986: 30). Piyasilo popularized Buddhist camps and retreats among English-educated young Buddhists from colleges and universities in the mid-1970s to 1980s.

Piyasilo was a reformist monk who sought a form of “pristine” Buddhism. In 1985, The Friends of Buddhism Malaysia (FOB) was officially registered “to create a Malaysian Buddhist identity by expressing Buddhism through local culture” (ibid.28). He defined a Malaysian Buddhist identity as “a universal peculiarity or uniqueness by which one Buddhist recognizes and accepts another, and which provides a sense of unity for all Buddhists in the country” (ibid.258). His effort was commonly seen in Buddhist groups who tried to gain support from the different traditions by endorsing the politics of unity. Piyasilo and his followers seemed to tailor a Buddhist unity. They were seeking Buddhists that “be properly trained, be more committed to the Buddhist life” and “serve the Buddha Dharma regardless of tradition, affiliation, race and age.... committed to a transdenominational study, practice and sharing” (ibid.288 & 289).

In the First National Council of YBAM, he held the post of vice president and “trained many active lay Buddhist leaders” (Wong 1982: 6). Although Piyasilo left

the order in 1990, his reformist programme for graduate youth has become the model for the future work of Mahayana and Theravada monks that surfaced in the later years especially his design of a dharma camp for the students in institutions of higher learning. Even though the medium of instruction has changed from English to Mandarin, the basic structure of dharma camps remained the same with the teaching of Buddhist doctrine and meditation supplemented with games and Buddhist songs. The participation of graduate youth in the Buddhist camps then further grew and prospered with the emergence of more charismatic religious teachers with Mandarin as the medium of religious instruction.

Buddhist Modernism: Sinhalese Lineage

In Sri Lanka, the decline of Buddhism under the colonial rule of British alarmed the monks to respond to the subordination of their religion. According to the revivalist's explanation, Buddhism was brought by son of the Emperor Asoka, the Venerable Mahinda, to Sri Lanka in the 3rd B.C.E. Hence, Sri Lanka has inherited a "true" form of Buddhist teaching. But with the arrived of colonial powers that brought along Christianity with strong proselytization missionary, the status of Buddhism in Sri Lanka was challenged.³⁹ This sparked off the sense of the crisis at the turn of the 19th century among the monks and followers. Colonel Henry Steele Olcott founded the Buddhist Theosophical Society in Sri Lanka and this encouraged a more proactive way of the doctrinal intervention of Buddhism to better reposition in the wake of

³⁹ However, Blackburn (2001: 8) challenges this monolithic view of so-called "traditional" Buddhism that confronted by "intensive colonial influence" by arguing that scholars "know little about what it meant to be 'Buddhist' in Lanka in any period before the late nineteenth century, about the religious institutions that shaped an understanding of identity and 'tradition,' and about the social and political activities that embraced and constrained all forms of Buddhist practice'. She argues that "Buddhist monks and their elite patrons were serious, and often self-conscious, participants in the reorganization of Lankan Buddhist monasticism that occurred through the formation of the Siyam Nikaya and the institutional structures and intellectual practices that sustained it" (ibid.41).

facing challenges posed by Christian missionaries (Malalgoda 1976: 242 - 245). The Theosophists were not so much concerned with revitalizing Buddhism as they were with questions of Theosophy and scientism but they perceived Buddhism as a religion that compatible with science. However, they provided Buddhism the modern idea and defended Buddhism in facing the challenge from Christianity.⁴⁰

In the later years, charismatic religious leaders have surfaced and the active role of Buddhism in society has deepened through the changing role of Buddhism “as a collective and public religion” that “was interwoven with the changing politics of the island” (Tambiah 1992: 3). Anagarika Dharmapala, a charismatic religious leader in the late 19th century to early 20th century, contributed the revival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka by inventing “a philosophical and scriptural Buddhism pillared upon a middle class vocabulary of rationality and (western) scientism” (Johnson 2004: 79). He established the religious institutions such as school, missionary group, and youth group at the moment of “the onslaught Christian missionization” (ibid.76). Dharmapala was firstly influenced by Theosophists at that time and this experience allowed him to use the discourse of science in Buddhism. For Sri Lanka, he contributed to the independent movement of Buddhist nationalism. He formed the Maha Bodhi Society to fight for the regaining control of Bodhi Gaya through mobilization of support from the Buddhist communities and in a series of court cases (Trevithick 2006).⁴¹

The influence of Sinhalese Buddhism on Chinese Buddhism started when Sinhalese migrants entered British Malaya. It began with the building of Buddhist temples initiated by the community to provide religious services for the Sinhalese

⁴⁰ But the manifestation was diverse and pluralistic with “many options for people to define and develop their Buddhist identity” (Bond 1998: 40). Hence, “It should be understood that the Buddhist reformers never presented a unified front nor a consistent ideology” (ibid. 38).

⁴¹ For a detail history of Theravada reformation in Sri Lanka, please refer to Bond (1988: 11-74).

migrants but was subsequently extended for participation by Chinese communities. Early immigrants from Ceylon consisted of surveyors, contractors, traders, planters, railway staff, and British officials who were transferred to Malaya (de Silva 1998: 9-22). Unlike the Chinese and Indian migrant laborers, Sinhalese migrants belonged to higher strata of society. The types of occupation implied that they received their basic education in Ceylon before coming to Malaya. This was important for the transmission of new religious idea that happened in Ceylon at the end of 19th and early 20th century. With that background, they were influenced by the vicissitudes of religious transformation that happened in their homeland prior to Malaya. At the same time, the Sinhalese monks arrived to Malaya were trained by the modern Buddhist education in Sri Lanka. As a result of the religious training and the experiences at the homeland, they brought along the idea of Buddhist modernism from Sri Lanka.

K. Sri Dhammananda and the Buddhist Maha Vihara at Brickfields

The Buddhist society Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society became a center for Theravada Buddhism in West Coast Malaya with the arrival of K. Sri Dhammananda. He came to Malaya in 1952. He was a novice monk since 12 years old and fully ordained at the age of 22. Novice training received in Sri Lanka had prepared and well-equipped him for missionary works in Malaysia. The coming of Buddhist leaders especially K. Sri Dhammananda from Sri Lanka has indirectly transferred Buddhist modernist ideas to Malaya. His early education institution Vidyalankara Pirivena was founded by Ratmalane Dhammaloka in 1875 who belonged to Colombo circle. The circle led the Buddhist communities against the proselytizing of Christian through “printing presses and publishing houses; new organizations like the Society for the Propagation of Buddhism, Buddhist Theosophical Society, Young Men’s Buddhist

Association; Buddhist schools” (Malalgoda 1976: 188). Dhammananda brought Sinhalese Buddhist modernism to Malaya and successfully transplanted the idea to the English-speaking Chinese Buddhist community

Dhammananda was trained at Vidyalankara Pirivena “where he studied Sanskrit, the Pali Tipitaka and Buddhist Philosophy, besides other secular subjects” and obtained a “diploma in Linguistics and the Pali Tipitaka”.⁴² Vidyalankara Pirivena was a Buddhist centre of learning that displayed “a more progressive attitude”, “embarked on experimentation or innovation”, and even “participated in active political and social agitation”.⁴³ Its in-house journal the *Kalaya* “carried feature articles on contemporary issues such as the role of the Bhikku in politics, the compatibility of Marxism with Buddhism, the change over of the medium of instruction to Swabhasha, the recognition of Buddhism as a State religion”.⁴⁴ He then furthered “his tertiary education at the Benares Hindu University in India” and “studied four years at the university graduating with a Master of Arts degree in Indian Philosophy in 1949”.⁴⁵ At that time, Dhammananda would probably be the only Buddhist monk in Malaysia with such a formal higher education and systematic religious training. He transformed Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society based at Brickfields temple to a Buddhist missionary centre and a wing of religious revitalization from Theravada tradition from Sri Lanka.⁴⁶

⁴² Official Site for K. Sri Dhammananda , ‘Life story- Early Life’, http://www.ksridhammananda.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=26&Itemid=37, accessed 14 April 2010.

⁴³ *The Official Government News Portal of Sri Lanka*, ‘Vidyalankara Pirivena: Its contribution to cultural and educational development’, 12 December 2007, http://www.news.lk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4225&Itemid=52 , accessed 13 April 2010.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Official Site for K. Sri Dhammananda , ‘Life story- Early Life’, http://www.ksridhammananda.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=26&Itemid=37, accessed 14 April 2010.

⁴⁶ At the turn of century, many factors have contributed to the formulation of new religious idea in Sri Lanka. Among others, the forming of Buddhist society was crucial.

After ten years in Malaysia, in 1962 Dhammananda established the Buddhist Missionary Society⁴⁷ (BMS) and this was another example of the influence of Sri Lanka Buddhism's proactive role in proselytizing. It was actively involved in missionary activities through social welfare, dharma talks, publication, and novitiate programmes. BMS was different from traditional Chinese Mahayana Buddhist temples especially in its missionary goal. At that moment, clerics of Mahayana Buddhism in Malaysia were passive in proselytizing activities compared with Christian and Islamic missionaries. There was lack of the sense of competition with the other religious groups. There were two reasons why Mahayana Buddhism was passive in religious propagation. Firstly, there was no proper mechanism that allowed the training of Buddhist clerics that encouraged the modern bureaucratization of religious missionary activities. This lack of willingness to embark serious missionary work of Mahayana Buddhism has been partially filled by BMS after independence. The First Committee of BMS's president Teh Thean Choo argued that

“other co-religionists were forging ahead in the propagation work of their respective religion, we, of the Buddhist faith, were [lagging] behind in our propagation activities. Our slackness had resulted in a good deal of misconception and misunderstandings in regard to our Buddhist teachings, practices and beliefs. In fact it was known that many of our followers were drifting from us to other faiths” (Teh 1972: 3)

BMS has launched various important religious activities to introduce Buddhism to English-educated Chinese Buddhist. There were three important propagation activities

⁴⁷ Its name has been changed to Buddhist Missionary Society Malaysia (BMSM) in 1996. from BMSM official site, 'About Us', http://www.bmsm.org.my/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=52&Itemid=53, accessed 15 April 2010.

in the 1960s and 70s, which included publications, correspondence course, and novitiate programme.

The most impressive project in first decade of BMS was its publication achievement. From 1962 to 1972, BMS published a sizable booklets divided into two series, Missionary Series and Wisdom Series. Here I quoted the list and amount of the total copies that have been launched in “publications expounding the teaching of Buddha”. Under the Missionary Series, they were: *Noble Living*, 5,000 copies; *What Buddhist Believe*, 5,000 copies; *Do You Believe in Rebirth?*, 5,000 copies; *Great Personalities in Buddhism*, 8,000 copies; *Why Worry*, 10,000 copies; *Life of the Buddha Part 1*, 10,000; *A Manual of Buddhism*, 10,000 copies; *Handbook of Buddhists*, 25,000 copies. Under the Wisdom Series, this included: *What is Religion*, 30,000 copies; *You are Responsible*, 20,000 copies; *Saying of the Buddha*, 30,000 copies; *Nature of Life*, 10,000 copies; *How to Overcome Your Difficulties*, 50,000 copies; *Day to Day Buddhist Practices*, 10,000 copies; *Buddhism and Duties of Lay Buddhists*, 10,000 copies; *Chinese Culture and Religion*, 10,000 copies; *Why Were We Born?*, 6,000 copies and *Parents and Children*, 10,000 copies.

From the publication list of BMS, interestingly, the scope of Buddhist teaching under the concern of publication committee was the basic concepts of Buddhism. BMS always emphasized the more “pristine” form of Buddhist teaching (Teh 1972). Dhammananda once also argued that “Buddhists may think that going to the temple and offering flowers at the feet of the image of the Buddha, lighting a few oil lamps and burning some joss-sticks or incense in the temple means that is Buddhism. They

may believe that their religious duties have thus been fulfilled”.⁴⁸ In official website of K. Sri Dhammananda, a similar discourse reiterated:

“It was common for many Chinese in Malaysia to regard themselves as Buddhist because of past traditions. However, many of them did not understand the teachings of the Buddha. They mistook the customs and traditions that they grew up with, or those practised by their parents and grandparents as being part of Buddhism. Unfortunately, many of these customs and traditions were based on superstitious beliefs handed down from the past. This resulted in Buddhism receiving a very bad image and regarded as an out-dated and superstitious religion by the educated strata of society”.⁴⁹

Dhammananda was part of the larger sentiment of Sri Lanka and he spoke the language of Buddhist modernism. He argued in his book *Sri Lanka's Contribution to Buddhism*,

“Sinhalese monks are to be found they are instrumental in organizing Sunday schools, study circles, Buddhist societies, schools, publication of Buddhist books and literature, lectures on Buddhism and indulging in many other religious activities. In certain countries Sinhalese monks were in fact the pioneers in such activities and in the performance of religious ceremonies in the manner as prescribed in the Dhamma. Where previously Buddhist activities had been limited only to an occasional visit to the Temple and offering of some joss-sticks, the

⁴⁸ Dhammananda, K. Sri (n.d.) *Buddhism and Duties of A Lay Buddhist*, <http://www.ksridhammananda.com/pdf/08-04-02/DUTIES%20of%20a%20lay%20buddhist%20-%20edited.pdf> , accessed 24 April 2010.

⁴⁹ Official Site for K. Sri Dhammananda , ‘Life story- Nation Building’, http://www.ksridhammananda.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=29&Itemid=37, accessed 14 April 2010.

Sinhalese monks have on their part done much to enlighten the people by revealing the Buddha's true teachings and by guiding them on how to practice this noble religion without resorting to any superstitious belief" (Dhammananda).⁵⁰

The most important move of BMS was the laicization of its missionary activities. Dhammananda formed the committee that was led by lay persons and also set up BMS Youth Section and BMS Ladies Section. The first president of BMS and committee members were largely lay persons. The involvement of youth had energized the missionary activities and given a new image of Buddhism being a religion for the young too. New idea came out with the participation of youth lay persons, for example, the introduction of correspondence course by BMS Youth Section. It was drafted by a University Malaya graduate with a design to adapt for the local need of basic understanding of Buddhism. The correspondence course called "*Buddhism For You*" was designed in simple language, "presented interestingly", "can be easily remembered", and "applicable to lives" to "deepen understanding of Buddha Dhamma by studying it systematically" (Ang 1980: 31). The course aimed to instill "Buddhist doctrines" that could provide readers "the study and practice of the Dhamma" that "lead a meaningful life by following the Buddhist principles of living" (ibid.32).⁵¹ In its Lesson 2 on "What Buddhism Is Not", there was an emphasis on the misconception of Buddhism with popular practices that mixed up with Chinese religions. Accordingly, this course received overwhelming response with more than 500 people enrolled and the Youth Section planned to translate it into national language and Chinese in the early 1980s (ibid.33).

⁵⁰ Dhammananda, K. Sri (n.d.) *Sri Lanka's Contribution to Buddhism*, <http://www.ksridhammananda.com/pdf/new/Sri%20lanka's%20contribution%20to%20buddhism%20-%20edited.pdf>, accessed 24 April 2010.

⁵¹ Thai temples in Kelantan and Kedah have also been teaching Buddhism to local village kids since the early 1950s – in part spurred on by Thailand's influence.

A few years before independence, the unconstrained supply of monks and nuns from overseas was gradually stopped. New nation-state entailed stricter rule and regulation of the moving of citizen. After Malaysia was formed in 1957, fewer monks and nuns came to the country. In 1953, Chief Abbot of Kek Lok Si told *The Straits Times*,

“Priests are in such demand in other states and Settlements that our temple has had to release many for service elsewhere..... Malayan boys wishing to enter the priesthood had to enter a recognized monastery in China..... It was still possible for them to leave Malaya, but he doubted if under the new immigration law they would be able to return to this country” (*The Straits Times* 1953).

On the other hand, Mahayana Buddhism was in a decline in China and it was very hard to attract Malaysian Chinese to be ordained as monks or nuns. Chinese Buddhists were in the belief system of Confucianism which valued *xiao* (filial piety). The first Confucian ethic of *xiao* is expecting the son to maintain the patriline through marriage and to continue the family name's posterity. The problem of a clerical shortage was obvious. Dhammananda established the Buddhist Monks Training Centre which organized novitiate programmes to provide the general public with the “monastic discipline and to take up a monk's life for advancement in personal development and service to the Buddhist community in Malaysia” (Buddhist Missionary Society 1980b: 29). The duration of the programme was two weeks. It was packaged with an intensive course on Buddhist doctrines and suttas, chanting, meditation, and novice discipline that emphasized the training of Theravada Buddhism and it was held during the year end school holidays. The programme allowed those interested in monastic life to experience and live as a novice for a short

period of time. It was a programme for the sowing of seed for inspiration towards monkhood. The first novitiate programme was launched in 1976 and since then it succeeded in attracting a few participants who chose the path as full-time English-speaking sangha members. In other words, it contributed to the beginning of the homegrown of sangha. These homegrown monks and nuns later played important role in the growth of Buddhism in urban Malaysia.⁵²

Dhammananda was also active in international Buddhist organizations, for example, he was an Honorary President of the World Fellowship of Buddhists from 1995 to 2006 and Senior Religious Adviser for World Buddhist Sangha Council. This international connection was important to keep up with the latest developments in Buddhism that had undergone tremendous change in the modern world. Technological advancements have allowed high mobility of people and idea through transportation and publication. More interactions and exchanges have opened up resources sharing between Buddhist communities in the majority and minority countries. This has strengthened the religious development in the minority countries.

Before the emerging of active Mahayana reformist groups, the Brickfield Temple was a “central network of a number of Buddhist organisations” (Buddhist Missionary Society 1980a: 31). Buddhist organizations such as YBAM in Selangor and Fellowship of Buddhists were centered at the Brickfields Temple where they had their activities. The Joint Wesak Celebration Committee also used the Brickfields Temple to coordinate their activities in celebrating annual Wesak festival in the Kuala Lumpur area (ibid).

Brickfields’s activities under Dhammananda’s leadership creatively employed modern technology in proselytization in the 1960s and 70s, for an example, the using

⁵² Official Site for K. Sri Dhammananda , ‘Life story- Novitiate Programme’, http://www.ksridhammananda.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=31&Itemid=37, accessed 24 April 2010.

of booklet to spread dharma. The temple's monks de-emphasized supernaturalism and highlighted the compatibility between modern science and Buddhism. Dhammananda's mission was to fortify Buddhism through the new idea that compatible with modernity that can interact with other world religions. First Prime Minister of Malaysia Tunku Abdul Rahman once stated that "Ceylonese⁵³ who worked in large numbers in almost every branch of the public administration.... has left an indelible mark in my mind" (Selvaratnam & Apputhurai 2006: xv). Sinhalese monks were an "indelible mark" in strengthening the English speaking Chinese Buddhist from the proselytizing of other world religions by incorporating the modern idea and terms into Buddhism, and to a certain extent also influenced the development of Mahayana Chinese Buddhism through direct and indirect exchanges.

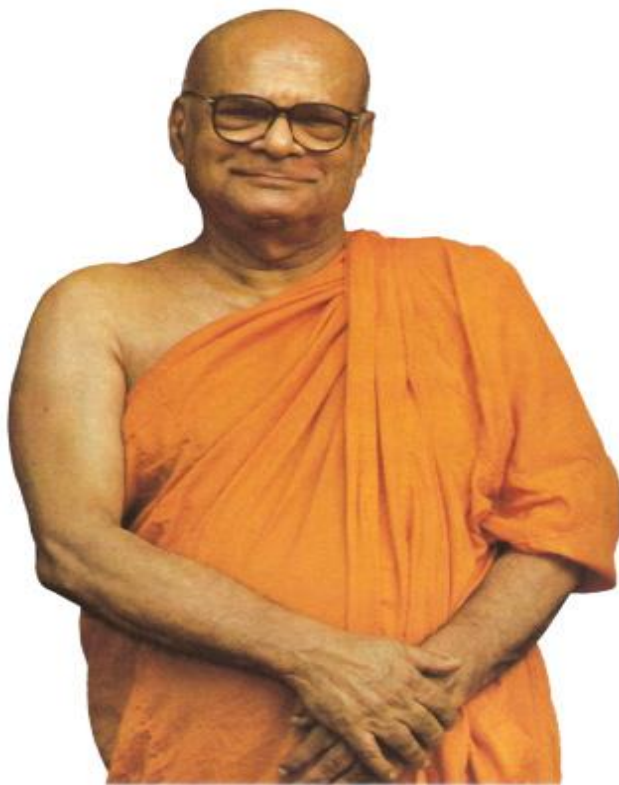


Figure 1 Venerable K. Sri Dhammananda Nayaka Thera (1918-2006). Source: Nalanda Buddhist Society, <https://www.nalanda.org.my/buddhism-in-malaysia/>

⁵³ There are two groups, Sinhalese and Tamil.

Rensheng Fojiao (Buddhism for Human Life): Mahayana Lineage

During the revolutionary age in the early 20th century in China, Chinese belief systems especially Confucian values were seen as a cause to the backwardness by the new youth intellectuals such as Hu Shih, Chen Duxiu, Lu Xun, Cai Yuanpei, and Zhou Zuoren. Under this crisis of identity, they perceived the invasion of Western powers as humiliation at home, there was a call for the abandonment of Chinese traditions by intellectual community (Chow 1960). Chinese Buddhism was seen as part of the “superstitious” Chinese belief system that caused the downfall of the glorious Chinese civilization. “Most intellectuals of the New Culture Movement⁵⁴ summarily dismissed religious beliefs and practices as worthless remnants of a prescientific feudal society or unfortunate survivals from humanity’s psychological childhood” (Pittman 2001:25). One prominent leader of the movement in China, Liang Qi Chao argued that

“the Chinese had always been quite badly tainted with the poison of superstition; as Buddhism became prevalent, all sorts of belief in evil spirits and unorthodox doctrines as well as methods for public deception and popular delusion..... If this continues unchanged, then Buddhism will become a great obstacle in our intellectual world, and even those of us who have always treated Buddhistic teachings with respect will

⁵⁴ New Culture Movement or The May Fourth Movement started in the mid of 1910s called for the Chinese Renaissance that a new Chinese culture should be based on Western knowledge, especially science and democracy. They called for the use of vernacular language, the end of patriarchal family and women liberation, and reexamination of traditional Chinese institutions and thoughts, in specific, Confucian values. Hence, China needed ‘Western scientific technology’ and ‘laws and political institutions’ (Chow 1960: 1-15).

henceforth be tongue-tied and afraid to discuss it any more” (cited Pittman 2001: 29).

Under these historical vicissitudes of cultural reformation movements in China, a prominent Mahayana reformer in the early 20th century, Taixu called for a reform of Chinese Buddhism in order to uplift Buddhism from accusations of negativities. Anti-religionist intellectual group criticized Buddhism as being superstitious and Taixu had to “counter the arguments and actions of hostile anti-religionists” (Pittman 2001:2). Chinese religion was not only attacked by the May Fourth Movement’s intellectual groups. Even before May Fourth Movement in 1919, there had been an antisuperstition movement since 1898. Under the political modernization project by Kang You Wei, a policy “Destroy temple to build schools” was launched by the Guangxu Emperor. There was another fierce antisuperstition movement led by the Kuomintang from 1926 to 1937. Temples and their lands were seized and confiscated by Kuomintang government. For the three decades from 1898 to 1937, “probably more than half of the million Chinese temples that existed in 1898 were emptied of all religious equipment and activity” (Goossaert 2006: 308). Taixu lived in that social and political turmoil “period of religious prosecution” (Birnbbaum 2003: 430) in China. He has taken up the discourse of antisuperstition to reform Buddhism. At the same time, he also actively promoted the setting up of Buddhist organizations to protect Buddhism in an organized form. In 1945, Taixu founded the Committee for the Reorganization of Chinese Buddhism. Two years later, under the auspices of the Nationalist Chinese government, he set up the Chinese Buddhist Association (Tuttle 2005).

Taixu called for a religious reform of Chinese Buddhism through “institutional reorganization, modern education, compassionate social action, and ecumenical

cooperation in global mission” (Pittman 2001: 2) in China in the early 20th century. He proposed a new way to understand Buddhism which he termed as “*Rensheng Fojiao*”, “Buddhism for human life” or “Buddhism for the living”. He argues that “all practices that have to do with gods and ghost be immediately discontinued” (ibid.175). Another major theosophical turn proposed by Taixu is the Buddhism should be practiced during human life and he “emphasized that wisdom could not be attained apart from compassionate actions in the world” (ibid.8). Buddhism during the late 19th century to post-May Fourth Movement period was plagued with many problems which included the morally corrupted monks, outdated doctrinal teaching by famous monasteries, the challenge from Christian missionaries, and political pressure from anti-religionist intellectuals as well as government. It was even believed that “Buddhism is vanishing; the monks are disappearing more and more; and the temples and monasteries are on the decline” (Reichelt 1934: 49).

In response to religious crisis of deteriorating of Buddhism, Taixu proposed three revolutions for Mahayana Buddhism. These were “an organizational revolution, an economic revolution, and an intellectual revolution” (Pittman 2001: 80). The first revolution was the restructuring of the sangha system for a proper recruiting and training of Mahayana sangha members. These included the “new model monasteries, benevolent organizations, and educational ventures” (ibid.95). Taixu founded the Wuchang Buddhist Institute, South Fujian Buddhist Academy, The World Buddhist Institute, The World Buddhist University, *Han Zang Jiaoli Yuan*, and *Daxingshan Si*, they were modern education institution for training of new sangha members. The second revolution was the rebuilding of economic resources in supporting the sangha and their monasteries. Taixu planned a self-sufficient sangha economic system that urged the majority of sangha to work as farmers to support themselves.

The third was the reinterpretation of Buddhism to reject superstitious belief and excessive emphasis on the other worldly teaching. To serve this aim, he published *Haichao Yin*, an important magazine to promote *Rensheng Fojiao* (Buddhism for Human Life) by highlighting this worldly aspect of Mahayana Buddhism. The contents of this magazine included “exposition of Buddhist doctrines”, “defense of the faith in face of modern criticism”, “advocacy of reformation”, “stories of conversion experience, lives of saintly devotees” and “critical review of works on religion and philosophy” (Tsu, cited Pittman 2001: 94). The magazine became the platform for him to gain support from the younger generation of clerics and laypersons. It was also a channel to channel the opinions on the problems faced by Chinese Buddhism by engaging in debate with traditionalists.

Taixu's Influence in Taiwan

Taixu's influence extended to overseas Chinese communities as well as reformist monks in Taiwan were influenced by Taixu. The political and Cultural Revolution that happened later in the 1950s led to the fleeing of monks and nuns to Taiwan. Taixu was religious teacher of the famous scholar monk in Taiwan, Yinshun, who has contributed to the “Chinese Buddhism's intellectual resurgence” (Pittman 2001: 267). A more systematic way to study Buddhist scripture is proposed by Yinshun. Taixu's “Buddhism for human life” has been extended and interpreted. Yinshun started another philosophical turn in Chinese Buddhism, he rejected the practices of Buddha “to be worshipped like gods in their heavens”. As he explained,

“Sakyamuni Buddha was neither a god nor a demon, neither a son nor a messenger of a god. Sakyamuni frankly stated: ‘All Buddhas and world-honored ones arise from within this world and not from those

gods. This is true not only of Sakyamuni Buddha; all buddhas arise from the human realm and not from a heaven” (ibid.270).

The founders of Fo Guang Shan, Fa Gu Shan, and Tzu Chi have been influenced by Taixu. Fo Guang Shan’s founder Hsing Yun once said “ever since I started propagating the Dharma, I have been following the teachings of Master Taixu” because “saving those who are alive is much more important than saving the dead” (ibid.273). Another way to understand the influence, “Taixu was the advocate of Buddhism for human life, but Hsing Yun is the one who has put a Buddhism for human life into practice” (ibid).

Fa Gu Shan’s founder Sheng Yan also recognized the legacy of Taixu. Sheng Yan “linked its construction with the concerns of a line of Buddhist reformers that goes back through Taixu” (ibid.283). Sheng Yan delineates,

“Taixu began to promote a ‘Buddhism for human life’. Taixu’s student Yinshun continued this by advancing a “humanistic Buddhism”. My shifu [teacher], the Venerable Master Dongchu, published the magazine *Humanity*. An then, in Taiwan, I myself founded Dharma Drum Mountain, whose goal is the “establishment of a pure land on earth”. These are all measures for preserving the wisdom of Buddhism that is in great peril and activities for recovering the original design of Sakyamuni Buddha” (cited Pittman, 2001: 283 & 284).

The Taixu’s legacy continued to the second generation of clerics in Taiwan. Another important Buddhist group’s charismatic leader in Taiwan, Cheng Yen, founder of Tzu Chi, was ordained under the scholar-monk Yinshun, who was Taixu’s disciple. Cheng Yen emphasized compassion action as a core for Buddhist teaching in her speeches. She once said, “[if] we don’t practice the teachings of the sutras, the

distance between humans and the Buddha will still be immeasurably large. One who learns Buddhism should understand it thoroughly and practice it personally.... One can benefit only from rigorously practicing what one has learned” (ibid.290). This is compatible with what has been argued by Taixu, “True bodhisattvas could never seek their own rebirth without simultaneously seeking the rebirth of all sentient beings” (ibid.239). Cheng Yen emphasized the worldly charity actions by helping the poor, old, and the sick in walking the path.

The religious freedom in Taiwan and the arrival of charismatic religious leaders from China to Taiwan have laid the foundations for the development of Mahayana Buddhism in Taiwan. Those reformist monks in Taiwan continue Taixu’s modernization efforts. When Taiwan developed and climbed up the economic ladder, the wealth has allowed more resources to be channeled to global religious activities. This transnational Buddhist movement then benefits Chinese Buddhism in Malaysia.

The influence of Taixu extended to Malaya as well. In 1940, Taixu was invited by Buddhist organizations in Malaya to deliver a public lecture in Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Melaka, and Singapore (*The Straits Times*, 1940a; Shi 2010: 117). His lecture in Singapore on “The Buddhist Eightfold Path and the Reformation of Our Life” was in Mandarin with 200 men and women participated (*The Straits Times*, 1940b). In Penang, he delivered lectures in Kek Lok Si, Guanyin Temple, and Shuang Qing Temple (Shi 2010: 117). A reader in a letter to the editor of the Strait Times column called Taixu as “the Martin Luther of modern Buddhism” (L.C.L., 1940).



Figure 2 Master Taixu (1890-1947). Source: Da Du Buddhist Web, <http://www.dadunet.com/25-36-view-36-201007-22738-1.html>

Taixu and Chuk Mor

The influence of Taixu on the Mahayana monks who came from China to Malaya was significant. The “Buddhism for human life” that Taixu advocated was transmitted to Malaya through his student Chuk Mor born in China, a prominent Mahayanist monk living in Malaysia. According to the personal life history of Chuk Mor, in 1946 when Chuk Mor was still 34 years old, a prolonged serious high fever had almost taken his life. One night, Chuk Mor had an apocalyptic dream of his future. In his dream Ksitigarbha, a popular bodhisattva who took a pledge to salvage all beings in hell, told Chuk Mor that “in the Southern world, you have a great mission to propagate the dharma” (Lu 2010: 112). Chuk Mor perceived this dream as his duty in this life. In 1954, Chuk Mor was invited by Bodhi Secondary School in Penang as a religious teacher. There he edited three volumes of Buddhist textbooks for the students. Penang became Chuk Mor’s new homeland.

Chuk Mor started his teacher-student relationship with Taixu back in South Fujian Buddhist Academy (*Minnan Foxue Yuan*), the major center of modern Buddhist education in China during the Republican Age. Taixu was the head of the school in 1927 (Welch 1967: 111). The academy was designed by Taixu according to a new educational system. There were “written entrance examinations, diplomas, and a regular marking system in which 60 percent was the passing grade” (ibid). The instructors were unlike senior monks “seated on a dais in a red robe” but instead “walked around and used a blackboard, while students sat taking notes” (ibid). These were the attempts of them to break away from tradition by employing new way of running a Buddhist education. In 1932, Chuk Mor was the best student in the academy. Taixu once commented on Chuk Mor’s article submitted for assignment as “clearly articulated and it was the best among the students, and he has a very bright future”

(Lu 2010: 18). Chuk Mor then became one of Taixu's disciples and followed him in the dharma tours to deliver speeches in various places in China. He recorded Taixu's dharma talks and published them in *Haicao Yin*, a magazine which promoted Taixu's brand of reformist thought. In 1933, Chuk Mor was appointed as a sub-editor of *Haicao Yin* and became a researcher at the Wuchang Buddhist Institute. He was also the librarian for the World Buddhist Institute that was established by Taixu. Chuk Mor contributed many articles to *Haicao Yin*. He joined the debate with anti-religionist intellectuals. A famous May Fourth Cultural Movement thinker Hu Shih wrote an article to criticize Buddhism, young Chuk Mor challenged his misunderstanding view (ibid.21). In 1935, Chuk Mor was ordained with the Bodhisattva vow⁵⁵ by Taixu (ibid.34). In the same year, he was appointed as assistant lecturer at the South Fujian Buddhist Academy.

Chuk Mor had some experiences in the publication of Buddhist magazine. During the Japanese occupation, he was involved in the publication of a Hong Kong based magazine called *The Awakening of South China*. Chuk Mor edited issue number 7 which was a special edition to commemorate Taixu's 50th Birthday. He subsequently became a contributor for the magazine and updated readers on Taixu's activities in China. Chuk Mor was appointed as editor of the magazine since the issue number 12. He insisted the publication of *The Awakening of South China* was to inherit and promote the new teachings of Taixu. In 1941, Taixu wrote a letter to him and complimented the magazine as "interesting" and Taixu hoped that it would become a magazine for the younger generation to learn new Buddhism in South China. The new Buddhism here referred to the idea of Buddhism promoted by Taixu, for an

⁵⁵ In Mahayana Buddhism, the Bodhisattva Vows is the most compassionate promise. Those who have chosen the vows have to help all sentient beings in this world to gain the enlightenment before attaining nirvana.

example, Buddhists should learn the dharma for the use in this life and Buddhism was not for the old or death (Chi Chern n.d.).

Chuk Mor's involvement in publications was crucial for the birth of an important Buddhist magazine that was to influence Malaysian Mahayana Buddhism. *The Everlasting Light (Wu Jin Deng)*⁵⁶ was first published in 1951 in Macao and moved to Malaysia after Chuk Mor decided to stay in Penang. Since then, *The Everlasting Light* has become an influential magazine for Chinese speaking Malaysian Buddhist. Before this, Mahayana Buddhist groups only reprinted sutras for free distribution with most sutras were in classical Chinese language and they were not easy to understand by ordinary Buddhists. The language used by the magazine was simple Mandarin and allowed two ways interactions, for an example, a column of question and answer was created to allow readers to pose any question to Chuk Mor about their curiosity in Buddhism. This column was popular and received tremendous responses from the readers. The magazine had also promoted the writing of articles and literature about Buddhism by the clerics and laypersons. In 2012, *The Everlasting Light* has survived for about 61 years and now it is owned by MBA.

In 1962, Chuk Mor's followers built *The Triple Wisdom Hall (Sanhui Jiangtang)* in Penang after the original old building was found to be insufficient to accommodate the growing number of devotees. *The Triple Wisdom Hall* offered various Buddhist talks and classes for the Chinese Buddhist community in Penang and it became a famous center to learn Buddhism. Some intellectuals in Penang were attracted to Chuk Mor and took refuge as a Buddhist. In 1972, a Taixu Memorial Pagoda was built to remember Taixu's contribution and promote his idea of "Buddhism for human life". In 1975, "Center of Buddhism for Human Life" was set up in commemoration

⁵⁶ Chuk Mor explained that the magazine's title meant 'the light of Buddhism started from one person, it then spreads to thousands and millions people and the light of dharma should be continued forever'.

of Taixu. There were estimated that around 50,000 laypersons have taken five precepts refuge and 135 clerics have ordained by Chuk Mor (Lu 2010: 189). His students, lay person as well as monastic, play an important role in the development of Mahayana Buddhism in Malaysia.

Chuk Mor did not confine himself to his temple. One of the major contributions he made to Chinese Mahayana Buddhism was in the forming of a Buddhist association. In 1955, a famous monk from Melaka Kim Beng⁵⁷ met Chuk Mor to discuss the possibility of forming a national Buddhist body in the country. The Malaysian Buddhist Association (MBA) was formally registered in 1957 with 400 affiliated organization members and 3,000 individual members. In 1959, the association was officially launched in Kek Lok Si with the opening ceremony officiated by Tunku Abdul Rahman, Malaysia's first Prime Minister. The MBA has since functioned as a lobby group for Malaysian Buddhists. The decision to form a national organization also showed that even though those first generation clerics were from China, the Malayanization process has been taking root. The political upheavals in China including the Cultural Revolution and suppression of religion, had closed the door for Chinese monks in Malaysia to return to their homeland.

Chuk Mor was the President of the MBA for about 12 years and laid down several milestones for the future development of Buddhism in Malaysia, especially the promotion of modern Buddhist education and setting up of Buddhist societies. A significant contribution made by Chuk Mor was his efforts in promoting sangha education. In 1969, the Malaysian Buddhist Institute was founded and he became its dean, a position he held for 30 years. The establishment of this Buddhist academy was a way to standardize the training of professional clerics in Malaysia. Chuk Mor also

⁵⁷ He was the founder of an important Buddhist temple, *Xiang Lin Si* in Melaka and was an ex-president of MBA.

actively encouraged the forming of Buddhist societies nationwide. These included Buddhist societies in secondary schools, universities, teaching colleges, and various states as well as at cities, towns, or villages' Buddhist societies. Some Buddhist societies in the secondary schools and universities have been hidden and could not register officially even though they have received support from members.



Figure 3 Tunku Abdul Rahman (right no. 6) officiated the opening ceremony for Malaysian Buddhist Association at Kek Lok Si in 1959. Source: Malaysian Buddhist Association



Figure 4 Venerable Chuk Mor (1913-2002) visited his birth place in China in 1987.
Source: Wenzhou Web, <http://news.66wz.com/system/2012/07/25/103276625.shtml>

Summary

Early Buddhist modernist ideas in Malaya have been transplanted through transnational connections. This has continued with contemporary Buddhist revitalization movements. However, there are few differences that enhance the traffic of regional linkages. Technological advancements such as the global media, Internet, and transportation have enhanced interactions among the Buddhists from different

parts of the world. The historical roots of a transnational connection with the Buddhist world has been grounded in the early development of Malayan and later Malaysian Buddhism. Thai, Sinhala, Burmese, and Chinese Buddhism developed through the religious resources from their host societies.

Buddhist modernism that happened in Sri Lanka, Thailand, and China brought in another form of Buddhism with the arrival of religious leaders who were influenced by the idea of Buddhist modernism. Dhammananda and Chuk Mor represented this first generation of reformist monk in the 1950s and 60s. Their initiatives especially through the forming of Buddhist organizations such as the MBA and the BMS have strengthened the reformist ideal among clerics and laypersons. In the next chapter, I will focus on the initiatives of Chinese Buddhist organizations, MBA and YBAM, that have improved the form and content of Buddhism. One distinctive feature of contemporary Buddhist revitalization in Malaysia is the larger scale of bi-regional interaction between Chinese Buddhists in Malaysia and Taiwan. Besides the local efforts, at this moment, there is a new wave of Buddhist modernism idea that comes from Taiwan which also contributes to Buddhist revitalization in Malaysia (Chapter 4).

Chapter 3

Reforming Chinese Buddhism through the *Zheng Xin* (Right Faith) Movement

During my fieldwork, I attended a conference concerning Yinshun's *Renjian Fojiao* (Buddhism in the Human Realm). There were approximately 400 participants. The conference's opening ceremony began with a popular Mahayanist Buddhist song. Everyone stood up and sang the *Song of the Triple Gem* (*San Bao Ge*)⁵⁸, which was composed in Mandarin by Taixu. The lyrics were projected at the front and the rear of the hall. A group of Tzu Chi members led the singing. They held lotus candles, and the lights were turned off. This ambiance created a sense of "Buddhist sacredness" in the hall.

A counter and several tables close to the main conference door caught my eye. They were occupied by an organization called the Zheng Xin Buddhist Association, which was a co-organizer of the conference. The Zheng Xin Buddhist Association was established in 1999 with the aim "to continue practicing Buddhism daily in the most practical ways as we grow in the various stages of our lives, whilst complimented by some academic logic and discussion to foster [a] progressive understanding of the dhamma".⁵⁹ The association's groups first formed in Sydney under the guidance of the Venerable Tsang Hui, who was born in Taiwan and studied Buddhism under the tutelage of Yinshun.

The association promotes Yinshun's publication series, the *Miao Yun Collection*. Yinshun inherited Taixu's legacy in further advocating "Buddhism for

⁵⁸ See Appendix 1.

⁵⁹ The official web page of *Zheng Xin* Buddhist Association, <http://www.myzhengxin.net/>, accessed 26 April 2011.

human life” (*Rensheng Fojiao*) and “Buddhism in the human realm” (*Renjian Fojiao*). The association reissued a compilation of Yinshun’s research publications and general articles. According to the association’s official website, Yinshun “placed emphasis on discriminating inaccurate assumptions made during the evolution of Buddhism while [he] reinstalled and promoted accommodative new theory, which was suited to the current era”.⁶⁰ Yinshun argued for “returning to the simplistic Indian Buddhism”⁶¹ or “according to the principals of Early Buddhism...in systematic analyses and arguments”⁶² where Buddha should not be worshipped “like gods in their heavens” (Pittman 2001: 270).

Zheng Xin is a term frequently used by Mandarin-speaking Chinese Buddhists in Malaysia. The Zheng Xin Buddhist Association was not the first Buddhist group to coin the term. Rather, it has been used since the first generation of reformist monks, including Chuk Mor, Kim Beng, Ji Huang, and some others, arrived in Malaya in the 1950s. There is a continuing discourse on *Zheng Xin* Buddhism in Malaysia. The discourse does not stop at the level of debates and arguments but also entails a *Zheng Xin* movement, which has been endorsed by various reformist Buddhist clerics and layperson’s organizations.

The Discourse of *Zheng Xin*

The term *Zheng Xin* as adopted by modern Chinese Buddhist associations in Malaysia can be traced to the second decade of the 20th century. A lay association called the *Fojiao Zhengxin Hui* (Buddhist Right Faith Society) was formed by Wang Senpu and Chen Yuanbai in 1920 in Hankow, China. Wang and others took Buddhist refuge with

⁶⁰ The official web page of the *Zheng Xin* Buddhist Association, <http://www.myzhengxin.net/teacher.html>, accessed 26 April 2011.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Official website of the Hwa Tsang Buddhist Monastery, <http://www.hwatsangmonastery.org.au/edupub.htm#sec6>, accessed 26 April 2011.

Taixu (Welch 1968: 77 & 78). This Zheng Xin Society had a reciprocal relationship with the Wuchang Buddhist Seminary in Hubei, China.⁶³ Furthermore, Taixu was chosen as the society's *daoshi* (guiding master). With the support of businessmen, the society grew and "built a large three-story complex for its publishing and educational activities, and by 1933 [it] claimed a membership of thirty thousand" (Pittman 2001: 97). The society published a magazine called *Zheng Xin Zhoukan* (Right Faith Weekly). At the same time, it initiated charity efforts; for example, it operated a free clinic and primary school in Hankow and it donated coffins to the poor. The society even dispatched small boats to rescue flood victims of Yangzi River in 1926.

The initial notion of Right Faith Buddhism began with Taixu. Indeed, since its inception, the term has been associated with a reform agenda that distinguishes the new Chinese Buddhism advocated by Taixu from traditional Chinese Buddhism. Traditional Chinese Buddhism was trapped in old practices. The traditional Buddhist monasteries did not uphold the higher moral virtue in sangha communities. Monks and nuns lacked modern educational training opportunities. The role that Chinese Buddhist clerics could play in serving the community was limited, and it was eventually reduced to providing ritual services during funerals. At the turn of the 19th century, Chinese Buddhism in China was also highly influenced by the Pure Land School (*Jingtu Zong*), which promoted the practice of dharma by chanting six words, "Na Mo A Mi Ta Bha", to gain rebirth into the *Xifang Jile Shijie* (Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss). The Bodhisattva Amitabha who resided there would help those who recited the verse to achieve nirvana. Right Faith Buddhism believes that the pure land exists in this world rather than in another realm. To enter the Pure Land, Buddhists must learn sutras, practice meditation, and perform acts of charity.

⁶³ Database of Modern Chinese Buddhism, <http://buddhistinformatics.ddbc.edu.tw/dmcb/%E6%AD%A3%E4%BF%A1%E6%9C%83>, accessed 27 April 2011.

According to Taixu, the ideal of right faith has two actions. The first ideal is “improving human life”. The second ideal is “becoming a Buddha” through self-cultivation and compassionate actions (Pittman 2001: 180).

Yinshun, a student of Taixu, goes even further to demystify the Buddha and Mahayana Buddhism. The Buddha became a god-like figure in Chinese Buddhism. Furthermore, the Buddha was worshipped by the Chinese as were the other deities of Chinese religion. Chinese Buddhism has become a part of the larger Chinese religious system. The Buddha was accepted by Chinese Buddhists as a deity with special powers since time immemorial. Yinshun denounces this syncretism of Buddhism with Chinese popular Taoism. He maintains that the worship of the Buddha should instead consist of admiration for his perfect stage of life rather than for magical powers that confer protection or wealth on practitioners. One must practice, rather than pray, to attain the perfect stage of life.

Yinshun criticizes the practice of Pure Land piety through the chanting Namó Amitabha and promises of rebirth in *Xifang Jile Shijie*. By doing so, he alienated some Pure Land devotees in Taiwan (Pittman 2001: 269). Yinshun also published a book to oppose the contemporary practice of Pure Land. In his book *The Pure Land and Zen*, Yinshun (1982) analyzes the tradition from historical as well as Buddhological perspectives. He rejects the common practices of the Buddhist community at that time as misinterpreted through the tradition of Pure Land Buddhism. According to Yinshun, in addition to chanting, the practice of Pure Land should include greater dedication to self-cultivation and good deeds. He argues that Pure Land seems simple to practice, but in fact, the religious cultivation to higher stage which the followers aspire is not easy to achieve. This argument is attuned with

Yinshun's *Renjian Fojiao*, in which he argues that the practice of Buddhism focuses on the human realm but not in the other realm as argued by the Pure Land.

Yinshun further argues that Mahayana Buddhism seeks wisdom for the individual as well as for all sentient beings. To achieve Buddhahood individually is imperfect. The right faith in Mahayana Buddhism is that of the bodhisattva, who will “take great vows of compassion to enter the world again and again to save all” (Pittman 2001: 269). In retrospect, Yinshun's teacher, Taixu, also “emphatically disagreed with such teaching and asserted that too many lay devotees and too many monks were satisfied with the passive way of dependence without understanding its profound doctrinal basis” (ibid. 202). Taixu held a different opinion from the Pure Land master Yinguang, who was responsible for “the growing popularity of Pure Land devotionism” in China (ibid. 201 & 202). Chinese Buddhism scholar Kenneth Chen estimated that 60% to 70% of lay devotees in China during the 1930s considered themselves to be Pure Land followers (ibid. 202). For Taixu, “the visionary and otherworldly emphasis of Pure Land devotionism was counterproductive” to “compassionate forms of social interaction” (ibid. 202). He believed that “such devotionism had led [Pure Land followers] to postpone action in favor of reliance on visualization of the pure lands, the worship of image, and the recitation of the name Amitabha Buddha (*nian fo*) in hopes of rebirth in another cosmic realm” (ibid. 202 & 203).

Taixu considered the bodhisattva to be an ideal for Mahayana Buddhists. He argued that “Mahayana followers seek self-enlightenment in order to awaken others, so that all might together realize eternal truth” (ibid. 200). Hence, “the most efficacious path for those pursuing bodhisattvahood is not through some celestial realm or distant pure land. Rather, it takes our common, ordinary human experience

on this plane as its starting point” (ibid. 204). Yinshun saw Taixu as “not sufficiently attacking the worship of celestial buddhas and bodhisattvas” (ibid.). In fact, in Mahayana Buddhism, “there is a natural tension between the notion of Bodhisattvas as supernatural beings” and “Bodhisattvas as human ideals” (ibid. 200). Yinshun has now challenged and rejected the notion of bodhisattvas as supernatural beings. Chinese Buddhism is redirected to this so-called *Zheng Xin* idealism.

***Zheng Xin* in Malaysian Chinese Buddhist Context**

Taixu uses the term *Zheng Xin* in the discussion of how a Buddhist may follow the path of a bodhisattva. Taixu explains that the path of a bodhisattva is “like one’s progression from kindergarten to advanced doctoral studies” (Pittman 2001: 204 & 205). For the attainment of the bodhisattva path, the first requirement is the “preliminary expression of ‘right faith’ and taking refuge in the Three Jewels (*san bao*)” (ibid.205). “Right faith” then becomes a prevailing means by which to differentiate traditional Chinese Buddhism from the reformist Buddhism advocated by Taixu.

The first generation of Mahayanist monks who migrated to Malaya in the 1950s also began to employ the term *Zheng Xin* in their writings. Despite the use of this term in the writings of some Mahayana clerics prior to independence, its popularization occurred much later. The publication and circulation of a book called *Zheng Xin Fojiao* (Right Faith Buddhism) originally published by a Taiwan Buddhist publisher helped to spread the idea to the Chinese-educated Buddhist community. This book was written by Sheng Yan, the founder of Dharma Drum Mountain, the third most-significant Buddhist group in Taiwan after Fo Guang Shan and Tzu Chi; it also has the capacity for international expansion. I first received *Zheng Xin Fojiao* in a

dharma class at University Science Malaysia. It was a free copy distributed by the Buddhist Society. During my visit to the YBAM's secretariat in Petaling Jaya, I learned that the YBAM funded the free distribution of this book in mass quantities.

Zheng Xin Fojiao began as a question-and-answer column in a magazine in 1963, and it was compiled into a book and published by Fo Guang Shan in 1970. *Zheng Xin Fojiao* is a book written in simple language for reaching out to ordinary people. Sheng Yan wrote in his book's foreword, "with reference to what Taixu and Yinshun's views, I do my own research to produce this book" because "some people still see Buddhism as a belief system full [of] ghosts and deities" (Sheng Yan 1983). In total, there are 70 questions in the book that clarify the so-called misperceptions of Buddhism. The book opens with the first question, which asks what right-faith Buddhism is. According to Sheng Yan, right-faith Buddhism was maintained by a small number of monks in the mountains and by educated laymen in China. Meanwhile, Chinese society practiced a mixture of three schools—Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism—in which the worship of spirits and deities intermixed with right-faith Buddhism. The second question asks whether Gautama Buddha is the creator of the universe. Sheng Yan denies that Gautama Buddha is a creator-like God as in Christianity. The third question asks who Gautama Buddha is. Gautama Buddha was a human being who was born into a royal family. With dedication in practicing dharma, he attained nirvana. Sheng Yan historicizes the founder of Buddhism and emphasizes that everyone can reach the level of Buddha in their lifetime. Locating Buddhism amidst human existence is the book's primary goal. This notion is compatible with the main idea forwarded by Taixu and Yinshun.

There are also some practical issues that relate to the practice of right-faith Buddhism discussed in the book. Sheng Yan strongly rejects the burning of joss paper

and money. According to Sheng Yan, this practice has nothing to do with Buddhism and may belong to other traditions instead. He historicizes the burning of joss paper as a superstition practiced since the Han Dynasty. Furthermore, he compellingly argues that the burning of joss paper printed with sutra during a funeral is seen as disrespectful in the Buddhist tradition. For him, observing the five precepts when one is still alive is more relevant than the excessive burning of joss paper to assist the dead. As he argues, it is too late when one is dead. Sheng Yan's forceful rejection of this popular practice has a major impact on the formulation of a new way of worship for those Buddhist groups who see themselves as on the path of right-faith Buddhism. The other issues that the book discusses are societal concerns, such as gender equality, divorce, and suicide. In addition, the book elucidates the basic usage of Buddhist terminology and the concepts and history of Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism.

Zheng Xin Fojiao was reprinted in 1980 and introduced to Malaysia in 1983 by the YBAM. The first printing of the YBAM's *Zheng Xin Fojiao* consisted of 22,000 copies. From 1983 to 1994, the YBAM distributed a total of 53,000 copies of the book to Buddhist groups in institutions of higher learning, Buddhist organizations, and temples. There is no data available after 1994.⁶⁴ However, the total number printed is far larger than the YBAM's distribution because some Buddhist societies or organizations have also printed the book. The notion of *Zheng Xin* has been popularized among Chinese Buddhists in Malaysia through the massive distribution of the book by the YBAM and other Buddhist groups.

⁶⁴ All data were collected from fieldwork.

Defending *Zheng Xin* Buddhism in Malaysia

Buddhist groups have taken up the defense of so-called *Zheng Xin* Buddhism if they observe a potential threat to their understanding of Buddhism. In this way, they reiterate the *Zheng Xin* discourse. At times, the response of certain Buddhist groups was inherently emotional. I refer to two cases, *Yi Guan Dao* and the Hungry Ghost Festival, to illustrate defensive responses during the 1980s.

Conflict with the Unity Sect (Yi Guan Dao)

The history of *Yi Guan Dao*, or Unity Sect, in Peninsular Malaya can be traced to 1948 when its first *fotang* (literally, Buddhist Hall) was established by a businessman in Kuala Lumpur. This Chinese religious sect first formed in China in 1930, but it was banned by the Nationalist government in 1946. It subsequently spread to Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the overseas Chinese communities. Hong Kong was once a major center for the sect's promulgation, but it was soon replaced by Taiwan in prominence. The strengthening of the Unity Sect in Taiwan has allowed the sect to become a transnational Chinese religious sect. Consequently, resources from Taiwan have contributed to the development of the Unity Sect in Malaysia in the 1990s. However, the consolidation of the sect in Peninsular Malaysia was largely the work of members in Hong Kong and Singapore (Soo 1997: 151 - 153). According to the official website of the Unity Sect, Malaysia now has approximately one million sect members.⁶⁵

The rapid growth of *fotang* throughout Peninsular Malaysia during the 1970s to the 1990s has reinforced the competition of the sect with “the existing interests” of Buddhist associations (Soo 1997: 153) in terms of financial resources, membership and theological understanding. The “over-enthusiastic evangelistic spirit of sect members from Taiwan” further intensified the tension between the Unity Sect and

⁶⁵ The Republic of China I-Kuan Tao Headquarter official website, http://www.ikuantao.org.tw/modules/tadbook2/view.php?book_sn=1&bdsn=73, accessed 11 May 2011.

Buddhist organizations (ibid.153 & 154). The Unity Sect's theology is based on the reinterpretation of canonical texts from various religious sources, especially Buddhism (Lu 2008: 140). This intermingling is viewed as heterodoxy in the eyes of certain Buddhist groups. The sect uses Mahayanist Buddhist scriptures, such as the Diamond Sutra in its rituals. A major Buddhist association in Taiwan such as Buddhist Association of the Republic of China insisted that the sect alters and manipulates the Buddhist sutras to fit its own doctrine (ibid.49 & 50). Buddhist terms such as the "three jewels," "Maitreya Buddha," and "Sakyamuni Buddha" are used to interpret the sect's teachings. Buddhist organizations' primary objection is to the undermining the status of the Sakyamuni Buddha compared with the main deity of them, Venerable Mother of the Ultimate Realm. In 1981, a Buddhist Studies Seminar called "Smiting Heresy and Spreading the Truth" was organized by MBA to target the Unity Sect (ibid. 157). The ex-President of the MBA, Kim Beng, argued that the Unity Sect is "a heretical sect maintaining only a façade of Buddhism" (ibid). He explained that "the sect's ultimate aim of returning to the Venerable Mother's side was not equivalent to attaining the stage of nirvana in Buddhism" (ibid). Kim Beng also argued that the idea of obtaining the truth through the Unity Sect "violat[es] the law of causation" in Buddhism (ibid). In fact, the Unity Sect has selectively borrowed teachings, terms, and texts from Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity and even Islam to construct its doctrine. Lao Zi, Confucius, Sakyamuni Buddha, Jesus, and Muhammad are all saints worshipped by the sect. According to the sect, it teaches the truth from different perspectives, but all of its teachings correspond to the Unity Sect's main teaching regarding eternal truth.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ The Republic of China I-Kuan Tao Headquarter official website, http://www.ikuantao.org.tw/modules/tadbook2/view.php?book_sn=1&bdsn=40, accessed 11 May 2011.

When a person joins the Unity Sect, an initiation ceremony is performed and an oath is taken. The oath contains the phrase, “If [I]...divulge heavenly secrets...[I] desire to receive Heaven’s punishment and be destroyed by lightning” (ibid. 154). As a result, the vow of the Unity Sect “is regularly regarded as [an] “evil oath” (*fa dushi*) by the general public” (ibid). Moreover, there is a membership⁶⁷ fee imposed when one joins the sect. The local Chinese press accused the preachers from Taiwan of being a “heretical sect controlled by an international bloc of swindlers” (ibid. 155). The Singapore government expelled and blacklisted twelve Taiwanese preachers in 1981. As a result, the Johor State Police Head Office also “instructed police stations in all districts to investigate [the] activities of this sect” (ibid. 156).

Some new converts to the sect “who were too eager and zealous” have caused family crises. For example, they “shift to [a] vegetarian diet abruptly, and hence refuse to join [their] family members who are non-vegetarians for lunch and dinner” (ibid. 154). This maladjustment has garnered media attention that has undermined the Unity Sect’s reputation. In 1993, Yan Cai Lin, a social activist from Muar, accused the Unity Sect of devastating his family. His 23-year-old daughter joined the sect and persistently proselytized to her mother and younger sister; the three of them eventually fled the home. Yan then begged the Home Ministry to ban the sect. It was then disclosed by a Chinese newspaper that the man’s wife refused to share a room with him. A newspaper column accused the Unity Sect of “caus[ing] many cases of tragedies” such as “broken families, [financial] swindles and sexual assaults” (ibid. 160 & 161). In response to the criticism from the general public, the Unity Sect’s committee called a press conference to explain the issue. The man’s daughter accused her father of “[using violence] against her mother”. The wife complained that she had

⁶⁷ Soo (1997: 185) showed that ‘more that two thirds of the Unity Sect members under study were from the middle and or lower middle income groups’. In terms of age group, the majority was from 20 to 49 years old (ibid.181).

suffered from serious angina pectoris, which was cured by observing “sexual abstinence in order to preserve her bodily purity” (ibid. 162). She also claimed that she “was then chosen to be a spirit medium by the deity to save sentient beings from sorrows and bitterness”. Disputes occurred in the family because the husband did not believe in mystical experiences. The president of the main branch *Wuji Shengmu Zhonghui* of the Unity Sect attempted to protect the sect’s image by warning Yan Cai Lin “to bear the consequence of legal action” (ibid. 165). Yan organized a Committee of Justice and Anti-Heretical Sects⁶⁸ and “urged those who had experienced suffering from joining the sect to help in exposing the veil of these heretical organizations by providing him with necessary information” (ibid. 165 & 166).

Soo (1997: 169) notes that “Buddhist associations of certain localities took part in instigating the anti-Unity Sect activities, but their role in most cases was in the background”. In fact, the YBAM has been involved in branding the Unity Sect as a *xiejiao* (heretical sect) that promotes incorrect teachings. In 1991, 53,000 copies of a booklet were printed and distributed with the aim of countering the influence of the Unity Sect. The total stock available was approximately 1,573 copies in 1999 (YBAM 2000). From 2000 to 2001, another 3,100 copies of the booklet were printed for dissemination. The booklet called *How I Denounced Unity Sect* was written by an author from Hong Kong. It was first published in 1989 and was republished in Taiwan.

Buddhicizing the Hungry Ghost Festival

The celebration of the Hungry Ghost Festival, or *Yu Lan Peng*, can be traced to the 4th century in South China. “*Yu Lan*” is a word “describing the pitiable fate of those hanging up-side down in the subterranean prisons of hell,” while “*Peng*” is a word

⁶⁸ 反邪教争议委员会。

“indicating a bowl or tray in which offerings are placed” (Teiser 1986: 2). In fact, the festival was the Chinese Buddhist celebration when the “monks ended [their] three-month retreat” on the full moon of the seventh month, which coincided with the autumn harvest. Teiser notes that

“laypeople with no exclusive religious affiliation provided for the salvation of their ancestors [through] offerings to the monastic community.... Coming at the juncture of the full moon, the new season, the fall harvest, the peak of monastic asceticism, the rebirth of ancestors, and the assembly of the local community, the [*Yu lan peng*] was celebrated...by all classes of people” (ibid. 2 & 3).

The ritual connection of the Hungry Ghost Festival with the monastic community “secured its place in Buddhist historiography, while its vital function in the ancestor cult and local community insured its survival into modern times” (ibid. 3). The involvement of the emperor’s court has expanded the scope of the festival to cover a larger region of the Chinese empire. During the Tang Dynasty, *Yu lan peng* was celebrated in state-sanctioned Buddhist and Taoist temples with state coffers. The festival aimed to make merit for the royal family and common people’s ancestors (ibid. 3 & 4). Accordingly, the emperor also joined in the festivities at the larger city temples (ibid. 4). It was the “[integration] of ritual, religion, and politics in the imperial celebration of [*Yu lan peng*]” (ibid).

The celebration of *Yu lan peng* has syncretized and evolved alongside popular beliefs. It has become a festival for common people to pacify the hungry ghosts. The festival has been associated with popular Taoism and moved away from Buddhism. In Peninsular Malaysia, this festival was recorded by a colonial officer in Penang in 1836. He observed that,

“The Toa-so [The King of Ghost] is the chief of the Kooee [ghost], or spirits. In Penang, he is annually represented, in this month, by a figure about twenty feet in height. It is constructed with split bamboos; the whole is then covered with paper, which having been painted, the dress is put on. He will be found seated giant-like, during two or three days, under a shed, close to the principal *tokong*-house [temple] in George Town. At night, a table, at which thirty or forty persons might sit down, is laid out before Toa-so, and it is covered with a costly profusion of viands and liquors, of which whole boiled pigs form a prominent part. When this ghostly guest has, it is supposed satisfied his appetite, the contents of the table, sometimes even to the dishes, plates, glasses etc, are given to the poor. At the sound of a gong, there is a general rush and scramble for these good things. One night’s entertainment of Toa-so still costs from two to three hundred dollars. The expenses attending this festival, and indeed of all the rest of their festivals, are dispersed out of religious funds, belonging to each *tokong* [temple]. Some of these are said to be rich, and they are readily supplied by voluntary contributions; for as these festivals resemble carnivals or saturnalia, the poorest Chinese grudge not his mite, but looks forward to them as to recreations, and days of unfettered enjoyment. When sufficient honours have been paid to Toa-so, a chest made of paper is filled with models, also is paper, of various articles of dress, for his use. The whole is then burned. The effigy of Toa-so is finally consumed, so that he may return to his abode” (Low 1972[1836]: 308 & 309).

For the religious Chinese, the seventh lunar month is seen as a month in which ghosts are released from the hell to the human realm. A report by *The Singapore Free Press* in 1949 captured this belief among the Chinese in Malaya:

“[F]rom midnight Monday the gates of Hell are supposed to open...

According to Chinese tradition, the hungry ghosts will be released from Hell for 30 days to mingle with mortals. These liberated spirits fall under the category of neglected shades who have not been cared for by their living relatives and who, therefore, are prone to commit mischief during their brief sojourn on the earth” (Wong 1949).

Due to poor economic conditions, this festival was scaled back before World War II and after the Japanese occupation in the 1940s. However, DeBernardi (2004:

159) observed that by the late 1970s, “Penangites once again celebrated this festival with enormous tables of open-air offerings, nights of Chinese opera rotating throughout the city, and extravagant feasts at banquet restaurants”. During the 1980s and 1990s, there was a competition of prestige between the Chinese temples in Penang, and the duration of the festival was prolonged with Chinese operas. Certain wealthy temples hosted opera performances for nearly a month. There was a contest to make the King of Ghosts’ effigy as large as possible and the standing dragon incense as tall as possible. It was once reported that the civil authorities limited the size of the incense because some temples’ devotees used incense that was specially designed to be taller. The temples competed among themselves by increasing the height of the incense until they caused public safety concerns.

During the 1980s, reformist Buddhist groups attempted to reinterpret the origin of the Hungry Ghost Festival by referring to the Buddhist canon. They referred to *The Yu Lan Pen Sutra* as a canonical source to understand the Hungry Ghost Festival, which has been infused with popular forms of Chinese religion. The sutra focused on the “Buddha’s founding of the yu-lan-pen festival, his instruction on how to carry out the ritual, and the ceremonial responsibilities of monks” (Teiser 1986: 74 & 75). However, a later version of the sutra emphasized the story of Mu Chien Lien, who tried to rescue his mother from the suffering in hell after she had obtained bad karma during her lifetimes. Hence, this sutra amplifies “the severity of the laws of karma, the important of filiality”, and the use of offerings by laymen (Teiser 1986: 75).

The ex-president of the MBA, the Venerable Kim Beng, was the core actor in promoting a so-called Buddhist vision of the Hungry Ghost Festival. Under his

initiative, the MBA was involved in initiating various activities to Buddhicize the practice of the Hungry Ghost Festival. According to Kim Beng,

“[The] Hungry Ghost Festival started with reference to *The Yu Lan Pen Sutra*. The aim of the celebration is to give Dana to clerics, pray for the health of parents and make merit [with] the ancestors.... This practice is inherited from one generation to another and [deviates] from the original meaning. Nowadays, the Hungry Ghost Festival is twisting the Dana offering to the killing of animals and the worship of ancestors to ghosts. This way of practice [violates] the meaning of the festival. Hence, it should be reformed to return the celebration to its original essence” (Kim Beng 2004: 48).

The MBA embarked on this purification of the Hungry Ghost Festival in accordance with Buddhist traditions by organizing a grand Buddhist ritual ceremony in 1984 on the 14th day of July on the Chinese calendar. The event emphasized the festival as an opportunity for merit-making and for practicing filial piety for living parents as well as for deceased ancestors. The MBA was the only Buddhist group that celebrated the first event. In the following year, 1985, the MBA mobilized its member organizations throughout Malaysia to celebrate the festival. In Melaka, the event was called “Buddhist Yu Lan Peng Blessing Ritual” rather than the common name of “*Yu Lan Sheng Hui*”. This Buddhist way of celebrating the Hungry Ghost Festival continues annually in Melaka. The Melaka Buddhist Yu Lan Peng Blessing Committee also organized a competition in 1987 over the Buddhist history and origin of the Hungry Ghost Festival; it expanded to the national level in 1993. Kim Beng argued that through the competition, the younger generation would reclaim the values of the Buddhist Yu Lan Peng. He hoped that the celebratory practices of worshipping

King of Hell with raw animal such as pig and chicken would be transformed. In supporting the MBA's Hungry Ghost restitution campaign, the YBAM printed 26,000 copies of *The Yu Lan Peng Sutra*, which has been transliterated into the vernacular language for free distribution. This Buddhicized festival has mainly attracted members of YBAM and MBA.

In retrospect, the Hungry Ghost Festival was targeted by the anti-superstition movement that arose in China during the Republican Period in the late 1920s. In the anti-superstition movement's discourse, the festival was perceived "as a means for greedy clergy and local elites to extract hard-earned money from the deluded poor" (Nedostup 2008: 97). The movement may be associated with "the myth-history of Sun Zhongshan's youthful efforts to combat superstition" (ibid. 97). In the anti-Hungry Ghost movement in 1928, the Ministry of Education issued a pamphlet to spread the discourse of anti-religion intellectual Cai Yuanpei:

"To set fire to a few pieces of paper copper, gold, and silver money, or some paper houses, and as every piece of paper is consumed it really turns into gold, or copper, or a house—where in the world is this possible? Those who insist on believing this only end up taking the money earned by their own sweat and blood and putting it in the pockets of monks and priests" (Nedostup 2008: 99).

The Social Affairs officer also stated that "danger could easily arise". The Capital Police Department issued a public declaration that "this sort of ritual-holding and festivals for spirits recklessly stirs up the gullible; not only is it a source of financial waste, but it can readily start trouble.... [A]ll bad habits must be uprooted" (ibid.101).

The perception of the Hungry Ghost Festival as a "nonproductive, economically harmful" and "wasteful ritual" (ibid. 104) was later taken up by the

Koumintang government and the Taiwanese Buddhist communities in the 1950s. In 1953, one day before the Hungry Ghost Festival began in Taipei, a magazine owned by the Chinese Buddhist Society (Taipei branch) published an article written by Taixu's disciple, the Venerable Ci Hang, to advocate for a proper way of worshipping the Buddha, in which he rejected the burning of joss paper and money. State authorities cooperated with the Buddhist organization's agenda to control the celebration of the Hungry Ghost Festival. In collaboration with the state authority, the Taiwan Buddhist Society issued a statement to "promote savings among the people, improve their beliefs and counter superstition" (Kan 2004: 62). The statement issued to all Buddhist groups posited that Buddhists should follow the tradition of celebrating Yu Lan Pen without wasting money and that the celebration should be simple. Only the chanting of sutras, the offering of bowls, and the offering of vegetarian food items should be included (ibid. 62 & 63). This type of anti-popular form of Hungry Ghost Festival rhetoric has persisted over the years.

In Malaysia, the campaign against the Hungry Ghost Festival has been influenced and shadowed by the historical context of the Mahayanist world. Nevertheless, three important local socio-political factors have also triggered or provided the opportunity for Buddhist groups to embark on their plans to Buddhicize the Hungry Ghost Festival. During the 1980s, the stagnant economy created the justification for the MBA to address the waste of community resources in popular practices of the Hungry Ghost Festival in Chinese temples throughout Malaysia.

The founder of Fo Guang Shan holds a similar position toward the Hungry Ghost Festival. Hsing Yun argues that the month should be a time to give *dana* to the sangha. "At the same time, we should abandon the superstitious beliefs in society about [the] seventh month". He assured the Buddhists that they could do anything in

the seventh month of the Chinese calendar without fear. In the Buddhist tradition, the month is for supporting sangha, remembering ancestors and helping the poor (Hsing Yun 2010). The founder of Tzu Chi, Cheng Yen, argues that the beliefs regarding the ghost month are a result of the influence of Taoism. She further argues that the seventh month is the month of blessing because according to Buddhist tradition, the 15th of July is the date that the sangha community completes its summer retreat. It is also the month of gratifying the older generation and helping all needy human being (Cheng Yen 2010).

The *Zheng Xin* movement of the Buddhist groups in Malaysia is also expounded upon in discourse. Buddhist groups contested the interpretation of Buddhism by the Unity Sect to highlight their ideas regarding *Zheng Xin* Buddhism. They also took advantage of Chinese popular religious occasions, such as the Hungry Ghost Festival, to revisit the teachings of Buddhism. The movement has taken shape through different projects implemented by various Buddhist organizations since the 1960s. It has been strengthened by the efforts of the MBA and the YBAM. The second-generation religious leaders born in Malaysia have reinforced the idea of *Zheng Xin* based on the religious guidance they received locally and globally.

The Role of the MBA

The MBA is one of the earliest Buddhist organizations to uphold the basic notion of *Zheng Xin*. Chuk Mor and the other first-generation Mahayanist monks from China who shared the similar modernist idea played an important role in the MBA's propagation of *Zheng Xin* Buddhism. They were generally influenced by Taixu's view of modern Chinese Buddhism. Besides that, the influence of Theravada monks resided in Malaysia to MBA also can be expected. In fact, the interaction between

Theravada and Mahayana Buddhists happened since the early 20th century when religious leaders from the both traditions tried to seek Buddhist unity for the propagation of Buddhism to the world. All these exchanges contributed to the idea of Buddhist modernism. *Zheng Xin* Buddhism was established through the formalization of the taking-refuge ceremony, the Buddhist examination, and the establishment of a modern Buddhist education training center, the Malaysian Buddhist Institute (MBI).

Formalization of Taking-Refuge Ceremony

In his study of the Chinese in Malaya, the scholar and colonial officer Victor Purcell states,

“[t]he Chinese have always been regarded as most tolerant in matters of religion.... [A]lthough they are adherents of Buddhism, Confucianism, or Taoism, we know that they tolerate the sects they do not belong to and often conform to two or three of the cults simultaneously” (Purcell 1967: 119).

The Chinese have been viewed as simultaneously irreligious and superstitious because of their tolerant attitude toward all types of beliefs. British colonial officer James Low cited a traveler’s observation of Chinese attitudes towards religion in the early 19th-century Malaya: “they are irreligious but most superstitious” (Low 1972: 282). In general, “Chinese Buddhists” are only loosely affiliated with Buddhism as part of their complex cultural belief system. A Chinese person could be considered a “Buddhist” if born into a typical family in which the parents practice Chinese religion. Hence, being a Chinese Buddhist is a self-proclaimed identity. This way of claiming to be Buddhist continued until modern Chinese Buddhism began to define Buddhist identity through the formalization of taking refuge.

There is a common understanding about the ceremony of taking refuge. It is the first step whereby Buddhists cultivate their faith. The ceremony is typically conducted by prominent monks or nuns. Usually, the clerics will explain the meaning of the refuge ceremony. Taixu's interpretation of refuge will be explained by the cleric who conducts the ceremony. In brief, "the Three Jewels are the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha," with Dharma as the most important. The awakening of faith begins with Dharma. According to Taixu, Dharma has two levels: first, it refers to those teachings specifically taught by Gautama, and second, the universal truth is also dharma. Hence, Buddhists should "take refuge in this holistic Dharma and not in any particular Buddha or celestial bodhisattva" (Pittman 2001: 206). Taixu also portrays Gautama as a human being who attained the perfect stage of life. Taixu states,

"Buddha is not a creator of the cosmos and human life, nor is he a lord of the universe who causes misfortunes and grants blessings. He is one who has completely awakened to the truth about the cosmos and human life and at the same time has expounded numerous enlightened principles to instruct people... Before he awoke to the truth, he was the same as all other sentient beings" (ibid).

Third, Buddhists should take refuge in the sangha, "the community of people who both believe the Dharma and seek to abide in it while supporting one another" (ibid. 207).

For the laity, there are currently two options for refuge: one is to take refuge only in the Three Jewels of Buddhism (*guiyi sanbao*), and the other is to take refuge in the Three Jewels of Buddhism and the five precepts (*sangui wujie*). By pursuing the first option, one must already obey the rule of the five precepts. Nonetheless, these two options demonstrate the flexibility of Buddhism in tolerating the different needs

of individual Buddhists. Hence, if one is not yet ready to fully obey the five precepts, that person is allowed to simply partake in the ceremony of *guiyi sanbao*. If one is prepared to follow the five basic precepts⁶⁹, that person will participate in the ceremony of *sangui wujie*. The ceremony is normally conducted by chanting sutras with those who take refuge while kneeling down in front of the Buddha's statue. From what I observed on several occasions, the selected sutra is determined by the individual cleric. After that, the initiates will follow the cleric in pronouncing the promise of taking refuge with either the Three Jewels of Buddhism or the jewels and five precepts. The "dharma name" (*fa ming*) will also be given during or after the ceremony. *Fa ming* are usually simple Buddhist terms that remind those who have taken refuge to cultivate Buddhism in their life to progress in the path of enlightenment. Professional clerics might issue an identification card with the individual's "dharma name" and photograph. The entire ceremony often lasts fewer than an hour. After the ceremony, one is considered to be a *Zheng Xin* Buddhist.

The history of lay people's participation in the ceremony of taking refuge in the triple jewels for Mahayana Buddhism is unclear in Malaya. However, the MBA began to promote a more serious taking-refuge ceremony for the laity in the 1970s. The taking-refuge campaign was officially launched in 1971 during the Fourth General Meeting of the MBA. According to the MBA's *Manifesto to Promote the Movement of Taking Refuge in the Triple Gem*, the goal of promoting the taking-refuge movement was "to establish the foundation of faith in Buddhism," "to ascertain the status of a disciple," "to [obtain] the benefits of taking refuge in the Triple Gem", for "the acquisition of protection", and benefits for children and society.

⁶⁹ These are refrained from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and alcohol.

The MBA argued that “a true Buddhist should take refuge in the Triple Gem in order to affirm his status” (Malaysian Buddhist Association 1971: 51 & 52).

Reformist clerics and laity view taking refuge as a “prerequisite” to being a Buddhist. The movement aims to ascertain one’s status as a Buddhist according to the manifesto elaborated below.

“Some people hold that it will be sufficient to have faith in Buddhism at heart without undergoing any ceremony. They do not realize that the declaration is [an] essential step to ascertain their status as Buddhists. It is comparable to the status of citizenship of a resident in Malaysia. Both citizens and non-citizens may stay in Malaysia. A non-citizen will not enjoy the same rights and privileges of a citizen.... One who has declared that one takes refuge in the Triple Gem will take one step ahead to strengthen one’s faith. One who has not ascertained one’s faith will not adopt the same attitude, take the same action and show the same degree of devotion” (Malaysian Buddhist Association 1971: 51).

The taking-refuge ceremony is in fact a conversion ceremony. It imitates the confirmation or baptism ceremonies of Christianity. One is officially accepted as a member of the faith community after participating in the ceremony. By encouraging this ceremony’s practice, the MBA attempted to differentiate Buddhists from Chinese religious followers. Chinese Buddhism had been tolerant of Chinese people who adhered to more than one religion simultaneously, with this idea of *Zheng Xin* Buddhism, the lenience in accepting Chinese Buddhists without requiring them to be seriously and solely committed to Buddhism has changed. To be a Buddhist, an individual must now be confirmed through a taking-refuge ceremony.

Although the MBA has not assumed this campaign as its primary task, the taking-refuge ceremony has become a common practice promoted by Buddhist organizations. Approximately 30,000 Buddhists took refuge under Chuk Mor, and mass *guiyi sanbao* occurred when famous clerics appeared to conduct the ceremonies. For example, when Hsing Yun came from Taiwan to Malaysia in 1996, approximately 80,000 people attended the dharma talk and participated in the taking-refuge ceremony in Shah Alam Stadium. This event was recorded as an historic mass conversion to Buddhism in Malaysia. Youth and university students are converted to be *Zheng Xin* Buddhists during dharma camps. The popularization of the taking-refuge practice is the reason that the campaign has disappeared from the MBA's agenda because nowadays, many Buddhist societies and organizations can conduct the ceremony by themselves.

The Malaysian Buddhist Institute

The Malaysian Buddhist Institute (MBI) was first proposed by the MBA in 1959. The idea was temporarily abandoned because of the MBA and Chinese Buddhist community's lack of resources to establish a modern Buddhist institute. The idea resurfaced when the MBA successfully built its headquarters in 1969. The following year in 1970, the Malaysian Buddhist Institute was officially established with the physical and financial support of the MBA.

In 1970, the MBI enrolled 59 students in lower-secondary and upper-secondary classes. The institute's enrollment has been inconsistent: from 1970 to 2006, only 577 students graduated, although a total of 2,568 students have registered in full-time Buddhist education. Some students of the MBI have made a major life decision to become monks or nuns. The goals of the full-time curriculum include

deepening the students' understanding of Buddhism, cultivating Buddhist clerics, and training temple abbots or dharma workers. The institute also offers a part-time correspondence option for those who are interested but unable to enroll as full-time students. The correspondence courses have reached approximately 11,000 people nation-wide by 1999 (Keoh 2010: 93-106).

Chuk Mor was the dean of the MBI from 1970 until he passed away in 2002. Chuk Mor utilized both public and private resources to support this Buddhist educational institution. He perceived the institute to be an important means of providing a modern education to the Mahayanist sangha community in Malaysia. Chuk Mor himself underwent modern religious training at the Minnan Buddhist Institute and the Wuchang Buddhist Institute established by Taixu. Chuk Mor and Taixu perceived Buddhist education to be a crucial aspect of the religious modernization of the Buddhist community. Taixu once mentioned that the future of Buddhism was in education, social welfare, and culture. In its early years, the MBI constantly faced financial difficulty. Chuk Mor allocated certain resources of the Triple Wisdom Hall, which was his own temple, to run MBI (Keoh 2010: 93-106). After he passed away in 2002, the dean's position was passed down his disciple Chi Chern, a well-known, locally born monk.

There are more Buddhist higher-learning institutions in Malaysia now, namely the Dong Zen Institute and the Dharma Buddhist University. At that time, MBI was the only institution for Mandarin-speaking Mahayanist Buddhists to pursue their religious higher education. With the Chinese Buddhist community's scant support of the MBI, the institute has played a role in training Buddhist clerics and dharma workers who have a better knowledge of Buddhism. The tightening of immigration rules for Buddhist clerics from China and Taiwan during the 1970s and 1980s has

posed a challenge for Malaysian Chinese Buddhists. Chuk Mor responded to these problems by way of the Buddhist institute.

Malaysian Buddhist Examination Syndicate (MBES)

The MBA collaborated with the YBAM to implement the national Buddhist examination project. The Malaysian Buddhist Examination Syndicate (MBES) was launched in 1973 as a joint committee for both of the Buddhist organizations responsible for the Buddhist examination. The MBES aims “to encourage and foster the understanding of the Buddha’s teachings amongst youth, to encourage and assist in the setting up of Sunday schools, Buddhist classes and institutes for Buddhist studies, to publish or assist in the publication of Buddhist texts and papers related to the study for the Examination, and to provide or assist in the training of teachers for Dhamma classes”.⁷⁰

A candidate who plans to take the Buddhist examination must register through a local Buddhist organization. The local Buddhist organization will usually encourage its dharma class students to take the exam. A textbook for the exam is available for purchase from YBAM. The syllabus is prepared by MBES, and the exam tends to be easy and available in English and Mandarin. For the preliminary and junior stages, the examination contains 50 multiple-choice questions. For the higher stage, there are subjective questions that require answers in essay format. Every year, two sets of exam papers—in English and Chinese—are prepared for the candidates. Depending on the students’ language-proficiency level, they choose which version of the exam they prefer to take. For the English exam, many Buddhist terms are in Pali, which belongs to Theravada Buddhism. Meanwhile, in the Chinese version, the content of

⁷⁰ Malaysian Buddhist Examination Syndicate (MBES), <http://bisds.org/MBES.doc>, accessed 21 June 2010.

the exam is more inclined toward Mahayana Buddhism with Chinese Buddhist terms. A certificate indicates that the exam grade will be issued after the exam results are released by the MBES and reported in the newspaper. The highest-scoring candidate is awarded a cash prize.

Enrolment in this national Buddhist examination is quite impressive. The number of candidates has grown from a few hundred to thousands. The first Buddhist examination was held in 1974 with only 240 candidates (YBAM 1974). In 1980, there were 1,978 candidates for the exam. Every year, approximately two thousand candidates take the exam. Hence, it could be estimated that approximately 70,000 candidates have taken the exam between 1974 and 2010. The exam has expanded from the initial two stages to four stages to suit the needs of the Buddhist communities. The first exam included only preliminary and junior stages for primary and secondary school children. In the second exam, a senior stage was included for working adult. As of 2009, the exam included four stages—the preliminary, junior, senior and higher stages—to test students who possessed different levels of knowledge regarding Buddhism.

This Buddhist examination might have a long-term influence on students' beliefs. The formulation of the syllabus and exam questions highlighting *Zheng Xin* Buddhism leaves an imprint on the students' minds as they continue through life. A report provided by Ch'ng for MBES notes that

“Buddhist education in the country was quite stagnant and unmotivated.

There were only a handful of Dhamma classes conducted on the temple premises, and there was no local Buddhist examination to test the achievement of the learners. [There was a] need [to establish] an examination body so as to stimulate the growth of Dhamma education in

the country.... It is undeniable that the MBES has contributed greatly not only the propagation of the Buddha-Dhamma in this country but also in the cultivation of the moral outlook of the younger generation of our citizens. Buddhism preaches compassion and tolerance. The study of Buddha-Dhamma will undoubtedly teach our youth to be better citizens”.⁷¹

The Buddhist Youth Movement and *Zheng Xin* Buddhism

The early Buddhist youth movement originated from and was largely associated with the dharma classes, which were variously called Sunday class, Sunday school or *fo xue ban* in Mandarin. The model of Sunday schools in Buddhist culture started in Sri Lanka in the 19th century. The learning of dharma through classroom learning imitated the Christian church where a wide variety of religious courses were offered to devotees. Before the culmination of this model, Buddhists usually did not know their religion. For a layperson, there was lack of channel to systematically or comprehensively learn the teaching of Buddha. The classes intended to provide a basic understanding of Buddhism for the younger generation.

The Sunday classes in Malaya were run by Buddhist organizations or temples to attract younger generations to learn the dharma. The history of dharma class can be traced to the 1920s in Kuala Lumpur. There is a record of a dharma class existing in the early 1920s in the Sinhalese Sentul temple. Later in 1929, the incumbent bhikhu of the Brickfields Temple established a “religious school” that enrolled 12 Sinhala children (Buddhist Maha Vihara 1999: 43). The need to accommodate the younger

⁷¹ Ibid.

generation has convinced the Buddhist temples and organizations to offer youth services.

The Buddhist youth sector in urban Malaya began to form under the guidance of active Buddhist organizations in the 1950s prior to Malaya's independence. The Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society at Brickfields opened its first youth section in 1954. The founder, Helen Bothaju, suggested that sports could be used to attract youths and "help them to know each other better" (De Silva 1998: 75). To attract the attention of younger generations, a more flexible approach was used. The founder of the youth section in the Brickfields Temple argued that the youth "would never like to come to temple unless there are activities that would catch their eye" (De Silva 1998: 75). However, "the elder members strongly objected to having any sort of outdoor activities on the temple premises. They feared the good name of the Society would be tarnished and ruined" (ibid). The Penang Buddhist Association also began its Youth Circle in 1954 with the objectives to "study Buddhism," "to propagate Buddhism," "to foster fraternity among the Buddhist youths," "to aid the PBA," and "to participate in healthy recreation" (Francis 1974: 20). The youth circle held "meetings [that] consisted of religious and general quizzes, games, hikes, socials, visits to places of interest", and swimming (ibid). But this youth circle "failed" because "the non-religious activities...found greater popularity, and turnout for religious education [was] comparatively lower" (ibid).

The Venerable Sumangalo began to change the nature of the youth section of Buddhist organizations and subsequently encouraged a new movement. In 1957, he founded a Sunday school in the PBA. According to the PBA's Annual Report of 1957, "many of us call ourselves Buddhists, but on what grounds do we profess what we call ourselves? We are Chinese because our parents are Chinese, it is true. But

Buddhism is not hereditary. We must embrace Buddhism and not inherit Buddhism” (Francis 1974: 22 & 23). Sumangalo has played an important role in inspiring the Buddhist youth movement in Malaysia that advocated *Zheng Xin* Buddhism.

The Venerable Sumangalo: Father of Malaysian Buddhist Youth Movement

The Venerable Sumangalo (Robert Stuart Clifton) was an American born into a devoutly Christian family. According to his biographical notes, his conversion to Buddhism began at an early age as he read library books. After his university studies, Sumangalo began to deliver dharma talk in San Francisco, California. He then left his New York home and travelled globally in Europe, South America, Hawaii, North China, Japan, and eventually to Southeast Asia. In 1957, he was ordained in Laos and was given the Buddhist name of Sumangalo, which means “very auspicious”. In the same year, he resided in Malaya. His famous quotation is, “I do not call myself a Theravadin or a Mahayanist. I am simply a follower of Lord Buddha and I am very happy to be a friend to anyone who is sincerely trying to follow Lord Buddha’s teaching, whether that person is Burmese, Siamese, Chinese, Japanese, European or American” (Sumangalo n.d.). Piyasilo (1992: 17) characterized Sumangalo’s contribution by saying that “[t]he most important achievement of Sumangalo’s was that he initiated the Buddhist youth movement in Malaysia. His most effective tool was the Dharma talk, and he lectured publicly and tirelessly. The youth ‘social’ (recreational) activities were his auxiliary tools, his carrot on a stick”. Even though Sumangalo spent only six years in Malaya, his impact on the local Malaysian Buddhist youth was great. Sumangalo is honored by the YBAM as the Father of the Malaysian Buddhist Youth Movement.

There are three main areas of Sumangalo's dharma efforts: "rectifying misconceptions regarding Buddhism, correcting 'Buddhist' malpractices, and activating the local Buddhist children and youths" (Piyasilo 1992: 3). Sumangalo initiated the "youth circle explosion" in Malaya. According to Piyasilo, "Sumangalo's Youth Circle concept, an effective adaptation of a successful Western Christian idea[,] began to catch on among young Buddhists in Malaya" (ibid. 2). In 1955, he founded the Youth Circle in the Penang Buddhist Association. Subsequently, the youth circle was formed in four Buddhist associations throughout Malaya in 1958. These included the Malacca Buddhist Association Youth Circle, the Kedah Buddhist Association Youth Circle, the Central Kedah Buddhist Association, and the Terengganu Buddhist Youth Circle.⁷² In 1959, two more youth circles were formed. They were the Wat Chaiyamangalaram Buddhist Youth Circle and the Batu Pahat Buddhist Youth Circle. The Taiping Buddhist Youth Circle and the Selangor Youth Circle were then established in 1960. The Kelantan Buddhist Association Youth Circle was established in 1961 and the Segamat Buddhist Youth Circle in 1963. The Buddhist Society of the Perak Youth Circle is believed to have formed between 1961 and 1963. The youth circles aimed to introduce Buddhism to a younger generation through "music, singing, dancing, games, sports, festivals and whatever would attract the youths" (ibid. 2).

Sumangalo's innovative work attracted many followers. He embarked on dharma trips, called "good-will tours", with Penang Buddhist Association members to various Buddhist organizations nation-wide. His charisma led to the national youth assembly, the Pan-Malayan Buddhist Youth Convention, in 1958 (ibid. 3). Following the convention, the Malayan Buddhist Youth Fellowship (MBYF) was organized "to

⁷² The Trengganu Buddhist Youth Circle was formed before its main body (Piyasilo 1992: 2).

create more opportunities for fellowship amongst Buddhist youths; to curb the growing materialism amongst modern youths; to promote good citizenship; and to train future Buddhist leaders” (ibid. 4). The second national convention was held in Melaka in 1960, and the Federation of Malaya Buddhist Youth Fellowships (FMBYF) was proposed and registered with the Registrar of Societies. The third convention followed in 1962. Sumangalo passed away in 1963, and the fourth youth national convention in 1964 was the last held in the 1960s. The fifth convention, which was to take place in Kuala Lumpur in 1966, was never held. The editorial of a Malayan Buddhist magazine, *The Golden Light*, stated that

“... in this country, there have been comments that, with [the Venerable Sumangalo’s] passing, the Buddhist activities of the country—particularly its youth activities—will be greatly retarded, if not reduced. This view is a fallacy, because, prior to his leaving this life, the late Venerable Sumangalo had laid strong foundations for his successors to build on” (cited in Piyasilo 1992: 6).

The failure of the Federation of Malaya Buddhist Youth Fellowships in the 1960s was due to poor leadership. The fellowship group “almost solely depended on Sumangalo for inspiration and approval” (ibid. 13). Leaders in the FMBYF were “poor leaders but good followers” and “were relatively inexperienced in organizational work” (ibid). A lack of funding and the constraints imposed by the main body were two additional reasons for its collapse. The overt emphasis on recreational activities rather than on dharma was also the downfall of the FMBYF.

Piyasilo observed that before the second convention, which was held in Malacca, *The Lotus*⁷³ reported the following leisure activities:

“Food and Fun-Fair, L.C.E. and Senior Cambridge Examination 1960, Musical Evening, Badminton, Film Shows, Magic Show, Excursion, Book on “Buddhist Hymns and Devotions”, Games “Caram” [Carrom], Concert, Folk Dancing Class, Art Class and Y.C. Library” (Piyasilo 1992: 15).

Piyasilo posed two questions regarding the FMBYF’s inclination toward social activities. First, “what could they say that had benefitted them from their association with Buddhism when they were young?” Second, “when they are in trouble and in spiritual need, what could they turn to from what they have [learned] of the dharma?” (ibid.15 & 16). However, the foundation of the Buddhist youth movement led directly to the formation of the YBAM in 1970.



Figure 5 Venerable Sumangalo (1903—1963). Source: Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia

⁷³ A quarterly publication of the youth circle of the Malacca Buddhist Association.

The YBAM and Zheng Xin Buddhism

The Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia is seen as a “more orthodox” Buddhist group (Liow 1989: 57) that has promoted a distinctive sense of Buddhist identity. Since the formation of the YBAM, *Zheng Xin* Buddhism has been its main agenda. The YBAM was founded on the last day of the National Buddhist Youth Seminar (NBYS) in 1970. During the NBYS, participants from various young Buddhist organizations presented their suggestions to address the problems of Malaysian Buddhism. They highlighted a significant problem regarding the practices of traditional beliefs among Chinese Buddhists. The University of Malaya’s Buddhist Society called for an end to traditional beliefs, such as the burning of gold and silver papers. Another youth group urged the reform of funeral rites. This attitude towards traditional Chinese beliefs is the reason for which the YBAM has been labeled as “more orthodox”.

The YBAM maintains the spark of the Buddhist youth movement that began in the late 1950s. The youth movement has been transformed and institutionalized by the YBAM. Buddhist youths under the leadership of the YBAM seek to propagate a *Zheng Xin* form of Buddhism. In the next section, I will provide a brief introduction to the YBAM. I will then expound upon how the YBAM has institutionalized *Zheng Xin* Buddhism through publishing, engaging in graduate-level Buddhist education, encouraging the formation of Buddhist societies in primary and secondary schools, and becoming involved in the National Service.

About the YBAM

The YBAM is the only national body representing Buddhist youths of different educational, linguistic, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, as reflected in its first

objective “to be the national organization of all Buddhist youths in Malaysia”.⁷⁴ The YBAM is a lay-oriented organization in terms of its executive committee members, affiliated organization members and its activities’ target group. Most of the former presidents and the current president are laymen, although several of the YBAM’s terms were led by monks.

The YBAM’s aim of uniting all of the Malaysian Buddhist youths for the advancement of Buddhism. The associations’ other objectives are:⁷⁵

- i) To encourage, foster and develop the practice of the Teachings of the Lord Buddha among youths,
- ii) To coordinate the religious, social and recreational activities of Buddhist youths through its member organizations,
- iii) To provide leadership training for Buddhist youths, and
- iv) To further all other interests of Buddhist youths as may be decided upon at a National Council meeting.

The early stages of the YBAM were more focused on dharma propagation, publication of Buddhist books, and internal organizational and administrative growth. The organization was rather “apolitical” throughout the 1970s to the late 1980s. The only political matter in which the YBAM participated was to serve in the National Youth Consultative Council (NYCC) as a way to “safeguard the interests of Buddhist youth”.⁷⁶ In addition, the YBAM lobbied for the introduction of Buddhism into the syllabus in subjects such as history and moral education. In 1983, a seminar on “A Buddhist Approach [to] Moral Education” was held, and “its outcome was

⁷⁴ ‘YBAM Introduction’, <http://www.ybam.org.my/cms/zuzhijiagou/mafoqing/526.html>, accessed 9 May 2009.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

⁷⁶ YBAM Second Six-Year Development Plan, 1987-1992, p.35.

incorporated in a memorandum presented to the Ministry of Education” (YBAM 1987: 29). Promoting Buddhist education in state schools has been one of the YBAM’s long-term plans. This issue was again raised during the 17th YBAM Biennial National Convention. The YBAM intends to further participate in Buddhist education in schools. As stated by its president, “it is possible to lobby for and make the incorporation of non-Islamic religions into the national education system” because “religious education is part of the individual right to education” (Goh 2004: 27 & 28). For the future plan, “a complete Buddhist education is an important agenda [for] the development of Malaysian Buddhism,” and the YBAM is seriously “to undertake the provision of a complete Buddhist education in Malaysia” (ibid).

Publications

The YBAM has a strong publication record in spreading *Zheng Xin* Buddhism. This publication division began with a Chinese magazine called *The Buddhist Digest*. The magazine was published by the Kelantan Buddhist Association in 1972 but folded in 1975. The YBAM assumed the role of publisher and reissued *The Buddhist Digest* in 1978. The publication of *The Buddhist Digest* evolved from a quarterly magazine into a publication division of the YBAM, which is called the Buddhist Digest Publication Board and which has been based in Penang since its formation. The aim of the Buddhist Digest Publication Board is to perpetuate *Fojiao Wenhua* (Buddhist culture) among Malaysian Chinese Buddhists.

In addition to a quarterly magazine, the Buddhist Digest Publication Board has published various types of books and booklets regarding Buddhism, primarily in the Chinese and English languages. Booklets in the Malay language were scarce because of the limited readers and sensitivity. The YBAM has published a tremendous amount.

By 2003, the YBAM had published approximately 431,340 copies of books and 2,419,920 copies of booklets (Tang 2008: 30). There are different genres of the publication, such as the Endless Light Series, the Buddhist Juvenile Series, Malaysian Buddhism Studies, and the Booklet Series. The Buddhist Digest Publication Board of the YBAM is the most important *Zheng Xin* Buddhist book publisher and distributor in Malaysia.

The YBAM Network's Promotion of *Zheng Xin* Buddhism

The YBAM has connected with Malaysian Buddhist youths through a complex network that has developed since the 1970s. The network consists of Buddhist societies in cities throughout Malaysia. The first category primarily consists of YBAM affiliate members. Another major segment comprises the linkages between Buddhist youths and the YBAM in the Malaysian education sector, which includes public universities, private colleges, and secondary schools. This network has permitted the cultivation of a future generation of leaders for the YBAM in particular and for the Buddhist youth movement in general. The YBAM has steadily instilled *Zheng Xin* Buddhism in the hearts and minds of the younger generation of Chinese through the multifaceted network of Buddhist youths by engaging them with collaboration in various activities such as Buddhist examination, seminars, dharma camp, meditation camp, and dissemination of publications.

Affiliate Members of the YBAM

Piyasilo recalled that when the YBAM was proposed, instead of reviving the Federation of Malaya Buddhist Youth Fellowships, he strongly argued that the youth organization “should start all over again” (Piyasilo 1992: 13). The problem of “poor

leadership” within the previous youth group has been overcome by the emergence of leaders who consciously emphasize the importance of organizational skills, thus strengthening the organization. With this consolidation of leadership within the YBAM, the number of affiliate members has grown significantly, from only 20 Buddhist organizations in 1970 to 265 in 2008.⁷⁷ The affiliate members are highly localized Buddhist organizations throughout Malaysia.

The affiliate members play an important role in supporting the YBAM in major campaigns, activities, and fund-raising. For example, affiliate members encourage students to participate in the Buddhist examination. This national Buddhist examination has become an important event for young learners in dharma classes nation-wide to test their knowledge regarding Buddhism. In addition, there are activities such as dharma propagation, the Buddhist film festival, the novitiate program, a quiz, an elocution contest, a seminar, workshops, and other activities. They could only be successfully organized by a network of various Buddhist societies.

The affiliate members of the YBAM “help to improve the financial status of YBAM”. A Dharma Walk has been organized to raise funds every three to four years. The aim of this walk is to relieve the YBAM’s financial pressures such that it can realize “its mission and objectives” (Dharma Walk 2011). The first Dharma Walk was launched in 1983. In 1979, the YBAM also initiated a fund called Yayasan Belia Buddhist Malaysia. The goal of this fund is to accumulate capital through investments in economic activities. The fund has invested money in a vegetarian restaurant, and the profits are used to provide subsidies for dharma workers and to support the printing of dharma books. The YBAM’s most-circulated book, *Zheng Xin Fo jiao* by Sheng Yan, is funded by Yayasan Belia Buddhist Malaysia.

⁷⁷ See Appendix 2 for the list of the affiliate member.

Graduate Buddhist Youth in Public Universities and Private Colleges

The YBAM connects effectively with undergraduate students in major public universities and colleges. The YBAM's network with educated Buddhist youths is its most successful connection compared with the loosely linked network of some of the affiliate members. Buddhist societies in public universities, such as the University of Malaya; University Science Malaysia; the National University of Malaysia; the University of Technology Malaysia; the University of Putra Malaysia; and the private college Tunku Abdul Rahman College are actively involved in the YBAM's projects. Many active undergraduate students would continue to be active in Buddhist activities and subsequently become YBAM committee members after graduation. Graduate youth are important to the development of the YBAM.

One example of the close relationship between Buddhist youth in universities and the YABM is the project to serve the community, Graduate Buddhist Youth Community Service. It is coordinated by the YBAM and includes various Buddhist societies in universities and colleges. This project was initiated in 1987 by the Buddhist Society of the University of Malaya, and it was subsequently taken over by the YBAM. Students from various public universities select a Chinese village and reside there for at least one week. They organize activities for the villagers, including dharma talks and tuition for the school children. Some Buddhist youths continue their service and return to the village. This project has contributed to the establishment of Buddhist societies in villages.

The YBAM has a special emphasis on Buddhist youth in universities. Since the 1990s, there has been a Buddhist Undergraduate Coordination Committee under the administrative structure of the YBAM. The primary idea behind maintaining

contact with graduate Buddhist youths is to deploy their experience and knowledge for the benefit of Buddhist societies of their own universities and to support the other Buddhist organizations throughout Malaysia. The YBAM has attempted to establish interactive camps to maintain contact with Buddhist graduate students. The initiative then evolved into a more formal committee to work among the Buddhist undergraduate as well as graduate population. The YBAM realizes that Buddhist graduate students can supply physical and financial support for various activities. Having learned the basic teachings of Buddhism, the students are more qualified to facilitate the YBAM's aims in promoting *Zheng Xin* Buddhism.

Buddhist Societies in Secondary Schools

With the encouragement and active support of the YBAM, more Buddhist societies were established in secondary schools in the 1970s. The YBAM lacked a clear direction in its engagement with secondary-school Buddhists, compared with university students, from 1970 to 1990. While some Buddhist camps targeted secondary-school students, they were organized by affiliate members, and the YBAM played a role in promoting the programs rather than being directly involved. The camps periodically emerged and dissolved.

In the early 1990s, the Young Buddhist Fellowship (*Foqing Zhiyou*) organized by YBAM was first established by a teacher in Kluang, Johor. Buddhist songs, lectures, leadership training, and dharma courses were arranged for those who joined the fellowship in Kluang. Under the guidance of an advisor or senior, the teenagers plan activities to propagate Buddhism among their generation. The YBAM then implements this model at the national level. In 2007, a Young Buddhist Fellowship Mentors Interaction Camp was organized by the YBAM to train more dharma

workers to establish additional groups throughout the country. This project extended to East Malaysia in 2007. Since 2008, an Adolescence Affairs Committee has existed under the administrative structure of the YBAM.

National Service

The future influence of *Zheng Xin* Buddhism on Malaysian Chinese youth will likely relate to the YBAM's involvement in National Service (NS, *Khidmat Negara*). Unlike the military and defense purposes that most countries', the Malaysian NS program, which began in 2004, is meant "to mould a society that is peaceful, harmonious and united without considering race and religion through the spirit of patriotism among the [people], enhancing national integration...".⁷⁸ Religious education is part of the NS program. However, the NS' religious coursework only offers participants Islamic teaching. All non-Muslim participants must either attend the Islamic course or none at all.

Of the 85,000 NS trainees in 2009, 26% (21,300) are Buddhists.⁷⁹ In the 17th YBAM Biennial National Convention, a resolution was adopted to urge all Buddhist organizations to assist in providing Buddhist education and activities for the Buddhist trainees.⁸⁰ The YBAM formed the National Service Program Special Committee to assume full responsibility for the NS program's Buddhist courses "in order to ensure that the students are exposed [to] the right Buddhism education".⁸¹ Without any financial support from the government, the YBAM initiated its own program,

⁷⁸ Official website of National Service Training Department, 'From the Director General', http://www.khidmatnegara.gov.my/?page_id=19&lang=en, accessed 8 October 2012.

⁷⁹ 'Planting and Nurturing the Wealth of the Nation: From National Service to Buddhist Youth', *Berita YBAM*, Vol.114, p.11.

⁸⁰ 'Resolutions', *Berita YBAM*, Vol. 111, p.31.

⁸¹ 'National Service Program Special Committee', *Berita YBAM*, Vol. 118, p.50.

including a facilitator-training course in various states. Its achievements are impressive.

In the first phase, in 2007, with the collaboration with the National Service Training Department, the YBAM managed to enter 65 camps out of the 77 NS program camps throughout the country by mobilizing 63 Buddhist organizations. During the second phase, the number of camps had increased to 81, and the YBAM successfully infiltrated 75 of the camps. In the third phase, 72 out of 80 camps included the YBAM Buddhist program in their religious education.⁸² From designing the Buddhism course and coordinating the facilitators to prompting Buddhist organizations to participate and help in the NS program, the YBAM taken responsibility for the religious education of Buddhist trainees in NS camps. This program has also diminished some parents' fears regarding the influence of other religions on their children. For the YBAM, participating in NS is an opportunity to share a *Zheng Xin* form of Buddhism with a younger generation that comes primarily from a Chinese religious background. After the NS camp, the trainees remain in contact with the YBAM through Facebook. The number of YBAM NS Facebook groups dedicated to connecting Buddhists at various locations is growing.

Summary

Modern forms of Buddhism have been introduced in Malaya by various migrant communities since colonial times. The Malaysian Chinese who claim to have been Mahayana Buddhists have a more accommodating approach towards their religion. With the amalgamation of various traditions, reformist groups in Malaysia have begun a transformation process in seeking a well-defined Chinese Buddhism that is distinct

⁸² *ibid.*, p. 50.

from traditional Chinese religions. This Buddhization is led by national Buddhist organizations, especially the MBA and the YBAM. These organizations have embarked on a journey to strengthen themselves while drawing upon the principles of *Zheng Xin* Buddhism. Various initiatives have been undertaken to propagate Buddhism and the *Zheng Xin* Movement has contributed to the rationalization of Chinese Buddhism in Malaysia that distinguished Buddhism from Chinese religions. To a certain extent, there is a growing number of *Zheng Xin* Buddhists that only pray to Buddha, related bodhisattvas, and perhaps Guanyin because the goddess is accepted in Mahayanist tradition, but not any Chinese deities. YBAM also has encouraged Buddhist youth to adopt Buddhist wedding and form their Buddhist family. Basically Buddhist wedding is conducted and blessed by clerics with emphases on providing vegetarian dinner, giving donation for clerics or temple, and committing in spreading teaching of Buddha to their children. And this is cultivating a so-called Buddhist family.

The MBA and the YBAM have attempted to propagate *Zheng Xin* Buddhism to further develop Malaysian Buddhism. Two transnational groups, Tzu Chi Malaysia and Fo Guang Shan Malaysia. These groups have brought new dimensions to Malaysian Buddhism by formulating new practices. Buddhist groups from Taiwan have also provided Chinese Buddhists in Malaysia with an understanding of how to become a Buddhist in practice. In the next chapter, I will discuss the role of Tzu Chi and Fo Guang Shan in supporting the *Zheng Xin* Movement.

Chapter 4

New Transnational Connections with Taiwan

The rise to power of the Communist Party of China in 1949 obstructed the Buddhist communication network between Malaya and Mainland China, disrupting Mahayana Buddhism's transnational connection. Subsequently, the contacts, movements, and flows of religious personnel shifted to Taiwan. The “most innovative and dynamic Buddhist movements of modern times” (Tanabe 2004)⁸³ in Taiwan has taken place during the period of its rapid economic transformation and political democratization since the mid-1980s. This transnational network between Malaysia and Taiwan has allowed the development of a new form of religious linkage that differs from the previously disorganized flow of ideas and resources to contribute the development of Buddhism. A more institutionalized contemporary form of modern Mahayana Buddhism has been established between Taiwan and Malaysia via this new religious corridor. Taiwanese Buddhist groups have expanded their branches into Malaysia through the transmission of a certain type of practice and set of ideas.

The early transnational expansion of Taiwanese Buddhist organizations into Malaysia was the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Merit Society (*Fojiao Ciji Gongdehui*) and the Fo Guang Shan Monastery. The arrival of both groups, corresponded to the industrialization of the Malaysian economy since the 1980s. On the one hand, Malaysia's industrialization policy encouraged the influx of a high volume of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) since the late 1980s. On the other hand, the Taiwanese government's “Go South Policy” (*Nanxiang Zhengce*) facilitated the

⁸³ Madsen (2008: 295) describes it as “religious renaissance”.

provision of informational, technical, and financial assistance to enterprises in Southeast Asia (Chen 2002: 111). In 1990 and 1991, Malaysia was the beneficiary of Taiwan's largest overseas investment among the Southeast Asian countries. By 1999, Taiwan's cumulative FDI in Malaysia ranked as the third largest after Japan and the United States (ibid.108). Taiwan's labor-intensive projects have resulted in both social and economic changes, and the arrival of the multi-national religious groups that have contributed to the revitalization of Malaysian Buddhism.

The new phase of Mahayanist transnational connections that has emerged since the late 1980s differs from Malaya's earlier connection with Mainland China prior to its independence in 1957. Taiwan has emerged as a main actor in the exportation of Chinese Buddhism, a role facilitated by intensified globalization. In this chapter, I will trace the role and involvement of Tzu Chi and Fo Guang Shan in the Buddhist revitalization movement in Malaysia. I will explore how various new religious forces transmitted by Tzu Chi and Fo Guang Shan have contributed to transforming the religious landscape of Malaysian Chinese Buddhism.

Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Merit Society

A Brief History of Tzu Chi in Taiwan

Tzu Chi was founded in 1966 by a nun born in Taiwan in 1937, Cheng Yen, following two significant events. One day, Cheng Yen visited her disciple's father in the hospital and "saw a pool of blood in the hallway". It was a case of miscarriage. An aboriginal woman who had been rushed to the clinic after eight hours of walking had been rejected because she could not afford the NT\$8,000 (US\$200) deposit. "Cheng Yen was shocked and nearly fainted: 'How could humans be so cruel to each other?'" (Huang 2009: 24). The second important event was Cheng Yen's interaction with

three Catholic nuns in Hualian. “The nuns then asked Cheng Yen why Buddhists, with their concept of universal love, concentrated only on improving themselves and did not build schools or hospitals as the Christians did” (ibid. 24 & 25). Those two incidents inspired Cheng Yen to organize and mobilize the Buddhist community to help the poor and deprived.

Cheng Yen “did not have an ordination teacher” until she accidentally encountered “the most revered reformist abbot Yinshun” (ibid.26). In upholding the dignity of the Buddhist sangha she established three principles for monastic life: “(1) no sutra chanting service for a fee (*bu gan jingchan*); (2) no dharma ritual service for a fee (*bu zuo fahui*); and (3) no alms receiving (*bu huayuan*)”. Cheng Yen and “her followers made a living by subcontracting to produce handicrafts for factories” to maintain economic independence (ibid.24).

During the initial stage, Cheng Yen, together with five monastic disciples, made baby shoes for a living, producing an extra pair for charity for each pair sold. Each pair of shoes was NT\$4.00; therefore, they earned NT\$24.00 per day and NT\$8,000 a year. This income could help the group fund a patient’s medical deposit. Tzu Chi’s first group of thirty lay followers was composed of housewives. The women donated NT\$0.50 every day from their grocery money to a bamboo “piggy bank” where the money was stored. On Tzu Chi’s first anniversary, US\$719 was collected, and 15 families were helped (Tan 2008: 47). Tzu Chi then grew from those initial efforts toward self-sufficiency to deliver more relief goods to the poor and to disaster victims.

In 1979, Tzu Chi’s historic plan to build a hospital marked the development of its philanthropic work on a larger scale. Cheng Yen believed sickness to be the cause of poverty. Therefore, she proposed establishing a general hospital with a

humanitarian mission. The Tzu Chi members enthusiastically collected funds from the public. A businessman from Japan wanted to donate US\$200 million, but Cheng Yen rejected the donation on the basis that the funds should be collected from Taiwan. After nine years of donation drives, the hospital was finally established. It was the first hospital in Taiwan that did not require a monetary deposit for admission. This practice was in response to the event that Cheng Yen had witnessed years earlier in the hospital.

Tzu Chi's charity works began with a "fluid organization and shapeless bureaucracy" (Huang 2009: 40-82). In the early stage, there was "no hierarchy...no definite sphere of competence...no established administrative organs...no system of formal rules" (ibid.40). Tzu Chi expanded in tandem with the decisions of its charismatic religious leader. For example, Cheng Yen's vision of establishing a hospital was at first unimaginable to her followers. With her persistence, the hospital plan succeeded after many years of dedicated work. Many projects were proposed and implemented on an ad-hoc basis. The attempt to institutionalize Tzu Chi came much later, after the hospital project. Cheng Yen first revealed her plan to organize Tzu Chi in a more systematic way in 1987. In 1990, a general management center was founded. The first management proposal included a mission planning committee under Cheng Yen's authority with three vice-chief executive officers (ibid.50 & 51). This management structure evolves periodically to accommodate new developments.

Today, Tzu Chi has developed into a giant global nongovernmental organization. In 2008, Tzu Chi had 10 million members and 500,000 volunteers in 42 countries (Tzu Chi 2008). The organization participates in disaster relief, recycling projects, and the construction of hospitals for the poor worldwide. It establishes colleges and community centers that provide educational and cultural programs. There

are Tzu Chi branches and associations throughout the world, in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines, Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Jordan, Turkey, South Africa, and other countries. Cheng Yen was selected by *Time Magazine* as one of the 100 most influential people in the world in 2011. The journalist who wrote her story noted,

“Buddhism teaches that suffering is inescapable but that everyone has the potential to overcome it. Taiwan's Dharma Master Cheng Yen is the embodiment of such a soul. As a spiritual guru, Cheng Yen, 73, has an ethereal quality...Buddhism also teaches that beings with good karma (deeds and thoughts) can be reborn into a higher state. The hereafter is the realm of the unknown but, in this life, Cheng Yen is already a saint” (Carim 2011).

A Brief History of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Merits Society Malaysia

Similar to other accounts of the formation of Tzu Chi branches outside Taiwan, a Taiwanese expatriate in Penang played an important role in Tzu Chi's work in Malaysia. According to the official website of Tzu Chi Malaysia, the seed of Tzu Chi was planted in 1989. A Taiwanese woman, Ye Cijing, was transferred by her employer to work in Penang. She undertook charity work similar to Tzu Chi's in Taiwan by helping the poor and needy in Penang. Following Ye Cijing's initiative, an initial Tzu Chi group was formed, and in 1993, an office was officially established with approval from Taiwan. A representative traveled to Taiwan to receive a Bodhisattva statue from Cheng Yen to signify the establishment of Tzu Chi in Malaysia.

Another account of Tzu Chi's establishment in Malaysia took place in Melaka. A woman and her husband moved from Taiwan to Melaka to establish a garment factory in 1988. In 1990, the woman initiated Tzu Chi's charity work by asking "the workers in their garment factory to provide the names of people in need of help" (Huang 2009: 252). They began by volunteering to clean poor senior citizens' houses. She also consistently engaged her husband in volunteer work. Both devoted themselves to working for Tzu Chi, applying their entrepreneurial skills to enacting Tzu Chi's universal humanitarianism. Their factory set up a charitable relief distribution center in 1994, later rebuilding it as the Tzu Chi Melaka branch of *Jingsi Tang* (Still Thought Abode) in 1997. By 2004, the couple had closed their garment factory, and the two-hectare lot was "replaced by a new one-[storey] complex that consisted of a kindergarten, an auditorium, a classroom for Tzu Chi courses for the public, a bookstore café, and a free clinic" (ibid.253). The couple donated all their assets and became involved in Tzu Chi as full-time volunteers. The husband is now the CEO of the Tzu Chi branches in Melaka, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ See Appendix 3 for the list of Tzu Chi-affiliated branches in Malaysia.

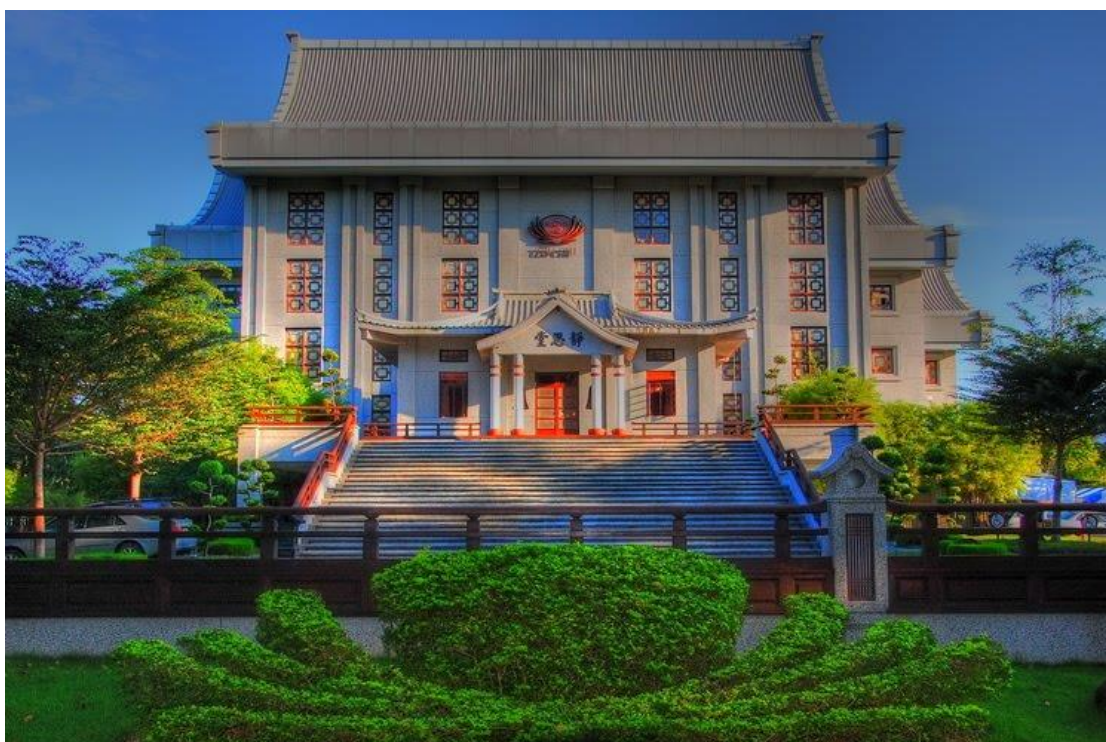


Figure 6 Tzu Chi's Still Thoughts Abode (*Jingsi Tang*) in Penang. Source: Tzu Chi's member, <http://egyeap.blogspot.sg/>

Tzu Chi and Malaysian Buddhism

In its country of origin, Tzu Chi represents Taiwanese nationalism and civic virtues that respond to the worldly needs of Taiwanese people (Madsen 2009: 41 -50). Tzu Chi members constantly “talk about cultivating the heart [to] properly care for one’s family and to have universal compassion and love” (ibid.46). Madsen argues that this is equivalent to civic virtue and that

“[b]y envisioning the nation and even the world as a family, Tzu Chi enables its Taiwanese members to feel at home, in continuity with the best of their traditional values, even [as] they experience the typical material and spiritual dislocations of a globalized modernity. This sense of continuity with the best of Taiwan’s traditional culture sustains the

sense of national consciousness that encourages civic participation”

(ibid.48).

By exporting Tzu Chi and establishing additional branches, its Taiwanese members promote a sense of pride and self-fulfillment globally. Nevertheless, what does Tzu Chi signify for its members outside of Taiwan, especially in Malaysia?

Tzu Chi as a Humanitarian Corporation

I took the Light Rapid Transit (LRT) train to Tzu Chi’s Kuala Lumpur branch in Petaling Jaya. The office is situated opposite the Kelana Jaya Station. I saw a Tzu Chi sign at the corner of a row of shop houses facing the Damansara Puchong Highway. From the exterior, the Tzu Chi building looks like any other company with offices in the commercial district. On its left is a shop specializing in traditional merchandise such as various decorative adornments, ink paintings, pillow case silked with golden dragon and phoenix, and Chinese traditional potteries, all imported from China. *Nasi Kandar*⁸⁵, pizza, and steamboat restaurants add to the eclectic nature of the shops. Those who know nothing about Tzu Chi might mistakenly assume that it is just another company. Because it uses the lotus as its symbol, some might speculate that it is a Buddhist company whose business is selling Buddhist statues, books, CDs, prayer incense, candles, crystal glassware, chanting beads, and other ritual items.

When I arrived at Tzu Chi’s main entrance, I found the door was fortified by an electronic security system. A woman opened the door by pressing a button. Inside, the office was packed with many working tables, computers and printers. Although the arrangement and design of the office was disorganized, the space was that of a

⁸⁵ A general term for Indian Muslim cuisines in Malaysia.

typical workplace. The major difference between this corporation and other businesses was that profits were not its main goal.

The woman who opened the door asked me to wait at the receptionist's desk. She called on an employee who was more familiar with the history of Tzu Chi in Malaysia. A woman came to speak with me. I explained my research intention to her, and she appeared hesitant to continue our conversation, saying that I should meet with another person by appointment. She gave me several brochures and magazines about Tzu Chi and told me about Tzu Chi plan to build a new office in Kepong, a subdistrict of Kuala Lumpur. Several volunteers came to the office to submit their donations. A worker in the office counted the money, issued receipts, and stamped the official copies. After a while, the woman went inside to arrange my meeting with a person who could provide more information to me. Tzu Chi has adopted and utilized modern corporate governance structures in its organizational administration for humanitarian works.

Mobilization of Malaysian Chinese Buddhists in Volunteer Work

In my interviews with members of other Buddhist organizations, Tzu Chi is continually referred to as a “welfare organization”. An active member in one national Buddhist organization went so far as to proclaim that “Tzu Chi is merely doing charity works”. Another organization's officer insisted that “Tzu Chi is not a Buddhist organization like us”. He explained that few dharma talks were organized by Tzu Chi. According to him, Fo Guang Shan was more qualified as a Buddhist organization than Tzu Chi.

Tzu Chi purposely positioned itself to be a “welfare organization” and “not a Buddhist organization” within the rubric of Malaysian Buddhism. Although Tzu Chi

is a charity organization, the quantity and magnitude of its charity have drawn more Chinese Buddhists into volunteer work. Tzu Chi Malaysia has taken the initiative to adapt to local needs. Aside from its charity work, which parallels projects undertaken in Taiwan, Tzu Chi Malaysia has initiated several new projects. In tandem with Tzu Chi organizations worldwide, the four missions of charity, medical care, education, and humanitarian work are the major undertakings of Malaysia's local Tzu Chi branch. In addition, the local Tzu Chi organization has begun to assist refugees in Malaysia in collaboration with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).⁸⁶

Charity Projects of Tzu Chi Malaysia

Dialysis Centers

The most notable medical project of Tzu Chi in Malaysia is its dialysis service. The Buddhist Tzu Chi Dialysis Center is a project of the Tzu Chi branch in Penang, which now runs three dialysis centers. The first center was established on Penang Island in 1997. The second center was established in Alor Setar in Kedah, and the third center was in Butterworth; both of these were established in 2002.

This charity project is compatible with Cheng Yen's beliefs about poverty. She believes that "sickness is commonly the root cause of poverty". Buddhist Tzu Chi Dialysis Center's Facebook page states that

"[f]rom the cases that [we] were taken care of, it was due to prolonged illness of the family members that [paid] heavy medical expenditure and [caused] the families into financial difficulties. It has been notice that among the long-term...relief cases in Buddhist Tzu Chi, quite a number are affiliated with kidney failure. The life-long costly medical

⁸⁶ This will be explored in Chapter 5.

expenses for this dreadful disease, coupled with inadequate dialysis facilities have worsened the condition of the patients” (Buddhist Tzu Chi Dialysis Center, Tzu Chi Facebook).

As of 2010, three dialysis centers provide dialysis service to 115 patients from low-income families. The service extends beyond the center, as Tzu Chi volunteers also pay home visits to help the dialysis patients. In 2011, Tzu Chi Malaysia offered a scholarship for a three year diploma course in nursing in response to Tzu Chi’s plans to launch a new dialysis center with one hundred hemodialysis machines. The scholarship includes a monthly stipend, tuition fees, uniforms, textbooks, examination fees, meals, lodging, and medical benefits. Ten candidates have been accepted and will study in Lam Wah Ee Nursing College, which is part of a specialist hospital in Penang. Each of the graduates receiving Tzu Chi’s sponsorship will complete 5 years of service in one of the Tzu Chi Dialysis Centers.

The number of patients in need of dialysis “grew from 46 out of every million Malaysians in 1990 to 512 in 2005” (Lim, et al. 2010: 2217). Dialysis treatments in a private hospital cost approximately RM3,000 monthly. This amount is higher than the monthly median income of a Malaysian family in 2009, which was RM2830. In 1990, due to the high cost of treatment, only 836 patients received dialysis care (ibid). In the same year, 88 percent of patients underwent dialysis in government hospitals. In 2005, 13,385 patients received dialysis treatment; of these, 37 percent underwent treatment in a government hospital, 30 percent underwent treatment in a private hospital, and 32 percent underwent treatment at an NGO. Tzu Chi has contributed to the percentage of patients receiving treatment at an NGO. In September 2006, Tzu Chi supported 427 patients with kidney failure in their dialysis treatments at other dialysis centers through a charity fund.

In 2010, there were 22,932 dialysis patients in Malaysia. The annual number of new dialysis patients doubled from 2,112 in 2001 to 4,521 in 2010 (Lim et al. 2011: 6). Tzu Chi has committed to providing dialysis services to kidney failure patients. By 2007, it had spent RM18 million on three dialysis centers (Huang 2009: 239), and the operation of these centers has resulted in significant financial strain for the organization. Nevertheless, Tzu Chi's willingness to continue its mission demonstrates its commitment in Malaysian society. Tzu Chi intelligently responds to the needs and undertreatment of kidney-failure patients in Malaysia.⁸⁷ Their active participation in providing free dialysis therapy has helped the poor and increased the reputation and image of this imported Taiwanese Buddhist organization in the eyes of Chinese Buddhists and Malaysian society.

Crisis Relief by Tzu Chi Malaysia

During my fieldwork in Kuala Lumpur, there was a flood in Alor Setar, Kedah. I planned to join Tzu Chi's volunteers in their crisis relief activities. Amazingly, volunteers from Penang and nearby areas had already reached the relief center before I managed to contact the person in charge. They mobilized very fast and reached the area to help the flood victims. I ended up watching the news coverage provided by Tzu Chi *Da Ai* (Great Love) TV. Tzu Chi members can install the TV by buying the cable box. For those with high speed Internet connection, they can just download the software from webpage and watch the channel.

In fact, Tzu Chi's rapid response of crisis relief impressed the general public during the 2004 tsunami disaster. The tsunami hit areas around the Indian Ocean

⁸⁷ In 2000, the Baitumals, 'a state-run Islamic social welfare organizations, began subsidizing dialysis for poor Muslim[s]. Funded by compulsory but tax-deductible tithes from Muslims, the Baitumals typically pay the full cost of dialysis' (Lim et al. 2010: 2217). The involvement of the Baitumals could be understood from the perspective of religious opposition, especially when it was reported that Tzu Chi's dialysis centers have also helped Muslims.

including parts of coastal North Malaysia. A Tzu Chi relief team arrived in Kuala Muda, a small Malay fishing village crushed by tsunami waves in Kedah. As reported in the Buddhist news site,

“Just 8 hours after the first tsunami waves crashed onto Penang and Kuala Muda, Kedah (Malaysia), relief workers were already at the scene, rummaging through the damage, pitching temporary relief tents and comforting victims... ‘Informers’ and ‘watchers’—key personnel located at the disaster sites, were already dispatching critical information on the ground, keeping those in the distribution networks in touch with the kind and amount of aid needed, and when... Buddhist Tzu Chi Merit Society Malaysia gained unexpected fame amongst the local populace when they became the first relief group to arrive at the various devastated sites the moment the waves subsided. This was acknowledged by the various local village chieftains (*penghulus*) as well as local state government agencies” (Goh 2005).

Tzu Chi undertook many crisis relief projects throughout Malaysia, from large-scale natural disasters such as floods to small-scale neighborhood fires. Volunteers were promptly mobilized to the scene of each disaster. When I visited the Kuala Lumpur office of Tzu Chi, I saw many crisis relief materials, such as blankets, towels, plates, spoons, boxes of instant rice, and mineral water with the Tzu Chi logo. A Tzu Chi member informed me that those stocks would be utilized when a catastrophe struck.

Tzu Chi members in Malaysia also collected donations for the victims of natural disasters around the world. They went out to the night markets or stood along the busy streets to conduct donation campaigns for the flood in China, the landslide in Brazil, the famine in Somalia, the earthquake in Iran, the typhoon in the Philippines.

Tzu Chi Malaysia has become a part of the global crisis-relief network. When crises occur in Malaysia, Tzu Chi branches elsewhere offer assistance.

Recycling Project

According to *The Study on National Waste Minimisation in Malaysia*, “the recycling rate of solid waste still remains at a low level of 2% to 5% in Malaysia” (Ministry of Housing and Local Government 2006). Approximately 8.7 million tons of solid waste were produced by Malaysia in 2004, and the cost of solid-waste management was RM860 million. By 2020, these figures are projected to reach 15.7 million tons and cost RM1.6 billion (ibid.8). Many Malaysians lack awareness of the need to recycle. Meanwhile, at the government level, there are no policies to support the institution of recycling. As for the management of private waste collection agencies, “lack of skilled manpower, irregular collection services, inadequate equipment used for waste collection, inadequate legal provisions, and resource constraints are the key factors that are challenging the waste recycling scenario” (Latifah Abd Manaf et al. 2009: 2906).

Tzu Chi has 20 years of recycling management experience. There are approximately 5,400 collection locations in Taiwan; in 2011, they engaged 72,000 volunteers (Tzu Chi 2008).⁸⁸ Tzu Chi’s famous recycling slogan is “rubbish will become gold and the gold will turn into compassionate love” (*laji bian huangjin, hunagjin bian aixin*). This practice is compatible with Cheng Yen’s teaching that Tzu Chi should help protect the environment as a way to preserve the planet. Tzu Chi takes an even more active recycling role in product manufacturing. For example, the plastic bottles collected were converted into 45,000 blankets, which have been used in

⁸⁸ Tzu Chi Taiwan has 4 million members.

disaster relief projects. The income from recycling projects has underwritten the cost of running Tzu Chi's Buddhist TV station, Da Ai Tai. Tzu Chi's recycling project has been the most successful environmental protection venture conducted by a Malaysian NGO. Entering its 10th year, the Tzu Chi Penang branch has 111 recycling collection locations in Penang and Kedah in 2010. In addition, there are 76 locations in Selangor and 71 in Melaka.⁸⁹

When I visited the Tzu Chi Melaka branch, I observed a group of people wearing the blue and white Tzu Chi t-shirts sorting garbage. When viewed from the main gate of the office complex, the recycling center was to the right of the Still Thoughts Abode building, a typical building of Tzu Chi imitated from the headquarter in Taiwan. The group consisted primarily of older women, and most of the volunteers were retirees or housewives. Some were more than 70 years old, and it was common for people as old as 80-year-old to volunteer. A slogan has been created for the older volunteers involved in this garbage-sorting work; it translates literally from Hokkien as “doing environmental protection work, the body will be healthy and has no worry” (*zoh huan poh, sen gu ho, boh huan loh*). In other words, protecting the environment will protect your body, and you will maintain a happy and peaceful mind. These elderly women were attracted by Tzu Chi through network of friends. Being a Tzu Chi member does not mean that one has to give up on previous beliefs but the influence of the organization is important. For an example, with Cheng Yen's teachings on Buddhist environmentalism, the burning of joss paper and incense is perceived as polluting (Cheng Yen 2011). Tzu Chi members now use only the simple gesture of closing both hands and bowing when praying to the Buddha. According to

⁸⁹ Tzu Chi, 各據點資源回收環保站 [Recycling Centers], <http://www.tzuchi.org.my/web/branch-offices/recyclingstation.html>, accessed 12 January 2012.

Tzu Chi's teachings, a sincere heart is more important in prayer than incense (ibid). Tzu Chi has negotiated the practices of Buddhism.

I noticed a handicapped young man. My friend who showed me around the center told me that the man was born with poliomyelitis. He has begun to recover after working on the recycling project in Tzu Chi. At first, he was unable even to stand up, but after actively engaging in Tzu Chi's recycling project, he developed the ability to stand and function more independently when performing simple daily tasks. With the spreading of the story by mouth, his story became a popular "legend" in the recycling center. Cheng Yen always articulated the reasons for environmental protection work in rational terms; however, Tzu Chi allowed the popular or mystical understanding of its benefits to circulate, and the merit-making form of belief persisted.



Figure 7 Tzu Chi Melaka's recycling center. Source: Fieldwork.

Mass Participation

Tzu Chi has created a new public arena for Chinese Buddhists in Malaysia, a space for Buddhists to engage in new forms of social activism. In a traditional Chinese Buddhist temple, one typical event that attracts mass participation is the prayer festival, *Fahui*. The followers' involvement is likely to be limited to two activities: praying and making merit by offering donations. With the redefinition of teaching in Chinese Buddhism, social activism such as environmental protection has come to be viewed as a religious activity that Buddhists should practice. Buddhists' engagement in this new form of religious activity is carried out through mass participation. The scale of the participation in Tzu Chi's activities is greater than for any other Buddhist organization in Malaysia.

Tzu Chi's KL branch has 30,000 members, among whom 2,000 are committed volunteers. To organize the volunteers, Tzu Chi divides Kuala Lumpur into 10 main regions:

West region – West 1 and West 2

North region – North 1 and North 2

Northeast region – NE 1 and NE 2

East region – East 1 and East 2

Central region – Central 1 and Central 2

Tzu Chi takes a systematic approach to mobilizing volunteers scattered throughout KL. According to Mr Raymond in Tzu Chi, running this system of volunteers is rooted in the community. There are three volunteer groups within this system. The first group is the Supportive Group (*Xie Zhu Zu*) and has 20 volunteers.

The second group is called the Loving-Kindness Group (*Hu Ai Zu*), and it includes 4 to 9 volunteers. The third group is the Goodwill Group (*He Qi Zu*) with only 3 or 4 members. To develop a mechanism that does not rely on a particular leader, Tzu Chi KL has a coordinator to mobilize volunteers when there is an event. The headquarters provide fellowship training courses to the volunteers.

With this small-group arrangement, volunteer mobilization can be undertaken more efficiently. Volunteers carry out their missions routinely, helping the poor and recycling old newspapers. At times of crisis, this organized network can quickly gather volunteers and rush to the scene. As described by several Tzu Chi members, the volunteer group has two functions: formal charity works and informal charity at the individual level. The informal function, which establishes friendships and mutual assistance in times of need, is crucial to this community-building process. For an example, in the Tzu Chi way, a death in a member's immediate family is met with assistance with the funeral arrangements. The Tzu Chi dharma brothers (*Shixiong*) and sisters (*Shijie*) will usually help arrange the funeral, and the sutra-chanting group will be called on to conduct the rites.

Shifting of Buddhist Cosmologies

The term *Tzu Chi Zong Men* (School of Tzu Chi) has been used to proclaim Tzu Chi to be a new tradition in Buddhism. However, what the School of Tzu Chi means to the intellectual history and tradition of Chinese Buddhism is in doubt. Julia Huang mentioned that she was continually confronted by the question of the "theology of Tzu Chi" in conferences. There is hardly a clear lineage of intellectual traditions in Tzu Chi. The source of Cheng Yen's Buddhist tradition could be the Huayan School because the reading of the Huayan Sutra (Avatamsaka Sutra) was important in her

early life as a Buddhist nun. Even so, there is no apparent intellectual attempt by Cheng Yen and followers to re-interpret and contribute to the Huayan School.

Cheng Yen's encounters might affect the path of School of Tzu Chi: for example, her experience with the poor in the hospital, her conversation with Christian nuns, and her ordination under Yinshun. She realized that compared to Buddhism, Christianity has performed an enormous amount of charity work since the colonial period, often with the aim of proselytization. Her teacher, Yinshun, has persuasively argued for Buddhism to make humans the principal targets of help. The School of Tzu Chi has selected this worldly need as its primary guideline for the practice of Buddhism. Mr Raymond told me that "there are gaps between the dharma and modern life".⁹⁰ Tzu Chi changes from time to time to fill these gaps, for examples Cheng Yen has simplified the difficulty of the bodhisattva path and self-cultivation, the barriers in traditional Chinese Buddhism, and the sangha-centric nature of Buddhism.

Cheng Yen's most noteworthy revision of Mahayana Buddhism is the simplification of the Bodhisattva path in the modern world. In the Mahayana Buddhist traditions, the path to becoming a Bodhisattva is complex and difficult to achieve. Discussions regarding the Bodhisattva and the Bodhisattva transformation process, duration, and qualification are beyond the understanding of ordinary people. There are too many difficult terms and concepts that require proper understanding and definition. Cheng Yen simplified the learning of the canonical sutras of Mahayana Buddhism into simple actions that can be broadly practiced by laypeople.

Cheng Yen has redefined the path to becoming a Bodhisattva for common people. According to her explanation, those who practice environmental protection and charity in their everyday lives and within the community context are bodhisattvas.

⁹⁰ From fieldwork.

This status is attained through constant practice. Its end result is important, yet it should be achieved over the course of many lives. Hence, doing philanthropic work is more meaningful than the classical study of sutras.

The idea of this simplified form of Bodhisattvahood is captured by the symbol of Guanyin. Literally, Guanyin means “perceiver of sounds”, one who hears the prayers of suffering human beings: Avalokitesvara in the Chinese tradition (Yü 2000). This figure is also referred to as “*Guanyin Pusa*”, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. In the Chinese tradition, Guanyin has been transformed, taking a feminine representation and becoming a deity of Chinese popular religion. Cheng Yen has employed a Guanyin icon for her Tzu Chi community, promoting the notion of the “thousand-handed and thousand-eyed Guanyin”. Cheng Yen notes that the thousand hands and eyes belong to her million devotees who help those in distresses (Huang 2009: 2). The simplification of the Bodhisattva path has resulted in a new way of understanding self-cultivation (*xiuxing*).

Reinventing the Tradition of Self-cultivation Practices

One phrase emphasized by Tzu Chi members is “do not talk too much, just do it” (*Zuo Jiu Dui Le*). I heard this during my undergraduate years in the Buddhist society of a local Malaysian university. This society continued to adhere to traditional means of self-cultivation. There was a dharma class every Friday at noon, when all of the lectures and tutorials were cancelled for Muslim prayers. The Buddhist Society also organized a dharma camp with intensive sutra teaching and learning, and a meditation camp for practitioners at various levels took place during the school holidays. Tzu Chi members began to approach the society as a location for its charity works, and a youth wing was established at the local university with an active Buddhist society. Some

members of the Buddhist Society who were actively involved in Tzu Chi criticized the Buddhist Society for engaging in too much dharma learning without any action. They raised the issue of linking theory and practice, and this provoked internal conflict amongst them.

As part of Chinese tradition, along with Confucianism and Taoism, Chinese Mahayana Buddhism has developed a comprehensive tradition of self-cultivation. By borrowing several techniques from Theravada Buddhism, Chinese Buddhism has invented different types of self-cultivation techniques, such as meditation, Zen practice, Pure Land chants, and others. All of these methods are traditional forms of self-cultivation. The path to non-self is tough; for example, there are many hurdles to overcome in traditional Anapanasati meditation if a Buddhist intends to progress from one stage to another, and achieving a breakthrough in Zen meditation is also difficult.

Tzu Chi has assumed a tradition of self-cultivation through Chinese culture and Buddhism. However, its practice differs from traditional Mahayana Buddhist methods of self-cultivation. In fact, it appears to be a non-religious path. According to Tzu Chi's interpretation, the act of self-cultivation simply consists of helping others and protecting the environment. This type of self-cultivation is a response to the needs of the modern world. Tzu Chi has adopted the discourses of poverty and environmentalism as universal issues for Buddhists to address.

By relaxing its more stringent forms of self-cultivation, Tzu Chi Buddhist practice becomes easy. It permits everyone to participate, irrespective of their educational background, income level, belief system, or gender. Not surprisingly, Tzu Chi has attracted traditional Buddhists, adherents of Chinese religions, environmentalists, secular humanists, social-welfare volunteers, and even atheists. The members of Tzu Chi are Buddhist and non-Buddhist, religious and non-religious.

At the same time, Tzu Chi can spread Buddhist teachings through their promotion of self-cultivating practices that address universal concerns in the present world. An officer of one major Buddhist organization admiringly noted that Tzu Chi Malaysia has drawn more people to Buddhism with its non-denominational approach.⁹¹

Tzu Chi's Pragmatism

Cheng Yen takes a minimalist approach to using Buddhist terminology. She uses common speech to convey the Tzu Chi message because her aim is to communicate with her group's members. She published a book series called *Jingsi Yu* (Word of Wisdom) as the main channel of transmission of her Buddhist teachings. However, some traditional Buddhists disagree with *Jingsi Yu*'s representation of "Buddhist thought". The language used in *Jingsi Yu* consists of general words from the daily lives of common people: for example, "treat criticism as a force for improvement", "anger is a way to harm [one's] own self", "[if] we do a good thing every day, we will be happy every day, too", and "today's homework must be completed today" (Cheng Yen n.d.). Cheng Yen's Buddhist thought is expressed in modern language within the context of the modern life that lay-people face in their studies or workplaces. Chinese Mahayana Buddhist terms have been marginalized, but the Buddhist ideas of letting go and helping others remain in her message.

In Cheng Yen's morning speech, *Minnan Yu*, a majority Taiwanese dialect, is used to express her ideas. The speech is broadcast with Chinese subtitles by Da Ai TV, which can be accessed on the Internet. Specific Buddhist terms were replaced with general terms. Targeting a particular dialect group appears to encourage the use of simple language, avoiding classical terms. Cheng Yen's use of dialect in her speeches

⁹¹ From my field note.

is rare among Buddhist teachers. Her personal background in the Minnan area is one potential reason for this decision. Nonetheless, her choice of dialect to deliver her daily morning speech demonstrates Tzu Chi's openness to meeting the needs of the classes who know only their own dialects.

Another feature of Tzu Chi's pragmatism is the absence of sutras in the so-called School of Tzu Chi. Tzu Chi does not exceedingly elevate the study of sutras as the qualification of a good Buddhist. The activity of reading the sutra conducted by other Buddhist organizations is too luxurious according to Cheng Yen; for Tzu Chi members, it is a true luxury to simply sit in an air-conditioned room and focus on the sutra. The School of Tzu Chi teaches the centrality of action to helping people in the real world; for them, to devote time to traditional Buddhist studies is unproductive. Thus, instead of excessively using the Buddhist sutra as the main reference in her speeches, Cheng Yen usually uses examples from daily life to illustrate her Buddhist teachings.

Laiity Oriented

Tzu Chi's leader is a nun. In contrast to the practice of a sangha monastery that relies on donation from the laity, Tzu Chi maintains a minimal number of nuns who achieve economic self-sufficiency through the production of vegetarian foods and environmentally friendly products. These products are sold for cash. This arrangement is "in sharp contrast to the primary livelihood of Buddhist monastics in Taiwan" (Huang 2009: 24) and in other Buddhist communities, and this has "provoked subtle hostility from their fellow monastic communities" (ibid). This setting has allowed the laity to take a greater role in reaching out to society, rather than focusing on supporting the monastic communities.

The development of Tzu Chi involves laypeople, not just the sangha community. Cheng Yen is the only representative of the Tzu Chi's monastic order who appears in public. Aside from Cheng Yen, there is an absence of Tzu Chi monastic leaders who appear to its members and the general public. On the contrary, laypeople present in the public and are always the main actors in planning and executing projects in Malaysia. The three branches of Tzu Chi Malaysia were all initiated by the laity. The laity attracted more laypeople to join the organization, and its further growth depends on the efforts of existing lay members. Tzu Chi's central control is weak, even non-existent. Laity in Malaysia have the right to pursue projects that suit the needs of the Malaysian context. In Fo Guang Shan, the sangha is central to all its worldwide branches, and many activities are led by members of the sangha. The head of the Fo Guang Shan is the chief abbot, and the sangha community contributes to the organization's development and growth. The role of the laity in Fo Guang Shan was simply to provide financial and material support to the main agenda proposed by the sangha. On the contrary, laypeople play a crucial role in strengthening Tzu Chi. The head of each branch is a CEO led by the laity who plans and implements all the branch's activities without the involvement of monastics. Cheng Yen simply sets out basic principles for the branches to follow; the power is then released to the laity.



Figure 8 Master Cheng Yen, the founder of Tzu Chi Merit Society. Source: Tzu Chi Web, <http://www.tzuchi.com.cn/?p=140>

Fo Guang Shan

A Brief History of Fo Guang Shan in Taiwan

Fo Guang Shan began with Hsing Yun, a charismatic leader who belonged to the 48th holder of the Linji tradition of Chan Buddhism.⁹² Hsing Yun was born in China and arrived in Taiwan in 1949 with a monastic relief team to help the needy during the civil war between the Communist Party of China and Kuoming Tang. Hsing Yun only met Taixu on one occasion, in the “Training Class for Staff Members of the Chinese Buddhist Association” conducted by Taixu. Similar to the younger generation of the

⁹² “One of the Chan Schools in Chinese Buddhism” founded during the Tang Dynasty (Fu 2008: 448).

sangha in China during the Republican Period, Hsing Yun was influenced by Taixu's reformist ideas. Hsing Yun once proclaimed that "ever since I started propagating the [d]harma, I have been following the teachings of Master Taixu. I emphasize the preaching of the original spirit of Buddhism and pay special attention to the preaching of humanistic and living Buddhism" (Pittman 2001: 273).

During his early years in Taiwan, Hsing Yun became the editor of a Buddhist magazine and was elected to an executive post in the Chinese Buddhist Association in Taiwan. He began to publish famous books, such as *The Biography of Sakyamuni Buddha*, *The National Master Yulin*, and *The Biography of Sakyamuni Buddha's Ten Disciples*. These publications earned him a wider reputation and greater popularity among the Taiwanese Buddhist communities. In 1967, with a growing number of followers, Fo Guang Shan was established in southern Taiwan. The monastery is located at the 120 acres hill and has become an international pilgrimage site.

In upholding Taixu's ambitions, Hsing Yun has argued that "Buddhism is not a religion of empty talk. We have to start by improving people's lives" (ibid). Taixu once commented that "[m]y life's work at reform is a history of failure" (Fu 2008: 48). Hsing Yun implemented what Taixu had envisioned but failed to create. Fo Guang Shan has four objectives: (1) to promote Dharma doctrine through cultural activities, (2) to foster talents through education, (3) to benefit society through charity, and (4) to purify the human mind through cultivation. In addition to building temples and meditation halls, Fo Guang Shan publishes Buddhist books and a scholarly journal, organizes conferences, digitizes Buddhist canons⁹³, establishes cultural funds, encourages theater and dance performances, undertakes disaster relief projects,

⁹³ Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Electronic Texts, 佛光山电子大藏经. The URL is <http://etext.fgs.org.tw/search.htm>.

operates a television station, sponsors an art gallery, and operates a travel agency and vegetarian restaurants.

In 1998, there were 1,305 monks and nuns ordained under Fo Guang Shan's monastic order. In practical terms, the sangha has occupied all the major positions of the monastery's branches around the world. There are approximately 200 Fo Guang Shan-affiliated temples in Asia, Australia, Europe, North America, South America and Africa. There are 16 monastic Buddhist academies established by Fo Guang Shan to train qualified religious leaders for the organization. Fo Guang Shan established a university, Hsi Lai University (Coming to the West University), in Hacienda Heights, a suburb of Los Angeles, to provide "qualified Buddhist leadership in the West" (Pittman 2001: 272). The sangha's educational qualification of Fo Guang Shan monastics is improving. In 2008, approximately 18 candidates had completed or were working towards their doctoral degrees, and 125 were working towards their master's degrees (ibid).



Figure 9 Master Hsing Yun, the founder of Fo Guang Shan. Source: Fo Guang Shan Web

A Brief History of Fo Guang Shan Malaysia

Hsing Yun visited Malaysia in 1963 as one of the religious leaders representing the sangha community who followed the Republic of China Delegation to Penang, Taiping, Ipoh, Melaka, Klang, and Muar. The Buddhist delegation was part of the *Huaqiao Zhengce* (Overseas Chinese Policy) embarked from Taiwanese government in the contestation with Mainland China over international support of overseas Chinese. At that time, his books *The Biography of Sakyamuni Buddha* and *The Biography of Sakyamuni Buddha's Ten Disciples* had attracted the attention of the Chinese-speaking Buddhist community in Malaysia.

During the 1970s, a number of Malaysian Chinese youths traveled to Taiwan to accept Buddhist education; several stayed and contributed to the expansion of Fo

Guang Shan there (Leong 2009). Multilingual Chinese Buddhists from Malaysia had the advantage of having learned foreign languages, a skill that could be capitalized on in their expansion to non-Chinese countries. Some of Hsing Yun's disciples later became Buddhist activists in Malaysia.

The first disciple ordained by Hsing Yun returned to Malaysia in 1980 and settled in a temple in Petaling Jaya. In 1985, Hsing Yun's friend in Malaysia, Venerable Guang Yu, requested trained clerics to manage two temples in the Klang area. Fo Guang Shan sent several disciples to administer the two temples, but both were later handed to Guang Yu. Fo Guang Shan's first temple, the Southern Temple (*Nanfang Si*), was built in 1989 in Klang (Leong 2009). The decade of the 1980s can be considered Fo Guang Shan's founding period.

The following decade was its period of consolidation. Twelve Fo Guang Shan sanctuaries were established in the 1990s. In 1994, the Fo Guang Shan Education and Cultural Center was set up in a four-floor shop house in Petaling Jaya. In the same year, a devotee donated 16 acres of land in Jenjarom; the construction of a Buddhist educational institution, the Dong Zen Institute, began there and was completed two years later. The area then consisted of a main hall, an air-conditioned meditation hall, an art gallery, a vegetarian dining hall, an audio-visual classroom, a restaurant, a garden called Lumbini, named after the Buddha's birthplace in Nepal, and a Buddhist educational institute, Dong Zen Institute.

Fo Guang Shan established its first temple in Klang, Malaysia, in 1989. By 2010, there were approximately 23 Fo Guang Shan-affiliated branches across Malaysia.⁹⁴ Fo Guang Shan Malaysia organized numerous activities. Dharma talks were held in the various Fo Guang Shan temples and among related groups. An

⁹⁴ See Appendix 4 for the list of Fo Guang Shan-affiliated branches in Malaysia.

international gathering of Fo Guang Shan Buddhist youth was held in Malaysia. And massive donation drives for natural disaster victims in China and other countries were launched periodically. There were also Buddhist art and performances, such as the Flora and Lantern Festival during Chinese New Year, theater performances, and singing competitions.

Fo Guang Shan and Malaysian Buddhism

Fo Guang Shan and the Chinese Mass Media in Malaysia

Fo Guang Shan Malaysia is skillful at attracting the attention of the mass media, especially Chinese newspapers. Hsing Yun's visits captured the media's interest; he was a religious celebrity who drew news coverage for himself and the organization. In fact, Fo Guang Shan's events have repeatedly been on primetime news in Malaysian television's Mandarin channels, and the organization has practiced corporate public relations with the news agencies. The case of Fo Guang Shan demonstrates the adaptability of Buddhist organizations in the modern era of mass communication.

There are three reasons that Fo Guang Shan's activities have received media attention. Buddhist organizations in Malaysia tended to underestimate the role of modern public relations until the arrival of Fo Guang Shan from Taiwan, which has adopted professional practices in its dealings with the mass media. In a corporate world, companies capitalize on their public relations to acquire profits. This religious group uses public relations to obtain greater exposure for its Buddhist events and religious products. Event publicity in the major daily newspapers is crucial to attracting participants. Fo Guang Shan Malaysia frequently issues press releases for their activities, depending on the target and audience of each event. For projects

requiring more publicity, journalists are invited to have lunch at the organization's restaurant before and after the event.

The second reason for Fo Guang Shan's extensive media coverage is the grandeur of its activities. This Buddhist group has always undertaken projects requiring considerable quantities of financial resources and participants. The main temple was built on a large piece of land with significant monetary support from the local and Taiwanese headquarter. Hsing Yun himself donated one million ringgit to build the main temple hall after a fire. When the temple's construction completed, Hsing Yun was invited to deliver a dharma talk in a stadium in Shah Alam. There were an estimated 80,000 people in attendance, and the event was described as the largest dharma talk in the world. A theater performance on the life of Gautama Buddha cost an estimated one million ringgit and was recorded as the most expensive theater production ever produced in Malaysia. These huge investments resulted in sensational media coverage even before the projects were implemented.

The third reason for Fo Guang Shan's extensive media coverage is the personal relationships between Fo Guang Shan's administrative staff, monks, and nuns with many media professionals. Editors and journalists who are already oriented towards Buddhism helped supporting Fo Guang Shan's projects through their newswriting and editing. The chief abbots of the group in Malaysia were quite skilled at addressing the media. The first chief abbot, Venerable Man Ya, held an MBA degree. Her caliber and competence helped advance and consolidate Fo Guang Shan's activities. She also had a close relationship with the editor of the largest Chinese daily newspaper, Sin Chew Daily, and many projects benefitted from the assistance of this newspaper, which was appointed to serve as the event organizer or official media outlet for Fo Guang Shan events. Through this relationship, the media obtained

recognition in the Buddhist communities, and Fo Guang Shan received free advertising.

Fo Guang Shan's vision of a Buddhist Popular Culture

Fo Guang Shan has strategically utilized popular culture in its public outreach initiatives. In the past, Hsing Yun has adopted innovative approaches to connecting with the public. Fifty years ago, he included a choral performance in his dharma teaching. In 1957, he produced the first-ever Buddhist album, including 20 songs, in Taiwan. When karaoke and karaoke television (KTV) became popular, Hsing Yun suggested that the Buddhist chanting service could be performed using karaoke machines (Fu 2008: 81 & 83). The role of popular culture is increasingly important in the propagation of Buddhism in Malaysia, as I will illustrate using two examples: musical theater and a Buddhist hymn-composing competition.

In 1999, Fo Guang Shan invested one million ringgit to stage the life of Gautama Buddha through musical theater. This performance was based on the book *The Biography of Sakyamuni Buddha*, which Hsing Yun published in 1955. All the actors and actresses were recruited locally, and a few of the main characters were famous artists in the local entertainment industry. The actor playing the role of Gautama Buddha was Yang Wei Han, the most popular singer in Malaysia at that time, who had won several major entertainment awards. The engagement of popular artists attracted the attention of the local media and was reported in the entertainment news. The show received extensive coverage through the paparazzi's tracking of famous artists' involvement. Due to the abundant financial resources received from the wealthy business class in Malaysia, the stage was spectacularly decorated, and the

performers' costumes were beautifully designed. An estimated 18,000 audience members attended the show from 1999 to 2010 (Fo Guang Shan Malaysia n.d.).

Prior to this impressive performance, various theatrical presentations had been staged by Buddhist organizations, in particular during the Wesak Day celebration. However, they were presented in amateur, casual, and low-budget productions without drawing media attention. Fo Guang Shan's professional production helped develop a popular culture around Hsing Yun's understanding of the Buddha's story. This musical theater production was exported to countries including Singapore, Indonesia, Germany, and South Africa. In 2009, the performance was restaged in *Istana Budaya*, the national theater hall, an event that was viewed as the state's recognition of Buddhism. In 2010, three Buddhist groups in Penang arranged performances for fundraising.

A competition entitled "Sounds of the Human World" (*Renjian Yinyuan*) was organized by Fo Guang Shan Malaysia in 2003. The first Buddhist hymn-composing competition had received 159 song submissions, and the winning hymn was performed at a music college with only 300 audience members in attendance. In the competition's third year, there were 1,400 audience members. It became a popular event among young people when Astro, the largest broadcast company in Malaysia, participated as a co-organizer from 2007 to 2009. Support from the mass media was only part of the reason for the competition's success: the prizes also attracted more participants. In 2008, the cash prize granted to the champion was USD3,000.

These huge expenditures on popular projects received a certain level of disapproval by some Buddhist groups. Responding to critiques of the group's spending on grand projects, a contact within Fo Guang Shan told me, "We [Fo Guang Shan] are willing to pay for it as long as it will encourage more people to learn about

Buddhism”.⁹⁵ The creation of Buddhist popular culture can be understood in light of the relationship between Buddhism and the media in a capitalist society. Popular culture relies on the mass media to shape certain consumer practices and behaviors. Hence, developing popular culture is unavoidably costly. Fo Guang Shan has adapted to the capitalist society by creating a new way to popularize Buddhism by staging performances with high-quality professional teams and media coverage.

Buddhist Education

Buddhist education in the Dong Zen Institute of Buddhist Studies (DZI) founded by Fo Guang Shan Malaysia is associated with the monastery’s other centers. After graduation, the institute’s students have the opportunity to work in various local or overseas branches. For example, in 2004, 17 of its graduates were assigned positions in different units of the monastery, such as the TV Center, the International Buddhist Progress Society, the Women’s Buddhist College, the English Buddhist College, the Culture and Education Foundation in Taiwan, the Fo Guang Publication and the Administrative Department in Malaysia.

The objective of the DZI is “to nurture talents in dharma propagation for Malaysia and neighboring countries” (Chan 2006: 58). Admission is open to single adults between the ages of 18 and 30, and the education is free, including room and board. The number of students and their willingness to serve the dharma has varied from year to year. In 2004, there were 30 students; 13 of them opted to be robed. In 2005, of the 20 registered students, 4 were ordained as clerics. In 2006 none of the 22 students who studied at the institute became clerics. The DZI has faced difficulties in

⁹⁵ From my fieldwork note.

attracting younger Malaysian Chinese to take up a formal Buddhist monastic education; there were far fewer of these students than expected.

One's decision to study in a Buddhist institute is determined by various factors. Commonly, a Chinese Buddhist youth will continue his or her education at the university or college level with a degree that guarantees good career prospects in the future. To optimize the DZI's Buddhist educational capacities, a course called the "Metropolitan Buddhist Class" was launched in 2004 to invite working adults aged 18 to 45 to pursue Buddhist studies. The course is conducted by DZI clerics on the weekends, and the program's graduates have the opportunity to continue their studies in Taiwan. There appeared to be more students enrolled in this course than in formal Buddhist monastic training. The classes are conducted in Mandarin and all expenses are supported by the Institute. Lecturers are recruited locally and also invited from Taiwan. The courses cover the learning of sutras, history of Buddhism, management, Buddhist music, and monastic life training.

There are additional activities at various levels of self-cultivation. The DZI has organized their Short Term Monastic Retreat (*Duanqi Chujia*) since 2002. This camp has received a positive reception from Chinese Buddhists in Malaysia. There were 328 participants in 2004 and 318 in 2005 (Chan 2006: 156). In addition, there is a 5-Day Meditation Retreat Camp for those who wish to learn meditation techniques but are not interested in monastic life. In 2005, there were 150 participants in this retreat. A two-night meditation program called "Cloud, Water, Zen, and Life Understanding Camp" (*Yunshui Chanxin Shengming Tiyaning*) is organized for both Buddhists and non-Buddhists. This program received an enormous response from beginners, and 200 people participated in the camp in 2005 and 2006 (ibid.158).

Dharma talks are an important way of purifying “human minds through group cultivation”, as stated in Fo Guang Shan’s objectives. Fo Guang Shan invited eloquent monks and nuns from Taiwan to deliver dharma talks and information about worldly matters. Some of the speakers were experts in their respective areas of study: for example, hospice care, education, health, or management. They attracted remarkable audiences after receiving coverage from Chinese newspapers. In 2004, there were 228 sessions of dharma talks, with 29,132 participants throughout Malaysia (ibid. 165).

Differences between Tzu Chi and Fo Guang Shan

Table 4.1 presents the major differences between Tzu Chi and Fo Guang Shan in Malaysia.⁹⁶ Tzu Chi places less emphasis on religion than Fo Guang Shan. In other words, Tzu Chi is more of a Buddhist civil group with charity responsibilities, and Fo Guang Shan is still a temple-based organization with the primary goal of spreading the dharma. Ideologically, the former believes in self-cultivation through charity works, while the latter maintains traditional practices. Both have responded creatively to the challenges of modernity and remaining rooted in Malaysia even though originated from Taiwan.

⁹⁶ Given the flexibility of these two Buddhist organizations, changes may occur at any time. This comparison was completed in 2010.

Table 4.1 Differences between Tzu Chi and Fo Guang Shan

	Tzu Chi	Fo Guang Shan
Driving force of activities	Mainly laity led	Mainly sangha led, but there is a trend toward a more active role for laypeople.
Social activism	Charity, healthcare and environmental protection.	Similar, but at a smaller scale.
Membership qualification	Buddhists and non-Buddhists.	Buddhists who have taken refuge.
Proselytization	No	Yes
Dharma talk	No	Yes
Meditation	No	Yes

Similarity of the Aesthetics of Religious Space and Material

Aesthetics of Fo Guang Shan Malaysia's Temple

“Fo Guang Shan temples are built to demonstrate the beauty of Buddhist arts and cultures” (Chan 2006:76). In my conversation with Mr. Ang, the president of the Fo Guang Jenjarom Branch, he mentioned that “when I was young, I did not like the Chinese temple. It was dark and dirty. I was introduced to Fo Guang and immediately I liked it”. This aesthetic factor may be among the reasons that Buddhist groups from Taiwan have grown substantially since the late 1980s. Buddhist temples and Chinese religious shrines in Malaysia continue to follow traditional architectural designs. The lighting quality is poor, and the buildings’ interiors are generally shadowy; they can be frightening when the shrine houses representations of deities from the hell described in the Chinese belief system.

Fo Guang Shan Malaysia's main temple in Jenjarom combines traditional Chinese monastic design and modern architecture. A visitor walking from the main door along the path to the main hall is welcomed by the 18 Arhat statues of Chinese Buddhism. There is a pond to the right, and a small bridge connects the garden with a Chinese pavilion. On the left is a miniature model of drawings and artifacts from the Dunhuang Buddhist Caves in China. This temple landscape received an award for being among "the Best Landscape Designs by Selangor Planning and Development Unit for three years consecutively since 2004" (Chan 2006: 36). There is also an art gallery to the right of the main hall.

Hsing Yun once said, "[m]y ideal is to build arts and cultural galleries to serve the purpose of education, exhibition and collection of valuable Buddhist heritage items" (ibid.76). The Fo Guang Yuan Art Gallery was established in 2004, including an exhibition hall and a heritage hall. The third floor is a display room for Buddhist relics, and the second floor has remained a heritage hall that maintains Buddhist statues, wood-crafted objects, calligraphy by Hsing Yun, and paintings. The most exclusive item in the collection is a Buddha amulet donated by devotees of Gua Musang in Kelantan. There are three pieces of amulets found by aboriginal people in a cave; two additional pieces will be sent to Taiwan's Fo Guang Shan Buddha Memorial Center. Experts have estimated that the artifacts may be 1,000 years old. The only piece of the amulet left in the hall is approximately the size of a palm, with Buddha sitting in the center surrounded by 8 buddhas. It appears to be a depiction of Vairocana (Guang Ming Daily 2011a).

During my fieldwork visit, an exhibition by a group of local artists occupied the ground floor, with price tags on the artwork being offered for sale. The exhibition hall has become a venue for local artists to share their work. It functions as an art

gallery and does not censor the nature of the artworks' content. The criterion for exhibition is based on the value of the art, not whether it is religious or non-religious. Since 2004, various exhibitions have taken place, featuring Buddha statues, calligraphy, pottery, oil and ink painting, illustration, photography, and sculpture. The art gallery has become a meeting place for artists and art lovers; both Buddhist and non-Buddhist art is respected.

Sensorial Consumption in Jing Si Books & Café

Tzu Chi Malaysia runs ten cafés throughout Peninsula Malaysia. The cafés are called Jing Si Books & Café, and they are located on Penang Island, Butterworth, Alor Setar, Kota Bahru, Kuala Lumpur, Klang, Batu Pahat, Kuantan, and Melaka. The Penang Island Jing Si Books & Café, the first Tzu Chi café in the world, was built in 2000. It was designed by the director of Da Ai TV, based on the idea of Zen meditation culture. The interior utilizes bamboo, plants, paper lanterns, teakwood floors, bookshelves and furniture, with stone walking paths in some locations. “Jing Si” means “contemplative still thought”. The intention behind opening these cafés is to sell books and vegetarian products manufactured by Tzu Chi and to provide a meeting space for Tzu Chi's social activities.

I visited Jing Si Books & Café, which is located in the most expensive commercial center of KL's golden triangle area opposite what was once the tallest building in KL, the Federal Hotel. The Lot 10 Shopping Mall, which sells the most expensive commodities in the area, is only 100 meters away. The most popular shopping mall, Sungai Wang, is also nearby. Jing Si is part of the Bukit Bintang walking area, which also houses a salon. The location itself presents a fusion of capitalism, globalization, middle-class preferences, and religion.

When I entered the café, its peaceful and well-designed environment relaxed me after the hectic KL traffic. The ambience is very Zen, combined with a Taiwanese style influenced by Japanese culture. The café has imported Taiwanese magazines for customers to read and serves organic food products such as noodles, drinks, soup, and biscuits. In this cozy environment, I paid RM6.00 for an excellent cup of hot chocolate. Coffee, traditional Chinese tea and green tea were also available.

I sat beside a group of teenagers who were likely from five secondary school students, who about to take SPM (*Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia*). They ordered a pot of tea to share and studied in the quiet environment. At times, they watched the Da Ai TV in front of them. To the left of my table, a group of college students discussed an assignment regarding a business plan. One was downloading a movie online. The other was instant messaging. The development of their business plan in the café of the non-profit Tzu Chi organization presented no ideological conflict. Later, an older gentleman entered the café to use the free wireless Internet service. Another young couple in executive attire walked in and shared a cup of coffee to temporarily escape from their busy office work.

Tzu Chi's TV station Da Ai was turned on. Sometimes the customers watched it for a while, but most of the time, they did not. The TV is on but no one pays attention to it. Yet, its presence might influence the patrons indirectly. I noticed a program discussing the donation of bodies to the university hospital for research purposes. The Tzu Chi University Continuing Education Center is based in Jing Si. Its aim is to provide programs for people ranging from young to old, student or worker, male or female. These activities include rejuvenating cane exercises, musical sign language, patchwork, baking, digital photography, China ink painting, pottery, guitar,

tea ceremony, yoga, Japanese language classes, vegetarian cooking, *Guzheng* (a Chinese plucked zither), resin clay sketch calligraphy, and violin lessons.

I saw no Buddha statues, and there was no emphasis on Buddhism in the cafe. However, the books were mostly Tzu Chi publications, and they were all Buddhist books. One of the frequent criticisms of Tzu Chi made by some Buddhists in Malaysia was that the group did not follow the dharma because they only performed charity works and recycling projects. They used modern means, such as cafés and charity projects, to spread Buddhist teachings.

Summary

Tzu Chi has launched charity projects to cater to the needs of three marginalized social groups, kidney patients, natural disaster victims, and needy poor. At the same time, Fo Guang Shan has embarked on large-scale dharma-propagation projects, which have received a tremendous response from Malaysian Chinese Buddhists. As Hsing Yun argued, the purpose of Buddhism is “to cater to the different needs and interests of people” (Chan 2006: 16). Tzu Chi and Fo Guang Shan have shifted Buddhist practice at the monastic and laity levels in Malaysian Buddhism. They are both directly or indirectly influenced by and committed to Taixu’s reformist idea to seek a form of Buddhism that is suitable in the modern world. Taiwan has nurtured modern forms of Buddhism that have developed both at home and abroad. Both groups’ creative ideas and adaptations to the forces of global capitalism have developed new interpretations and strategies for Chinese Buddhists. In the following chapter, I will scrutinize the meaning of Buddhist revitalization supported by local and global resources in Malaysia’s social and political context.

Chapter 5

Remaking Chinese Buddhists

In this chapter, I will explore the reasons behind Chinese Buddhist revitalization in Malaysia. Buddhist revitalization emerged in Malaysia through the hard work of monastic and lay communities. The factors behind Chinese Buddhist revitalization include Chinese politics and a cultural crisis within the Malaysian Chinese Buddhist communities and responses to ethno-religious state ideology imparted by the UMNO-dominated ruling coalition.

Chinese Communities and Buddhism in Malaysia

Three key conditions in Chinese communities have encouraged the rise of Buddhism. First, like Confucianism, Buddhism is believed by scholars to be an essential element of Chinese culture. Buddhism is perceived by Malaysian Chinese and other ethnic groups as a religion that belongs to the Chinese communities. The stereotype occurred because an ordinary Chinese usually would claim to be a Buddhist when asked by other ethnic friends and the census enumerator during the census enumeration. This perception is compatible with the ethnic boundaries created through static religious perceptions of the ethnic Chinese population that were constructed during British colonial rule. British census did not equate Buddhism with Chinese ethnicity but British officers realized that Buddhism was practiced by Chinese together with Taoism and ancestor worship (Nathan 1922). Within the Chinese communities, Buddhism is accepted as a religion that is friendlier to Chinese culture in terms of tolerating the continuation of older indigenous cultural practices, such as ancestor worship. In fact, Buddhism resides in a comfortable cultural sphere of Chinese

cosmologies that will favor the inclination of the younger generation to claim as being born Buddhist. At the personal level, to be a Buddhist means to claim a Chinese identity; for some, it is merely a traditional and convenient manner of self-identification. These historical and cultural linkages preserve the continuation of Buddhism and assist monastic or Buddhist groups in approaching Chinese communities.

Second, Chinese education has played an important role in the development of Chinese Buddhism in Malaysia. The struggle of Chinese educationist against state national language policies has sustained the continuation of six years Chinese primary school with the use of Mandarin as a medium of instruction. The persistence of Chinese education is important for providing a conducive environment for the expansion of reformist Mahayana Buddhism. Meanwhile, the shifting of linguistic orientation from dialects to Mandarin has fostered the acceptance of Buddhist teaching, promoted by local groups as well as Taiwanese groups, for which Mandarin is the primary language of instruction. At the same time, the use of Hokkien by Tzu Chi in the delivery of dharma has attracted a segment of this related dialect group. For dialect groups of Cantonese and others, Tzu Chi uses Mandarin as medium of instruction.

Third, a competitive multi-religious landscape in Malaysia has indeed awakened Buddhist groups. The spread of Christianity since British colonial rule and grassroots-inspired Islamization policies had shrouded once stagnant Buddhist proselytization machinery in the late 1950s and 1960s. The anxious Buddhist monastic and lay communities responded to the reality of possibly losing followers, especially Chinese Buddhists, who became open to any religious options, as long as it served their purpose. The multi-religious landscape has changed, as during colonial

time supported religious groups have weakened and as state-led Islam strengthened. The contestation among religious followers and of resources between Muslim and non-Muslim groups and Christian and non-Christian groups has however, remained prominent.

Malaysia's Chinese communities have been subject to the proselytization efforts of various groups, Christians, Muslims and newer East Asian sects such as *Soka Gakkai*, a Japanese Buddhist denomination and the Unity Sect from Taiwan. Within Mahayana Buddhism, there are many groups from different traditions, such as the Pure Land School, where the members chant six sacred words to be reborn in the Western World, presided by Amitabha Buddha. Smaller groups that adhere to Mahayana traditions also exist. Among them, the reformist Chinese Buddhist groups I mentioned in the previous chapter. This complex religious scene has stimulated Buddhist groups to respond to the challenges and changes that have occurred from time to time in Malaysia with the rise of second-generation, monastic, and lay religious leaders.

The Emergence of Second-Generation Religious Leaders: A Case of Venerable Chi Chern

Venerable Chi Chern began his Buddhist career with the Taiping Buddhist Association in the mid-1970s. He began as a volunteer who conducted the Sunday Dharma School. Under his tutelage, the number of students, as well as classes, increased extensively to 10 classes and approximately 300 students. He decided to become a monk in 1979. Chi Chern was ordained by Chuk Mor. In China, Chuk Mor, Chi Chern's teacher, had a close disciple-teacher relationship with reformist monk Taixu, who "targeted Buddhist rituals for the dead and the popular concern with

spirit” (Pittman 2001: 270). When Taixu visited Malaya in 1940, a reader of *The Straits Times* referred to him as “the Martin Luther of modern Buddhism” (CLC 1940).

Chi Chern is a well-known Buddhist leader who promoted his teacher’s idea of *Zheng Xin* Buddhism. The title of the Taiping Buddhist Association’s anniversary magazine, “*A Place of Worship for Buddhism in the Human Realm*”, or *Renjian Fojiao*, was an idea promoted by a prominent scholar monk Yinshun, who believed that Taixu “had insufficiently denounced the adoration of divinities” (ibid). Chi Chern has enthusiastically promoted *Renjian Fojiao*, where the target of Buddhism should be on human in this life, through the formation of a discussion group in which Yinshun’s scholastic work is systematically read. This intensive study of Yinshun’s idea of *Renjian Fojiao* is also popular among members of Buddhist societies in tertiary institutions and Mahayanist Buddhist associations throughout Malaysia that have been influenced by Chi Chern.

Chi Chern embarked on a new Buddhist youth movement, through which *Zheng Xin* Buddhism was spread. This new movement is different from the youth Buddhist movement in the 1950s and 1960s inspired by Sumangalo. At that juncture, the movement was chiefly focused on the organization of Buddhist youth and the encouragement of learning basic dharma through the establishment of Sunday Dharma Schools for primary and secondary school-aged children. Chi Chern advanced the Buddhist youth movement through the popularization of sutra learning and meditation camps in local universities and in his writings.



Figure 10 Venerable Chi Chern. Source: Chi Chern Personal Webpage, http://www.ccmati.com/mati/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1

Chi Chern and Yinshun

Chi Chern was influenced by Yinshun's new interpretation of Mahayana Buddhism. When he studied in Taiwan in 1978, a series of books called *Miaoyun Ji* became the primary source of his understanding of Buddhism. The series included 25 books that covered the basic tenets of Buddhism in terms of Yinshun's interpretation. Hurley (2004) described Yinshun's contribution as the "doctrinal transformation of twentieth-century Chinese Buddhism". Chi Chern recalled that it was *Miaoyun Ji* and Yinshun's other publications that helped him grasp the tenets, concept, philosophy, traditions, and historical development of Buddhism (Chi Chern 1995: 175).

When Chi Chern returned to Malaysia in 1981, he began to refer to *Miaoyun Ji* during dharma teaching and propagation activities. In his lectures to students at the Malaysian Buddhist Institute, two books from the series were referenced, *Basic Buddhism (Fofa Gailun)* and *The Way to Buddhahood (Chengfo Zhidao)*. Even in the Sunday dharma class, he summarized the main path in *The Way to Buddhahood* as a more systematic way for the students to understand Buddhism. The Higher Level of Dharma Studies Class organized by YBAM has also been focused on the study of Yinshun publications since 1985 (ibid. 176). Chi Chern also established a group called Panna Buddhist Studies Society to further explore the Buddhist studies authored by Yinshun and some Taiwanese scholars.

A seminar on Yinshun's thinking was arranged to introduce him to Malaysian Chinese Buddhists in 1989. It was held in Johor, Kuala Lumpur, and Penang. The seminar received remarkable support from Chinese Buddhist communities. A scholar monk from Taiwan was invited to talk about *Miaoyun Ji*, and Chi Chern himself presented a paper about Yinshun's Buddhist methodology. However, the quality of the seminar was far from satisfying, and some attendees criticized the lack of

thorough understanding of Yinshun's Buddhist thought that was evident in the seminar. Seminars or conferences on Yinshun have since become an attractive theme for Chinese Buddhist communities. Twenty years later, in 2010, a conference organized by YBAM and Zheng Xin Buddhist Association in Kuala Lumpur on Yinshun attracted more than 400 participants.



Figure 11 Master Yinshun (1906-2005). Source: Yinshun Cultural and Educational Foundation, http://www.yinshun.org.tw/yin_dr_ca.htm

Chi Chern and Meditation Camps

A meditation retreat camp was in session when I arrived at the Taiping Buddhist Association in the city centre of Taiping, a city near to Ipoh, in 2010. I heard about that year end camp since my undergraduate studies and I took the fieldwork opportunity to visit Chi Chern. Entry in meditation hall and dining hall were prohibited. I viewed the participants at lunch. They observed the rule of keeping silent, with some bowing their heads and walking slowly. All wore comfortable, loose clothes with mainly white and black that were suited for the long hours of sitting in the meditation hall. Participants had to wake up at 4:30 a.m. and went to bed at 9:30 p.m. This retreat camp was very strict, even *Xiangban*, a wooden stick, was used by some instructors to wake up meditators who had fallen into sleep during meditation. Chi Chern was the instructor at this retreat camp.

Chi Chern insisted that the practice of meditation is important to Buddhists and he will continue conducting courses until he is physically and mentally unable to do so (Chi Chern 2005: 279). In 2010, Chi Chern conducted five meditation camps for people at different stages of their meditation practice. In 1985, he organized the National Graduate Buddhist Youth Camp in Taiping, Perak. Although the theme of the camp was different each year, it was always linked to the teachings of Yinshun. Two hours of meditation training were incorporated each night to introduce basic meditation techniques to the participants. The organizer prepared a reading folder that consisted of sutras and articles to help members grasp the primary ideas of *Zheng Xin* Buddhism that are dissimilar to traditional Chinese beliefs. Usually, the seniors, who participated in the camp in previous years, would act as facilitators during the discussion to guide the new learners. The number of participants attending these camps has increased each year. During the first year of the camp in 1983 there were

only 50 participants, but the next year, the number had reached 120. Since the renovation of the Taiping Buddhist Association with a better facility, the camp has attracted 300 university students annually. By 2011, the camp was in its 28th year. The 25th Anniversary Magazine of the camp stated that “the camp has promoted university students to learn dharma and changed their perception about Buddhism and for those who attended the camp, Buddhism is not a religion which only practiced by praying to Buddha and hoping to gain reward from Buddha” (Wang 2010: 11).

Another camp, the meditation camp named Seven Days Meditation (*Jing Qi*) has been organized annually for approximately 28 years, from 1985 to 2011. The camp is well known among the Chinese-speaking undergraduate Buddhist youth and Chinese Buddhist community. The camp takes place at the end of the year during the school holidays. Unlike the National Graduate Buddhist Youth Camp, which emphasized sutra learning, the Seven Days Meditation camp is based solely on meditation. A participant must wake up on 4 a.m. in the morning and is expected to practice meditation for one week. Below is the time table for this camp:

4:00 am	Wake up
4:15 am – 5:45 am	Meditation and yoga exercise
5:45 am – 6:45 am	Morning class
6: 45 am – 8:00 am	Breakfast and cleaning duty
8:00 am – 11:30 am	Meditation
11:30 am – 1:00 pm	Lunch and cleaning duty
1:00 pm – 2:00 pm	Meditation teaching by Venerable
2:00 pm - 6:00 pm	Meditation
6:00 pm – 7:00 pm	Simple dinner
7:00 pm – 8:00 pm	Meditation teaching by Venerable
8:00 pm – 10:00 pm	Meditation
10:00 pm	Sleeping

This design of the intensive meditation course is in accordance with the instruction of the founder of an important religious organization from Taiwan the Dharma Drum Mountain, the Venerable Sheng Yan. Chi Chern’s meditation

technique belongs to the tradition of Zen inherited from Venerable Xu Yun, who was an important Zen master who combined five Chinese Zen traditions of Mahayana Buddhism in the late Ching Dynasty in the early 20th century in China. Chi Chern gained recognition from Sheng Yan as the fourth-generation inheritor of Xu Yun's tradition (Chi Chern 2005: 254).⁹⁷ This basic meditation camp attracted almost 4000 participants between 1985 and 2010. Participants were mainly Chinese primary school teachers and Chinese-speaking university students inspired by Chi Chern to be more serious in dharma. These camps have popularized meditation and inspired more Buddhist organizations to organize meditation camp for their members.

Another type of meditation camp exists for those who have attended *Jing Qi*. It is called Advanced Seven Days Meditation (*Jingjin Qi*). Some of the participants of the basic meditation camp felt that there was a need for a more intensive follow-up meditation course. Hence, *Jingjin Qi* was initiated by Chi Chern in 1988. For this camp, the participants must wake up as early as 3 a.m. Only those who are serious in meditation will join the camp. By 2010, this advanced level meditation camp has served almost 2000 participants. This advanced level meditation camp shows that Mahayanist reformism has been deepened by using meditation as a tool.

In 1989, the meditation camp Supplementary Meditation (*Jiaxing Qi*) was arranged. The duration of this camp is two weeks, and it is only for those who have completed the basic and advanced levels. Some of the advanced-level participants felt that one week of camp should be prolonged to make further progress in meditation practice possible. The camp had approximately 500 participants between 1989 and 2010. The meditation camp evolved over time. In 1996, Chi Chern also organized a

⁹⁷ 'Chi Chern is the first to receive the lineage transmission in the Chan School of Chinese Buddhism from Master Sheng Yen of Dharma Drum Mountain in Jinshan, Taiwan. He is the 68th generation of Dharma heirs in the *Linji* (临济) School and 63rd generation of Dharma heirs in the *Caodong* (曹洞) School' (Mahabodhi Monastery, <http://www.putige.org/about%20us/advisor.html>, accessed 2 November 2011).

camp for the monastic community. Approximately 60 ordained monks and nuns joined the course. In 1999, another new basic meditation training was introduced for university students. This training is specially arranged for university students who have different holiday schedules. Approximately 1500 participated in this camp between 1999 and 2010.

All of the courses have a systematic way of conducting meditation that allows for a clear path of progress for participants. Chi Chern combined the teachings of Sheng Yan, the Tian Tai meditation technique, and Yinshun's ideas. McMahan (2008: 186) observed that camps for modern meditation for layperson "have taken place within established tradition". A few meditation teachers emerged after Chi Chern, such as the Venerable Kai Zhao, Ji Chi, and Chi Chan. Kai Zhao was quite popular among university students in the late 1990s and early 2000s. His meditation technique derived from the tradition of Theravadin forest monks. However, Chi Chern remained the most important reformist monk and the one who has planted the idea for Malaysian Chinese Buddhists -- meditation as an essential means to achieving awakening.

Chi Chern's Publications

Chi Chern is a prolific author who produced popular Buddhist writings in Malaysia. By 2005, he had published a total of 65 books in Mandarin. These included 38 books, 9 edited books, 7 co-authored books, 10 booklets, and one book that he translated from English. The publications span four genres, and include literature, writing on meditation, academic papers, and Buddhist thought. The edited books were primarily on the meditation experience and written by participants of various meditation camps, and he also co-authored a few books on the study of Malaysian Buddhism.

Chi Chern's books were primarily compiled from articles previously contributed to Malaysian Chinese newspapers and magazines. These short articles were largely focused on everyday life as a Buddhist and became popular reading among Chinese Buddhists in Malaysia, especially those who had attended the author's Buddhist camps. The second major type of book revolved around writings on meditation that helped readers learn the basic technique of mindfulness through his teaching experiences and personal journey. Among others, two books were once very popular among Chinese Buddhists who practiced meditation. These books were *The Lecture of Six Ways to Enter the Way (Liu Miaomen Jiangji)*, printed in 1991, and *Anapanasati and Vipassana Lectures (Xiao Zhiguan Jiangji)*, printed in 1992. These two books were reprinted in Taiwan as well. He used an easy manner of explaining the tradition of Tiantai in practicing Zen meditation. This meditation system was adjusted for lay persons who face the stresses of modern life, such as in work, love, and family.

The Puzhao Buddhist Vihara Controversy

Chi Chern attempted to implement several projects when he was president of the YBAM. He was involved in a proposal to build a Buddhist research and meditation center to be called Puzhao Buddhist Vihara. It was a major attempt by Chi Chern and the YBAM to envision a Buddhist research center. Puzhao Buddhist Vihara started as a one-storey old wood temple owned by 87-year-old Lim Hong in Kluang, Johor. She donated the old temple to YBAM in 1986. Another lay devotee also agreed to donate a 7-acre piece of land to YBAM. A Puzhao Buddhist Vihara Planning Committee was then formed to take charge of planning the construction to develop a multi-purpose Buddhist training, educational, research and meditation center. The central committee

members of YBAM appointed Chi Chern as the temple's first abbot before the completion of the project. The construction process cost RM10 million. The first phase, which was estimated to cost RM2 million, was expected to be completed in March 1992 (Yeoh 1991: 2). The endowment from the Buddhist community had exceeded the target, and RM2.6 million was collected, but the primary difficulties of carrying out the project occurred before the construction could be completed.

Although, most of the time, YBAM insists on neutrality in terms of political participation, the visible hand of politics finally directly influenced the Puzhao Buddhist Vihara project. Suspension of the construction of Puzhao Vihara occurred without direct clarification from the committee because "YBAM is keeping a low profile in handling the suspension.... in view of sensitivity of a multi-religions society and to take care of the feeling of all parties. At the same time, it was because some of the decisions were listed as official secrets which could not be announced to the public" (YBAM 1994: 12). The contestation of a Buddhist community in the public sphere in a multi-religious society has its own complexities. Although the YBAM is more vocal and active in responding to state policies, it always accepts the final decision of the state. As a minority, the Buddhist organisations have voiced their discontent without strong and confrontational political activism.

The project was approved by the North Kluang District Council on 26 November 1990 and gazetted by local authority on 25 April 1991. The construction of the project officially began on 28 May 1991, which was also Wesak Day. The proposed site for Puzhao Vihara was near a *Surau* (Muslim prayer building) that belonged to the Agricultural Department. The old wooden Chinese temple had been built before the *Surau*, but this location had become a sensitive religious issue that was brought up by UMNO Youth, a political youth of main ruling party, because the

Johor Security Council's regulation does not allow "any religious premises to be built within 1.5 km of the *Surau*" (YBAM 1994: 13). Halfway through its construction, Muslim UMNO Youth members protested the building of Puzhao Vihara and the racial tension between Malay Muslims and Chinese Buddhists simmered (Goh 1993: 39). In an official letter dated 11 August 1991, the North Kluang District Council instructed the YBAM to cease construction because the plans had not been approved by the Johor Security Council. YBAM first refused to do so until 1 February 1992 "under the request from District Officer for the sake of overall public interest" (YBAM 1994: 13). Construction was only completed to the third level.

Several efforts were made to save the project. These efforts included a dialogue with local residents, which was organized by a Member of Parliament from the ruling party, the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA); another dialogue with the state's Chief Minister took place between UMNO youth who represented villagers and YBAM. During the meeting, a member of the Johor Security Council warned that "burning the Puzhao Vihara with fire would solve the problem easily" (Goh 1993, p.41). A coordination meeting was held between all quarters involved, and the decision to resume construction work progressed. However, the ex-deputy president of the YBAM Ang Choo Hong "received a bullet in an envelope posted to his house as threat of life"⁹⁸ on the same day. Before 13 May 1992, rumors of a demonstration by UMNO youth and villagers were spreading in the area, and leaflets protesting the building of a Buddhist Temple in a Muslim area were distributed. On 13 May 1992, "more than 100 policemen surrounded the Puzhao Vihara in case there was any demonstration" (YBAM 1994: 13).

⁹⁸ Before the meeting to settle the problem, State Exco Lau Boon Hong, Member of Parliament Kang Chow Oh, senator Syed Hamid and the District Officer Haji Johari also received bullets as threats to life (Goh Tuan Huee 1993, p. 42).

Several meetings with members of the Malay Muslim ruling party and a dialogue with the Chief Minister were organized. The YBAM were “negotiating with all means”, and “the difficulties and miseries that the YBAM encountered could not be explained” easily (YBAM 1994: 13). In 1993, the State Security Council imposed 11 conditions for the resumption of construction work, and YBAM was “working hard days and nights to strive for a better and less restrictive conditions for resumption” (ibid). In a press statement in 1994, YBAM stated that “for the sake of overall public interest and to resume construction as soon as possible, we [YBAM] decided to accept MCA’s advice to act according to the solution procedures” (ibid.14). In fact, YBAM had strong political linkage at that moment, as, for example, ex-Chief Minister of Penang Koh Tsu Koon was its advisor. The low profile manner of handling the issue did not achieve the aim to which they aspired.

Before the 10th General Election in 2004, the Kluang District Council communicated news of a possible approval, but approval was delayed again. After further despair, the Buddhist community did not have high expectations for the project recovery. Surprisingly, directly before the 12th General Election in January 2008, the project was suddenly approved but had to comply with nine conditions. The Buddhist community considers two of the conditions “unfair” and “illogical”. First, no religious activities are allowed in the temple. Secondly, Buddhist statues, which are part of the design for the compound area of the Puzhao Buddhist Vihara, are prohibited.

In the YBAM online discussion forum, the outbursts of Buddhist youths were apparent. A posting by an anonymous user with the nickname “Yahui” noted that “the 16 years struggle of Puzhao Buddhist Vihara is the most important history in

Malaysian Buddhism and Buddhist should know this history”.⁹⁹ Another posting on the eve of election day advised the Buddhist voters to “vote wisely”.¹⁰⁰ A monk also quoted the section on religious freedom in the Federal Constitution and argued that Puzhao Buddhist Vihara’s restoration conditions violate constitutional assurance (ibid).

During the national general election campaigning period, a seminar on religious freedom was organized by the YBAM in accordance with this “illogical” regulation, which would restrict the restoration of the project. Criticism of the ruling party on this issue via mobile phone short messaging spread among the Buddhist community a few days before the election.¹⁰¹ Signs of anger among Buddhists have also been observed in the political materials created and distributed through new media. For example, a YouTube video on a Buddhist temple demolition was spread through email during the general election.¹⁰² A poster that was titled “Buddhist Vote for Change” using the *Saffron Revolution* of a Burmese monk as a background and urging Buddhists to reject the hegemony of the National Coalition was spread through email.

Puzhao Vihara is a “grand vision” of the Buddhist youth movement. The plan is not only a customary temple with religious function for the followers but also will be “a training center for Buddhist teachers, professionals and researchers which include the Sangha and the laymen” and “to promote the Buddhist academic research and the further enhance linkage with other local and foreign Buddhist research centers

⁹⁹ YBAM Forum,
<<http://www.ybam.org.my/forum/viewtopic.php?t=502&postdays=0&postorder=asc&start=0>>
(accessed 10 September 2009).

¹⁰⁰ YBAM Forum,
<<http://www.ybam.org.my/forum/viewtopic.php?t=502&postdays=0&postorder=asc&start=45>>
(accessed 10 September 2009).

¹⁰¹ ‘Hoo Seong Chang: Duanxun Bushi, Puzhasi Chetu Meiwent’ [Hoo Seong Chang: Wrong SMS, Puzhao Vihara’s Building Plan No Problem], *Sin Chew Daily*, 7 March 2008.

¹⁰² ‘Destroy temple’, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8o12E7ejlY>> (accessed 9 October 2009).

or colleges”.¹⁰³ This grand vision is a crucial milestone for the YBAM in pushing Buddhist propagation in Malaysia. Unfortunately, the politicians racialized this issue, and with the power of Islamic influence in district administration, Malaysian Buddhist youth have experienced the frustration and collapse of their “grand vision”.

During the 11th YBAM Biennial National Convention in 1992, a special resolution on the objection to an Islamic law was endorsed by the Convention. It raised the concern that the YBAM should play a greater role “to actively resist proposals to amend the Federal Constitution with the intention of introducing the Islamic Criminal Law in the country” (YBAM 1992: 14). When the debate between PAS and UMNO on Islamic Law escalated during the 1990s, the President of the YBAM, Chi Chern, expressed the anxiety of non-Muslims in a commentary (Chi Chern 1994: 2). Since then, the issue of the implementation of Islamic Law by PAS in Kelantan has become a continuing political concern of the YBAM. At the YBAM 11th Biennial National Convention, two resolutions related to this issue were expressed, as presented below:

“to urge all the political parties to act with responsibility and uphold the interest of the people, especially by refraining from politicizing religious issues which bring about misunderstanding and fear among the followers of various religion and, to oppose any attempt by anyone religion to impose its religion ideals on the followers of other religions” (YBAM 1992: 14).

Buddhist revitalization has intertwined with political development in Malaysia. The politics of Buddhist are subtly articulated at the associational level without direct

¹⁰³ YBAM, *The Third YBAM Six-Year Plan (1993-1998)*, pp.129-130.

linkages to the existing political parties. Muslim political parties, such as Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (Islamic Party of Malaysia, PAS), is an Islamist political party with the aim of establishing Malaysia as an Islamic state, and even the dominant ruling secular party, United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), has an agenda of uplifting Islam. However, non-Muslim political parties have no religious agenda in their political struggle. None of the political parties have any direct aim of elevating and emphasizing the interests of Buddhism. Hence, Buddhist organizations have been playing their roles often in obscurity, resulting in a Malaysian political landscape with insufficient representation from the Buddhist community. Increasing Islamization has restricted the religious freedom of Buddhist community. The Puzhao Vihara issue does not merely signify the disappointment of YBAM in the contestation for space but is also a metaphor for the subordination of religious cosmological order in a Muslim majority state. The issue creates a remarkable yet painful memory for Buddhist youth in particular and arouses and politicizes the national Buddhist community's sentiments.

Cultural Reformation in Chinese Communities

The 1980s was viewed as a period of lost juncture for the Chinese communities. After 10 years of implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP)¹⁰⁴, which favored the Bumiputera, the Malaysian Chinese experienced discrimination and a sense of loss in contestation with government-supported Malay Muslims. This despair was expressed through the cultural movement within the Chinese communities, which was led by Chinese clan associations and was meant to revamp the so-called cultural baggage of

¹⁰⁴ NEP was an affirmative policy favored Malay community started in the 1970 after May 13th racial riots. The aims of the policy were the restructuring of society and the eradication of poverty. It received many criticisms from both the non-Malay communities and scholars who perceived it as the policy that halted the economic development and the losing of competitive edge of Malaysian in the era of globalization.

the community to gain further prosperity in Malaysia. In the Chinese new villages¹⁰⁵, the community was plagued by various social illnesses. Among other issues, the wastage of traditional practices connected to festivals, especially funerals and religious festivals were highlighted. During these ritual events excessive burning of expensive incense and paper money was a norm for many Malaysian Chinese individuals.¹⁰⁶

The close relationship between the YBAM and the Chinese communities began in 1983 when the YBAM was invited by 15 major Chinese associations, led by *Dong Jiao Zong*¹⁰⁷, and various Chinese Assembly Halls to present a paper on “Buddhism and Chinese Culture” at the National Chinese Cultural Convention. A declaration was written after the convention to express the demands of the Chinese communities in response to the National Cultural Policy¹⁰⁸ that prioritized Islam and Malay culture in nation building. The call to reform community religious beliefs was coherently voiced by the leading traditional Chinese associations and lay Buddhists, as well as clerics. The section on religious reform on the Malaysian Chinese Cultural Reformation Survey, which was conducted in 1997, identified three primary problems with religious beliefs of the Malaysian Chinese population. These problems were the followers’ lack of knowledge on religious doctrine, the wastage inherent in ceremonies, and environmental problems. Traditional Chinese religions were targeted

¹⁰⁵ The origin of new villages was to fend off the influence of Malayan Communist Party. The peasants were forced to move out from their house and land to resettle in a guarded camp called “New Village” (Loh 1988).

¹⁰⁶ The traditional belief practitioners included adhering to the old custom of burning the joss stick, gold and silver papers, and paper replicas of everyday necessities, as well as ‘modern merchandise’, such as cars, televisions, video tape recorders, airplanes, and telephones.

¹⁰⁷ *Dong Jiao Zong* refers to the two influential national organizations champion issue on Chinese education, United Chinese School Committees Association and The United Chinese School Teachers Association.

¹⁰⁸ National Cultural Policy (Dasar Kebudayaan Kebangsaan) is perceived by non-Malay communities as a policy to assimilate non-Malays into Malay culture. There are three aims in this policy: 1) The National Culture must be based on the indigenous [Malay] culture; 2) Suitable elements from the other cultures may be accepted as part of the national culture, and 3) Islam is an important component in the moulding of the National Culture (Office of The Prime Minister of Malaysia).

as causes of the problems. Chinese religious practitioners were also blamed for cheating money from unknowing devotees and sexual assault cases. The unnecessary burning of joss papers was also associated with environmental pollution (Lau et al. 1998: 227-237). The discourse on “the problem” of popular Chinese religions was part of the reform agenda for the community. In fact, this agenda was compatible with the agenda of *Zheng Xin* Buddhism.

In response to the issue of cultural renewal and the community’s concerns about religious practices, the YBAM organized a series of seminars on Chinese culture and Buddhism in cities throughout Malaysia. In 1983, a seminar called *Buddhist Culture and Custom* was held in Melaka to promote *Zheng Xin* Buddhism and advocated the reformation of so-called un-Buddhistic practices. The seminar aimed to identify the differences between Buddhist and Chinese cultural festivals. The conclusion of the seminar was to be presented to respected monks and nuns so that they could discuss and make decisions regarding this matter. The organizers of the seminar planned to publish a handbook entitled *How to Live as a Buddhist Handbook* (*Fojiao Shenghuo Shouce*) to circulate to all four million “Buddhists” in Malaysia. Chi Chern led the editorial board for *How to Live as a Buddhist Handbook*, which would address Buddhist weddings, funerals, and festivals. The handbook was published in Chinese by the publication wing of YBAM, the Buddhist Digest Publication Board, for free distribution to Buddhist organizations in Malaysia (YBAM 1987: 56).

Chi Chern’s Vision for the Malaysian Chinese Communities and Buddhism

Chi Chern was frequently invited by Buddhist organizations to present academic papers on Buddhism in Malaysia. His research was derived from personal reflections

through rooted engagement with Buddhist communities. The main theme of his talks was the relationship between the Malaysian Chinese population and Buddhism. Chi Chern had been thinking about a form of Buddhism that would be more suitable for the Malaysian Chinese since the 1980s. His vision for Malaysian Mahayana Buddhism, which included such aspects as the introduction of meditation and Yinshun's thoughts regarding Buddhism, can be understood within the context of the Chinese communities in the 1980s and the early 1990s.

Chi Chern proposed that Buddhism should be a primary source of inspiration for Chinese tradition. He argued that religious factors were crucial for the community's maintenance of its cultural identity. Buddhism can play a role in the Malaysian Chinese population's expectations of cultural renewal. Buddhism can enhance the quality of the Chinese belief system through the removal of not suitable elements of traditional practices (Chi Chern 1995: 118). Chi Chern has written a series of articles that analyze the need for Buddhism in the Chinese communities. He contextualized Buddhism as an essential element for *Mahua Wenhua* (Culture of the Malaysian Chinese). *Mahua Wenhua* was an attempt by a group of intellectuals to seek the identity of the Chinese in a Muslim majority nation state through academic discussion. *Mahua Wenhua* was also an effort to counter the hegemony of Malay Muslims at the level of intellectual discourse.

Soul searching regarding the culture of the Malaysian Chinese became a golden opportunity for Buddhist groups to promote *Zheng Xin* Buddhism. Chi Chern criticized four types of Chinese individuals in terms of religion or Buddhism. These types of individuals were atheists, believers in superstition, utilitarians, and radicals. He highlighted the lack of religious teaching among Chinese Buddhists who were easily influenced by popular religions. Furthermore, Chinese religions have indirectly

encouraged gambling, especially spirit mediums bowed to the demands of their followers' gambling habits (Chi Chern 1995: 96-98). From 1983 to 1986, YBAM organized 9 seminars to explore the issue raised by Chi Chern (YBAM 1987: 55). These seminars demonstrated that reformist Buddhist groups have strategically responded to the Chinese communities' call for cultural renewal to seek recognition for religion in the community. Through seminars that provoked more discussion and debate in vernacular newspapers, Buddhist groups gained legitimacy from Chinese community leaders to rectify Buddhism as an important element of Chinese tradition. The reformists have fruitfully resurrected a positive image of Buddhism, and it has been accomplished through advocacy, so that the elements of Chinese religion practices labeled as superstition could be filtered.

The cultural reform movement of the Malaysian Chinese has continued into the 1990s. Buddhist activists have played a major role in religion and custom reformation. For example, the report from the committee in charge of this aspect was written by Ang Choo Hong, a well-known Buddhist activist. Yet again, the report condemned the wastage of ritual practices among believers of traditional Chinese religion (Ang 1998: 229).

Political Engagement of Buddhist Community

During the demonstration of The Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (BERSIH) in 2011, there was a nun who attended the gathering. Her eye-witness article was published online by *Malaysiakini* and *Merdeka Review*. The article was included in the BERSIH 2.0 demonstration special collection (Yong & Chan 2011). A year later, BERSIH 3.0 was organized to demand a fair election in Malaysia, and a group of Buddhists who were active members of YBAM called for Buddhists to support the

electoral reform. The ex-president of YBAM became the leader in mobilizing the *Buddhists for BERSIH*. What surprised the Chinese Buddhist community was the show of support by Venerable Chi Chern. In fact, he also participated in an Anti-Lynas rally by helping some protestors to cut their hair. The picture of him together with other monks and Buddhists as they walked and meditated on the street under the hot sun was circulated on *Facebook*.

The participation of 200 Buddhists in political demonstration in BERSIH 3.0 has marked the beginning of a new political engagement of Buddhism in Malaysia.¹⁰⁹ Today, the Buddhist identity can be drawn on in national political gatherings. When the group determined to join a street demonstration and put up a banner reading *Buddhists in Support of BERSIH 3.0*, there were objections among the Buddhist community. The counter argument by *Buddhists for BERSIH* to the criticism of the active political engagement of Buddhists was similar to what has been stated by the ex-president of YBAM at the 2004 Convention: “politics affect every aspect of living including development of Buddhism in the society. Buddhists and Buddhist organizations should be concerned regarding political developments and vote for a government that upholds freedom of religion” (Goh 2004, 29). In the next section, I will focus on how groups from Taiwan have embarked on different paths to revitalize and create new horizon and space for Chinese Buddhists.

¹⁰⁹ The political participation of Buddhists manifests itself in many forms globally. These include the enduring ethnic conflict of “Buddhism betrayed” in Sri Lanka (Grant 2009; Tambiah 1992; Wickremeratne 1995), the *Saffron Revolution* of “angry monks” in Burma (Smith 1965; U Maung Maung 1980), nationalist Buddhism in Tibet (Burman 1979; Schwartz 1994), “engaged Buddhism” in Vietnam (Topmiller 2002), and “political Buddhism” or “Dhammic socialism” in Thailand (Buddhadasa 1986; Jackson 1989; Smith 1978; Suksamran 1977 & 1982).



Figure 12 Venerable Chi Chern (Left no.2) at the Bersih 3.0 gathering. Source: Facebook, courtesy of Chong Kok Siong



Figure 13 Chi Chern was helping a protestor to cut her hair in an Anti-Lynas rally. Source: Malaysiakini (Chinese version), <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/217696>

The Experience of Fo Guang Shan's Celebration: Chinese New Year Lantern and Floral Festival

The Dong Zen Temple Chinese New Year Festival in Jenjarom has become an annual event and gained the Chinese mainstream media's attention. The festival has attracted mass participation since it began in 2004. According to news reports, this one month's festival in 2011, nearly a million people participated in the festival (Guang Ming Daily 2011b). I ate dinner in a hawker center near the temple before going to the venue, and the hawker center was crowded with non-villagers. Cars from nearby states were parked along the road. Buddhists from Negeri Sembilan and Melaka drove to Jenjarom merely to witness the famous lantern and floral exhibition. I recall a villager complaining to me that the festival did not benefit the economy of Jenjarom in the previous year, the temple had its own vegetarian stalls. In 2011, the visitors appeared to have to either eat in the vegetarian restaurant inside the Fo Guang Shan compound or have their dinner in restaurants and hawker centers along the main roads of Jenjarom. The number of Chinese restaurants in Jenjarom has increased rapidly in recent years to cater to the increase in pilgrim and tourist arrivals.

Fo Guang Shan's Chinese New Year Lantern and Floral Festival was a carnival of sorts. The carnival was similar to a Chinese New Year (CNY) funfair. Fo Guang Shan repackaged the traditional CNY holiday celebration with new elements to create a venue similar to an amusement park during the most important holiday for the Chinese communities. This creation was achieved through visual art exhibitions, lantern decoration, various activities, and the basic arrangement of a children's playground.

By 6:45 pm, many visitors had already arrived, although the lanterns had not been lit. I walked around the compound to gain an impression of this Lantern and

Floral Festival. I observed the twelve lunar animals of the Chinese zodiac in lantern form, as well as comic and cartoon characters placed at various locations. The festival was a visual art exhibition. Above my head were thousands of traditional Chinese lanterns. A wishing tree was hung with thousands of wishing cards. I was surprised when I saw that a ferris wheel had been set up in the Buddhist temple. A toy train and merry-go-round were also brought into the compound of the Buddhist temple specially for the event. Some young couples hold hand and mumbled on ears. The scene could have been very much like any CNY carnival, fun for the children, and romantic for young couples.

The Lantern and Floral Festival was also a family event. Most visitors came with their family members. I observed many elderly men and women walking with their families. Some were in wheelchairs. An event invented by Fo Guang Shan has provided a carnival atmosphere to which younger generations can bring family members from the older generation and that is meaningful for both generations. Young people could enjoy the floral and lantern exhibition, while older individuals could pray in the temple. It was an event during CNY and was attractive to all.

Young married couples with babies or children in tow also attended the festival. Children played, and some rode the ferris wheel, toy train, and merry-go-round. Most of the attendees took pictures with digital cameras or simply used mobile phones to conveniently capture the colorful scenery. The festival featured many traditional lanterns and delightful animal models. In addition to twelve Chinese lunar animals, there were cats, fish, penguins, dolphins, and some cartoon icons, such as fairy horses, Ultraman, Hello Kitty, and Pokemon. A laser-animated river covered with swimming fish was designed to generate a hallucinatory effect in its viewers. High-level technology was utilized to create this virtual reality. A giant earth-shaped

lantern communicated the message of environmental preservation which compatible with the theme in 2011 exhibition. The idea for this lantern and floral exhibition was adopted from the exhibition displayed in Taoyuan, Taiwan.

A boy beat a large drum near the door of the main shrine hall. Even though A sticker prohibited the beating of the drum was placed besides it. In the main shrine hall, an old woman asked a young man, “what god is in this temple?” The man replied, in Cantonese, “Sek Kah”, which refers to Sakyamuni. Some visited the organic food stalls to learn about healthy eating habits. There was also a book fair set up. The book exhibition was also crowded with book lovers or parents who searched for children’s books from a number of publishers. Many visitors simply wandered around the temple in a relaxed manner.

Five tourist buses were parked outside the temple. I remembered that once, my mother and aunts joined a tour group during the CNY to visit Fo Guang Shan. Because of this event, the main road has been broadened and tarred properly to accommodate the influx of guests from many places in Malaysia. Hence, this Buddhist temple in Jenjarom has played a key role as being the headquarters of Fo Guang Shan Malaysia and increasingly functioned as a popular Buddhist destination in the country, as with Kek Lok Si in Penang. However, Kek Lok Si is different. It is only a place for praying and blessing but Fo Guang Shan has gone beyond that function. Despite the relaxation and secularization of activities that characterize this place, Fo Guang Shan has remained a Buddhist organization that promoted a form of Buddhism that differed from Chinese popular religions.

At approximately 7:30 pm, when the sky was slowly darkening, the lanterns began to be slowly lit in one section after another. Visitors seemed surprised by this unexpected lantern lighting. Everyone raised their heads and stopped on the spot to

witness this magical moment during which the sky above our heads was turned into a web of red lanterns. I felt very excited. The lighting created a psychological effect deep in my body by stimulating my eyes with a red sea of traditional lanterns. During that short moment of lanternization, I heard of people expressing their shock by merely saying “wow, wow, wow.....”. Everyone was thrilled. The lighting was an ultimate climax that helped one to gain “nirvana” of CNY celebration. I had never before experienced a similar sensation during CNY.



Figure 14 Fo Guang Dong Zen Temple during the Chinese New Year Lantern and Floral Festival at Jenjarom, Selangor. Source: Fieldwork.

Tzu Chi’s Chinese New Year Relief

Tzu Chi’s charity work does not take holidays, even during CNY. A day before the Chinese New Year, an activity to gather all of the families that received support from Tzu Chi was organized at various branch locations. The aim of the activity was to let

the poor and needy enjoy a happy new year. The activity included performances prepared by volunteers, as well as a reunion dinner for everyone. The invited participants received a bag of everyday utilities and new year's foodstuff with which to celebrate the festival.

In 2010, a group of volunteers in Kuala Lumpur began a new project during the new year. After the reunion party, they went to the streets of the capital city to deliver clothes and food to street beggars, persons with mental disorders, elderly wanderers, disabled people, and unemployed foreigners. Many of those who have nowhere to go during CNY have touching stories. A member of Tzu Chi told me that those volunteers who joined this new year eve's relief effort would be more appreciative of themselves. For them, the meaning of the new lunar year would go beyond the new clothes, *ang pow*, entertainment, and abundance of food.

The Declining Role of Chinese Associations

During CNY, Chinese associations also organize activities for this important festival. Nonetheless, the associations predominantly led by the *towkay* (the Chinese mercantile elite) primarily have an open house for CNY too, and this activity usually functions as an occasion for members of the business class to interact with one another. National Chinese associations will also invite political leaders of the ruling party to deliver speech and join the celebration. Before the political tsunami of opposition coalition took over five states in 2008 election, MCA, Gerakan, and UMNO's leaders would usually join the activity. This type of annual activity has favored a limited number of people who are privileged in terms of business or politics. Buddhist organizations, such as Fo Guang Shan and Tzu Chi, have made available a more participatory space for all through their public activities.

Nonini (1998: 447 - 464) locates “authoritative ethnic spaces of Chinese society” at the local level at:

“temples, cemeteries, certain schools – are affectively marked. Access to them is regulated by the local Chinese mercantile – those whose concentration of economic, social, and cultural capital certifies them as legitimate “leaders” (*lingxiu*) and who are acknowledged as such by the state..... were connected imaginatively to one another and to the Chinese publics of the town through narratives produced by the regional Chinese-language press”.

In the 1990s, a disruption of these authoritative spaces occurred since the 1980s when Malaysia opened its economy to global capital (Nonini 1998: 465) and this triggered “the production of new transnational imaginaries” (ibid.466). For the middle class, they could participate in this new venture, utilized transnational paths, especially overseas education for their younger family members (ibid.456). However, for the poorer Chinese population, they remained unable to participate in the transnational paths like middle class. Hence, “they embody an alternative power” (ibid.463) through popular religious experiences of god worshipping and possession (ibid.467).

The *towkay* dominated in Chinese associations has insufficiently responded to the changing Chinese communities. This lack of response has opened up spaces for Buddhist actors in the “authoritative ethnic spaces of Chinese society”, and they increasingly attain authority in the society. The transnational flows of people, thought, and religion, among others, enriched the spaces that were once restricted by the state boundary. A transnational sphere created especially in the name of religion has allowed for the trickling in of new ideas, both religious and non-religious. The loosening of ethnic spaces’ existing power structure that once primarily dominated by

towkay, has mediated the inflow of transnational connections since the 1980s, which has further intensified in the 1990s and 2000s.

The Chinese population's feelings of being "stigmatized as non-indigenous and non-Muslim by the Malaysian state" (ibid.467) has lingered. The "condition of being stuck" (ibid) is ironically comforted by new Buddhist actors. The decline of local Chinese associations became a significant concern for the community during the 1980s and the early 1990s. The younger generation has stayed away from these associations, and they faced the problem of succession, with some, especially those in small towns, even closing down. The traditional role of provider of assistance faded from year to year with the social and economic transformation of the Chinese communities. With the aging of leadership and members, there was hardly any new initiative that be embarked upon. Local and overseas Buddhist groups have remedied the failure of the transformation of Chinese associations.

National-level Buddhist organizations have avoided the norm of allowing top positions in Chinese associations to be taken by *towkays*. In MBA, a president always reserves for sangha members, and this practice is written in the constitution. As made apparent by past candidates for the national council of YBAM, members of the intellectual were highly appreciated as leaders. The founding president of the YBAM, Tan Eng Kong, was a medical doctor and lecturer at the University of Malaya, the University of Sydney and the University of New South Wales. In 2011, the president, Ong See Yew, is also a doctorate holder. At the 11th National Council, 69% of the members had at least a college-level education (YBAM 1996: 68). This trend was in stark contrast to those of the other Chinese associations, which were led by rich businessmen and frequently experienced internal conflict before, during, and after office re-election.

Transethnic Solidarities

On Independence Day in 2011, the online media site *Malaysiakini* published a piece entitled “54th Merdeka in the shadow of ethnic distrust”. The commentator argued that “[a]s Malaysians mark the 54th anniversary of the country's independence, the usual pomp and pageantry comes at a time of increasingly tense ethnic and religious ties” (Yeow 2011). The report was referring to an earlier accusation that a church had attempted to proselytize Muslims. In Malaysia, it is illegal to proselytize to Muslims and such an act was seen by many to be bringing to task a sacrosanct Malay Muslim dominance in the country.

Racialization and the polarization of religion are the norms in contemporary Malaysia's social and political landscapes. The race-based political party system has caused competition and divisiveness among three major ethnic groups. The race riot on 13th May 1969 between Chinese and Malay is still a political landmark event that shaped the current context of racialization. Pro-Malay Muslim policies of the National Front (*Barisan Nasional*) are perceived as a source of inequality and uneasiness by non-Malay communities. Tzu Chi has embarked on “transethnic solidarities” charity projects in a timely manner.¹¹⁰ Mandal (2003) argued that the history of the Malay world featured invisible transethnic cultural politics and inclusiveness. Tzu Chi has demonstrated how to gently radiate “transethnic solidarities” through its charity wing.

This transethnic impulse has allowed non-Buddhists to benefit from Tzu Chi's social benevolence projects. Tzu Chi dialysis centers have supported many kidney patients of different ethnicities. There has been a lack of data collection on patients that these centers have treated. The official website reported that in September of

¹¹⁰ Fo Guang Shan also organized Malaya Tiger protection activity together with World Wild Fund for Nature (WWF) in 2010 to raise awareness in Malaysian society.

2006, there were 78 patients at the Tzu Chi Dialysis Center, which included 59 Chinese, 10 Malays, 8 Indians, and 1 of another ethnicity (Tzu Chi n.d.).

The organisation's KL branch has initiated an educational project called New Hope for the Young (*Xin Ya*), which will give pocket money to primary school children. The project is meant to help school children in poor families by sending letters to schools to seek recommendations from school headmasters for eligible candidate. Between 1998 and 2007, Tzu Chi received approximately 700 to 800 applications for fund every year, and 500 applicants were approved. Mr Lee who worked in Tzu Chi told me in an interview that "from 2008 onwards, volunteers in every community meet school headmasters personally in nearby areas and we open for everyone to apply. In year 2008, we received 3,000 applications and in 2010 we received 7,000 applications in Kuala Lumpur region. 70% of applicants are Indian children". Mr Lee said, "the application number showed that Indian community is being marginalized in Malaysia. In Sungai Buloh, some Indian members even initiated with their own effort and attracted more to participate in this project. After several years, almost all the villagers at that plantation area join the Tzu Chi".¹¹¹

In addition to Malays and Indians, the Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA) has embarked on a charity project to aid aboriginal people (*Orang Asli*) in Perak in 1998. Bukit Asu, a village of aboriginal people, *Orang Kintak*, is situated in the forest. The village contains approximately 40 families and 139 residents. The volunteers must travel for several hours along a rugged and bumpy hill road to reach the village, which is located in the mountains at an elevation of over 1000 m. A volunteer recalled that when they first arrived, the villagers shut their doors and stayed inside their houses. In the first visit villagers did not show up, so the

¹¹¹ From fieldwork note.

volunteers placed food in front of every family's door to allow villagers to collect when the volunteers left the village. After several trips to the village, the aboriginal people began to know Tzu Chi and started to interact with the volunteers. Another volunteer remembered that the children suffered serious malnutrition, were thin and weak with pale faces and running mucus. Since 2002, Tzu Chi has been providing medical teams to offer health education and free medication to the villagers (Tzu Chi Malaysia 2011 & 2012).

Tzu Chi's inter-ethnic policy for social welfare carries a deeper meaning in racialized Malaysian society. Chinese clan associations have been part of civil society in Malaysia for a long time. However, they are ethnic-oriented civic groups that only help Chinese communities by donating to the construction of Chinese schools, giving scholarships to Chinese school children, and voicing the political concerns of Chinese communities. The civic activities of Chinese clan associations have reinforced the social boundaries and narrow-mindedness of different ethnic groups. The non-religious approach of Tzu Chi in serving the poor beyond Chinese communities is crucial for breaking through the racial barricade. Tzu Chi is the only Buddhist group which has this type of programme. Indeed, members of Tzu Chi have been told not to press for a proselytization agenda. Their charity work emphasizes not Buddhism but merely a universal humanitarian message such as loving kindness to other people. Tzu Chi has been making a paradigmatic shift in overcoming the obstacle of ethnic prejudices and providing humanitarian love for all regardless of race and religion.

Malaysia has refused to endorse the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol. In 2007, the Foreign Ministry argued that signing the Convention would draw refugees to Malaysia because of its geographical location. According to *The Annual World Refugee Survey*, "Malaysia was placed in the Worst

category for its treatment of refugees and asylum seekers in 1995” and slightly improved in 2006 (Kaur 2007: 86). Refugees are perceived as illegal immigrants, and hence, they are either detained¹¹² and deported or exploited by employers who provide them with low wages and dire working conditions. Additionally, their children have no right to education. In 2006, there were approximately 152,700 refugees and asylum seekers in Malaysia.¹¹³

The collaboration of the UNHCR and Tzu Chi occurred unintentionally. This collaboration occurred in 2004 when a Tzu Chi volunteer applied to UNHCR for a referral medical letter to transfer a refugee who suffered a heart attack to another country. UNHCR then noticed Tzu Chi’s charity work, especially their medical services. During my interview with a Tzu Chi officer, he recalled that UNHCR was surprised by the ability of the organization to attract more medical doctors to participate in their medical services to the poor. The UNHCR in Malaysia has been attempting to seek volunteer medical practitioners to help refugees, but the response was far from satisfactory. Consequently, the first collaboration between Tzu Chi and UNHCR entailed sending volunteer doctors to the Myanmar Muslim Religious School in a refugee camp for the Rohingya ethnic minority, which is predominantly Muslim. UNHCR was impressed by Tzu Chi’s charity mobilization. In the subsequent year, UNHCR appointed the Tzu Chi KL branch as an official partner in providing medical and dental assistance on a monthly basis to the refugees and detainees in the detention camps under UNHCR’s concern. Because of this collaboration, Tzu Chi was invited to attend the 15th UNHCR Annual Consultation with NGOs in Geneva in 2006.¹¹⁴ In

¹¹² In the detention camp, the condition is usually ‘horrific’ (ibid.84).

¹¹³ According to UNHCR’s official website, “as of end October 2012, there are some 99,970 refugees and asylum-seekers registered with UNHCR in Malaysia”. http://www.unhcr.org.my/About_Us-@-Figures_At_A_Glance.aspx, accessed 15 January 2013.

¹¹⁴ Two representatives from Tzu Chi Malaysia were David Liu, the CEO of Tzu Chi Melaka and Singapore Branch, and Raymond Tan, Administrative Executive of Tzu Chi KL branch.

2007, UNHCR signed the second Memorandum of Understanding with Tzu Chi to continue medical care for refugees in detention camps in Malaysia.

Tzu Chi's medical aid has extended to all of the refugee communities around Kuala Lumpur. In addition to medical treatment and dental services, special home visits were also arranged to deliver food and clothing to refugees. These services were initiated because some families faced food shortages when husbands or fathers were unexpectedly detained by police and sent to detention camps. More astonishingly, Tzu Chi even sent volunteers to help refugees in the forest. During the devastating flood in Southern Malaysia in 2006, Tzu Chi activated its crisis relief's mechanism to rescue refugees in Kulai, Kota Tinggi and Kampung Melayu, where they were badly affected by the disaster. Tzu Chi provided food and financial assistance to the refugees in the affected areas when the rest of the country only focused on the emergency reliefs to Malaysians.

In addition, Tzu Chi embarked on an education project for the Myanmar Muslim Religious School. Tzu Chi KL has employed a Myanmar teacher to teach English and the Malay language at the school since 2005. The volunteers, all university students, "visited the children twice in a month to teach them about humanity, inculcate good habits, etiquette and helped out with their homework" (Tzu Chi Malaysia 2008). Moreover, Tzu Chi has jointly funded the medical treatment of two children, one who had congenital heart disease and Down's Syndrome and another who had congenital heart disease (ibid).



Figure 15 Tzu Chi volunteer provided monetary assistant to a Malay student to continue his education. Source: Tzu Chi



Figure 16 Tzu Chi volunteer helped a Malay woman. Source: Tzu Chi



Figure 17 Malaya Tiger protection activity gained support from different races.
Source: Fo Guang Shan

Exit Option Revisited

Nonini (1998) discussed how middle class Chinese Malaysians engaged with the “transnational venture”, especially by sending their children to study in a foreign country as an exit option from their limitations in a Bumiputera-controlled nation state. For poorer Chinese, popular religion was used as a similar exit option to escape from the feeling of being trapped by Malay Muslim dominated nation state. Chinese Buddhists have simultaneously become engaged with this notion of modernity, but express this engagement differently. To a certain extent, they are also increasingly replacing the traditional power class of *towkay* (businessman) and providing Chinese communities with a new manner of public participation that consists of cultural,

educational, and religious spaces. Buddhist activists, laypeople and clerics have played a larger role in Chinese communities. In comparison with religious elites, local Chinese mercantile elites lack new resources and higher morality for the advancement of Chinese communities. There is a shift in the Chinese communities as to how they define themselves.

Taiwan is more advanced in various respects such as in cultural, economical, and religious developments, and the religious connections with it has benefitted Malaysian Chinese communities. If Taiwan is officially recognized by the United Nation, it will be ranked 18th on the Human Development Index (The China Post 2011). It is the most democratic Chinese society among Chinese majority countries and, in the 1990s, became one among the earliest democratized societies in Asia. This society has not impressed the Chinese communities because of its higher GDP per capita in comparison with Malaysia. The society's success goes beyond wealth accumulation to progress in humanities and art. For an example, Malaysian Chinese literature (*Mahua Wenxue*) has been inspired by Taiwanese literature in terms of the aesthetics of language usage and the variety of the content of the literature. In fact, several authors from Malaysia gained recognition in Taiwan literature circles through winning awards. Publication of their works is common, whereas Chinese written literature is not recognized by the state as Malaysian literature. This lack of recognition exists because of the principle formulated in the National Cultural Policy (*Dasar Kebudayaan Kebangsaan*), in which the upholding of the national language is prioritized. In 2011, the Chinese-language books of four Malaysian authors written in Chinese were fully funded by the *Council for Cultural Affairs, Republic of China*

(*Taiwan*) for translation and publication in Japan.¹¹⁵ China citizens must apply for a visa to enter Malaysia, but Taiwanese are allowed 15-day visits.

The Buddhist transnational network is exploited for the development of Chinese communities. When they are sidelined by the state, Chinese communities obtain resources from overseas through religious connections when Malaysia started to open up for foreign investment. The religious connection with Taiwan has allowed the flow of new ideas, such as volunteerism, vegetarianism, environmentalism, music, art performance, publication, architecture, and palliative care. This connection is unlike the transnational connection mentioned by Nonini, which involved the older generation sending their children abroad for education and hoping that the younger generation could stay after graduation and have a better future in overseas. At this moment, the Buddhist transnational connection has placed hope in the homeland. The aim of the bond is to help the place of origin through learning and transplant new resources into the home country. The localization strategy of the Buddhist groups from Taiwan permitted these forms of assistance to occur.

Fo Guang Shan has a policy of appointing a Malaysian as the chief abbot in Malaysia. The first chief abbot for Fo Guang Shan Malaysia was Venerable Man Ya, who was born in Malaysia and specialized in counseling. She has written many articles for local newspapers and magazines. Under Man Ya's leadership, many talks and seminars were organized. New concepts or practices in counseling and palliative care were adopted by inviting experts from Taiwan. Venerable Jue Cheng, the new chief abbot, was recently transferred back to Malaysia from Brazil. She was born in Johor and trained in Taiwan. Jue Cheng gained valuable experience while in Latin

¹¹⁵ The series are called 'Tropical Literature in Taiwan' (*Taiwan Redai Wenxue*). This is initiated by a scholar in Taiwan to introduce Malaysian Chinese Literature. It is published by the major publisher in Japan, *Jimbun Shoin*. *Sinchew Daily*, 4 小說通過台灣譯成日文·馬華文學登陸日本 [Four Novels Translated into Japanese Language, Malaysian Chinese Literature Landed Japan], 7 November 2011, <http://www.sinchew.com.my/node/225937?tid=1>, accessed 11 November 2011.

America. She is more concerned with the political development of the country. When the judge announced that Teoh Beng Hock had neither committed suicide nor been murdered, she wrote a letter to Prime Minister Najib Razak in which she argued for justice for Beng Hock. Teoh Beng Hock was a political secretary of the opposition party who was found dead in the office of The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) after the interrogation. This case was highly politicized and sensational in the changing political landscape of Malaysia. Her social concern is evident from her previous experiences in Brazil where she started a programme to help street kids who involved in drug trafficking.

According to the World Bank Report, 800,000 to 1 million Malaysians resided overseas in 2010. Malaysia is one of the countries most affected by brain drain (World Bank 2011). Working in foreign countries has become a choice for middle-class Malaysians as an exit option especially for the Chinese and Indian communities. Buddhism has largely played the role of exit option for Malaysian Chinese. The meaning and level of the exit differ from Nonini's observations and the World Bank's observations of the migration trend. In the midst of migration momentum, Buddhist groups are actually making efforts to build a more suitable homeland for a better future for Malaysians. Malaysian Chinese Buddhists are providing alternative vision for Chinese communities in civic engagement. This exit option has focused on the home country rather than on leaving.

Summary

The first remaking attempt was championed by YBAM through organizational mobilization of Chinese Buddhist youth and was advanced by local second-generation religious leader Chi Chern. By taking up the cultural renewal movement within

Chinese communities in the 1980s, YBAM and Chi Chern skillfully reinterpreted the problem of Chinese religious culture and practices to conform to the *Zheng Xin* Buddhism that they advocated. Elite members of the Chinese communities' criticism of waste and meaninglessness in some customary religious practices was followed by Buddhist groups' promotion of a reformist form of Buddhism that differentiated itself from traditional Chinese religions. Reformist Buddhist groups took the opportunity to introduce Buddhism through Buddhist education, which included publication, dharma talks, camps, and intensive meditation courses. This first attempt culminated with the envisioning of an ideal Buddhist research and learning center. However, the creation of this center ended in failure after confrontation with the Muslim political authority.

The second remaking attempt was observed in some Fo Guang Shan and Tzu Chi initiatives in the late 1990s and the early 2000s. Resources from Taiwan were channeled to Malaysian Buddhist communities either in material or cultural form. As discussed in Chapter 4, Fo Guang Shan introduced Buddhist theatre performances with the investment of massive capital. Fo Guang Shan also embarked on the performance of Chineseness during the Chinese New Year through the celebration of the Floral and Lantern Festival. Tzu Chi also promoted volunteerism among Chinese Buddhists and transplanted its healthy living style for the Chinese Buddhists. These organizations have initiated some new manners and experiences of promoting Buddhism in Malaysia.

Tzu Chi has begun the third remaking attempt. This attempt involves the politics of transethnicity in a multiracial context. Tzu Chi has been localized in Penang, Kuala Lumpur, and Melaka, and in each of these locations, there is a different focus. However, the three centers make a similar transethnicity effort, which included the Penang branch's dialysis centers, Kuala Lumpur's new hope education fund, and

Melaka's charity work. With their non-Buddhist and non-religious emphasis, Tzu Chi has overcome the sensitivity of religious competition in terms of proselytization between Muslims and non-Muslims, as well as within non-Muslim communities. With this non-proselytization purpose, set by the headquarters office in Taiwan, Tzu Chi has enticed even more non-Buddhists into joining their charity endeavors.

Buddhist revitalization occurred because of the cultural and political crisis of Chinese communities. Buddhist groups, such as YBMA and MBA, have filled this vacuum by drawing on the spiritual moral sources of Buddhism to counter communities' social weaknesses. Fo Guang Shan and Tzu Chi have provided Malaysian Buddhism with new resources and ideas for promoting religious belief. Tzu Chi has shifted the nature of Malaysian Buddhism from racial demarcation to cross-ethnicity. This strategy has made the revitalization simultaneously racial and universal within the Malaysian context.

Malaysian Buddhism has been connected with the larger Buddhist world since colonial times. Within this intertwining history of Buddhist revitalization, the religious reconnection with Taiwan has been clear since the late 1980s. The influence of the Taiwanese scholar monk Yinshun is clear even in YBAM's self-strengthening efforts. Prior to the appearance of Fo Guang Shan and Tzu Chi, the second-generation local Malaysian-born religious leaders were trained and studied in Taiwan. The notion of *Zheng Xin* Buddhism was imported from Taiwan as well, and deeper historical roots could even be traced to Taixu in the Republican Period. Since the late 1980s, the Taiwan imprint has been far more important than the China imprint in many ways for Malaysian Chinese Buddhists. This connection with the outside world has complicated the revitalization that is inherent in political expression within and beyond the nation. In the next chapter, I will consider the counter trend of Buddhist

revitalization, especially because it has unavoidably challenged the traditional religious actors of Chinese communities.

Chapter 6

Counterforces of Buddhist Revitalization

Traditional Chinese religionists have from time to time sporadically responded to the aspirations of Buddhist revitalization. The rationalization of Chinese religion by reformist Buddhist groups has inevitably undermined the credibility of the practitioners of popular Chinese religion. This conflict of interest has caused reactions in a subtle way. Although these reactions have been unable to pose a serious challenge to *Zheng Xin* Buddhism, they have provoked reflection among reformist Buddhists after facing criticism from outside and within. In this chapter, I will use personal life episodes, media events, and fieldwork data to describe what I call the counterforces to Buddhist revitalization in Chinese communities. The forces can be seen especially in the common religious practices observed at important moments in the lives of traditional Chinese religionists.

Dreams about Father

After my father passed away, my family members repeatedly dreamed about him. These dreams occurred because my siblings chose a so-called Buddhist funeral for father. His funeral was the first Buddhist funeral in the history of my family. A week before the funeral, my grandfather had passed away and was ceremonially buried according to traditional Taoist funeral rites. The following notes were written by me within the first month after my father's funeral. I was acting as a dream collector and analyst for my family to find a satisfying explanation for these dreams. Reading the

notes, I realized that the dreams provided examples of the counterforces to Buddhist revitalization.

Mother's First Dream

In the dream, my father was at home. My mother was watching from a distance. She saw him dressed as usual in a polo shirt and long pant. However, he kept adjusting his pant upward, and there was a hole in the pant. There was no conversation.

My mother used to take care of my father. Her care extended to his attire. Another cause for the dream was Buddhist funeral practices. At a Taoist funeral, a large quantity of paper clothes will be burned for the deceased. In contrast, at a Buddhist funeral, this practice is not followed. Those individuals of the older generation who practice Chinese religion continue to believe that by burning the paper clothes, they are providing the dead with clothes to be used in the next world. My mother shared a similar view. A few months after my father's funeral, she told us that she regretted agreeing to the Buddhist funeral. Because we had neglected the practice of burning joss paper and clothes, she worried that he might face difficulties in the afterlife and that his difficulties could affect us. In traditional Chinese belief, when the ancestors are unhappy, they might cause misfortune for their living relatives.

Mother's Second Dream

Father was coming back. My mother asked, "are you coming back by bus?" Father replied, "I came back by boat". Then, Mother asked, "why like that?" (She meant why had he died suddenly). My father answered, "it was out of expectation," and he repeated, "it was out of expectation".

That dream occurred in the night that followed the *Sanqi* (the third week or the 21th day) of father's death. My mother "asked" my father during the noon prayers why he departed without saying anything. Father "replied" to her in the dream. She felt better after the dream. The means of transport father used to return home was a boat. According to mother, the soul must travel on a river with the guidance of the deities who control the different regions of the underworld. Therefore, for the next prayer, she prepared various types of funeral joss paper to enable him to use paper money to gain admission to various places in the underworld.

In addition to the resistance from the dream, the social pressure of relatives, friends, and neighbors disturbed my mother. She once told me that her eldest sister advised her that more joss paper should be burned for father because during the Buddhist funeral not a single piece of paper was offered. She encouraged mother to buy paper clothes and money to compensate for the missing elements of the Buddhist funeral. Generally, my relatives were more concerned about such material matters than the ritual, which had been ignored. No one criticized or questioned the Buddhist ritual, which was conducted by an eighty-year-old monk, except my uncle, who has special status in the family because he is a *feng shui* (geomancy) master. He determined the final direction of the coffin to be positioned in the grave for grandfather. The wrongly placed direction would bring bad fortune for the family. He continually told my mother and siblings about the significance of the Taoist funeral based on his experiences or those of his friends. According to him, only a Taoist funeral could provide a wholesome and proper ritual. In contrast, the Buddhist way was not sufficient to appease the dead. The grumbling of relatives could be understood because they had just passed through a traditional Chinese death ritual

themselves. Suddenly, the next funeral was significantly different from the previous one. In other words, the Buddhist funeral was a cultural shock for them.

My mother's friends hold views similar to those of her non-Buddhist relatives. A neighbor whispered to her that those who are buried according to Buddhist funeral rites would remain at the temple without their own property in the underworld. He meant that my father had to share a dormitory at the temple and would not have his own house. For older individuals, the dream of owning a house is highly important, and they usually strive to buy a house as a part of self-fulfillment in life. Therefore, a traditional funeral would include a paper bungalow for the deceased and two paper servants. A paper bungalow could cost from a few hundred to tens of thousands *ringgit Malaysia* depending on the quality and size of the "property". She planned to burn one for my father after a year. My siblings told her that we should first ask the opinion of the monk who performed the ritual to avoid infringing on any "Buddhist taboo". However, most often, under the pressure from relatives and friends, we simply allowed her to burn paper money and daily-use items in subsequent prayer sessions to stop the criticism.¹¹⁶

Case 2: A Battle between Traditional Chinese Religion and Buddhism at Kampung Baru Jenjarom, Kuala Lumpur

Kampung Baru Jenjarom is 49.1 km from the capital of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur. It is a small village with approximately 11,267 Chinese, 1,733 Malays, and 2,060 Indians according to the 2010 Census Report.¹¹⁷ This small village is well known for its Fo

¹¹⁶ I would argue that this case presented could be applied to those families with a background of Taoist and subsequently become a Zheng Xin Buddhist. When their elders passed away and the younger generation members decided to organize a Buddhist funeral, the similar dreams might occur in the alive members who are still strongly influenced by Taoist practices.

¹¹⁷ Malaysian Government, Census 2010, Pihak Berkuasa Tempatan (Local Authority), Negeri Selangor, p.181.

Guang Dong Zen Temple. On 25 October 2010, I went to Jenjarom to visit the Fo Guang Shan temple. An unexpected field encounter inspired me to investigate the religious practices of Jenjarom's Chinese communities.

On the Monday that I visited the temple, the temple was not open. Unlike most Chinese temples, this temple has formal opening hours and I was disappointed after travelling over two and a half hours to get to Jenjarom by public transport. I decided to have lunch at a nearby coffee shop. The diners at the coffee shop spoke in Hokkien. I was surprised. I had thought that the residents of Jenjarom would speak Cantonese, assuming they belonged to the large Cantonese-speaking community in Kuala Lumpur.

After lunch, I walked around the village. Surprisingly, there were many Chinese temples and I randomly visited the temples. I thought that with the coming of the multinational Buddhist group, the Chinese villagers in Jenjarom most likely would be influenced by Fo Guang Shan's version of Buddhism, which upholds relatively more committed Buddhist followers who only pray to the Buddha.

I visited the *Wan Shou Gong* temple. The main god of the temple is *She Fu Da Ren*, called *Da Ren Gong* by the villagers. This Chinese deity is the same deity as that of the temple near my childhood house in Penang. According to the person in charge of temple (*miao zhu*), the temple was once resided by a monk named Xing Kong from Klang, Kuala Lumpur. A hundred years ago, this Taoist temple was formed by the villagers by merging four smaller temples. The decision to merge all the temples in the village was made to reduce the burden on the villagers.

According to Mr Ang, a 60-year-old temple assistant, "Jenjarom was a new village created by British resettlement policies. There were communists in the nearby jungle. The economic activity of Jenjarom was mainly rubber in the early years of

settlement. In the 1960s and 70s, coffee replaced rubber, and in the 1980s and 90s, palm oil was the main agricultural product. From 1992 to 1996, many villagers were getting richer because of the booming share market”.¹¹⁸ He added that, “there are approximately 30 to 40 Chinese temples in this small town, which has around 20,000 people. All types of temples with different deities are mushrooming in this area. Now, the vision of the older generation of merging the four temples to have one representative temple has been forgotten. From time to time, new temples and deities have just come and gone. However, *Wan Shou Gong* is still the oldest Chinese temple in Jenjarom. Therefore, it organizes the annual Hungry Ghost Festival and provides the venue for the celebrations”.

The Chinese traditional temples in Jenjarom have responded to the challenge posed by new Buddhism. They have adopted a new way of running the temple. *Wan Shou Gong* has set up a committee for charity, the *Wan Shou Gong Charity Fund*. Many charity activities are organized by the temple committee to help the poor and needy. In addition, there is a plan to build a new temple to replace the old wood temple. The architectural design was posted on a notice board outside the temple, and a donation drive was launched to collect building funds. The old wood temple will be demolished and replaced by new brick building consisting of a traditional temple that combines a hall and main shrine.

Another villager I met said, “the number of local villagers who go and worship in the Fo Guang Shan temple are much fewer. Most of the Fo Guang’s devotees are outsiders from different parts of Malaysia and even from foreign countries”. I spoke with another villager, who confirmed the preceding statement by saying, “I seldom go to Fo Guang’s temple. I only go there for exercise. Fo Guang allows villagers to go

¹¹⁸ From an interview with Ang Xing Quan, a 60-year-old temple assistant. Due to his illness, that day was his last day on duty.

jogging there”. There is a walking path that could be used as a running track. One young man sitting outside the temple emphasized, “*Wan Shou Gong* is the most important temple in Jenjarom”. Oddly, this statement was repeated several times when I mentioned Fo Guang Shan. The statement reflects the dynamism between Fo Guang Shan and the local Chinese temples.

Although there is a sense of competition, at the same time, the villagers seemed to welcome Fo Guang Shan. One villager said, “in the past, Jenjarom was famous for its secret society and criminal activities. Now, people know Jenjarom because of Fo Guang Shan”. I was intrigued by his statement. This individual intentionally compared the secret society with the sacred temple. Perhaps the tolerant attitude reflects the circumstances and sentiments of the Chinese worshippers in this village. A young man spoke in Hokkien, “there is no competition per se. Worship more than one deity, and you will get multiple protection”. DeBernardi observed in Penang that,

“the use of religion to construct identity, value, and a sense of belonging in the idiom of the sacred is deeply rooted in the historical experiences of the Penang Chinese. When Chinese emigrated from southeastern China to this colonial port city...., Chinese freely borrowed from these ethnic others, transforming their own style of life, but many remained loyal to the practices of their religious culture, which blended ancestor worship with cosmological and ethnical frameworks derived from Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism” (DeBernardi 2004:2).

The villagers I talked to invited me to a *Guanyin* (Goddess of Mercy) birthday celebration in the village that night. One villager said it was the most excited and

crowded (*lau juak*)¹¹⁹ moment for Jenjarom. Most villagers would participate in the celebration. Some of the popular activities organized by Fo Guang Shan were attended by its followers from the greater Klang area. Certain activities even caused traffic congestion in the village, and because Mahayana Buddhists are vegetarian, the Fo Guang Shan's temple activities did not significantly benefit the hawker center and coffee shops in the village that sold non-vegetarian food. The celebration of the Goddess of Mercy's birthday remained the most important religious event for the villagers, which indicates that the popular form of Chinese religion is still more significant than the distinctive form of Buddhism promoted by Fo Guang which eschewed large scale ritual activities. This is because the traditional religious culture also "encompasses an imaginative and poetically compelling cosmology, mythology, and theocracy, some elements of which we may trace back for millennia in Chinese history" (DeBernardi 2004: 8).

Although Fo Guang Dong Zen Temple stands as an iconic temple in Jenjarom, the old Chinese temple is more important to the villagers. After 20 years, Fo Guang temple has not taken root in Jenjarom. In contrast, the old Chinese temples are a main part of the villagers' lives. Fo Guang temple could not integrate in the Chinese communities in Jenjarom as the other Chinese temples could and had more outsider than local devotees. However, in terms of the spiritual aspect that attracted villagers, it could not compete with the local deities. The temple has yet to be integrated in the local social, economical, and political networks. Furthermore, Chinese religious culture does not only "reproduces traditional structures of thought and practice, but it also enters into social process, including the identity project of modernity" (DeBernardi 2004: 4).

¹¹⁹ This Hokkien tem is difficult to translate this term into English. It refers to a happy occasion with communal gathering and celebration.



Figure 18 Wan Shou Gong at Jenjarom. Source: Fieldwork.

Case 3: The Urban Miracle of the Talking Buddha Statues

In the early 2011, news of talking Buddha statues shocked Malaysia's Chinese Buddhist community. A group of Buddhists claimed to have witnessed Buddha statues opening their mouths. Some alleged that they observed the statues beaming and breathing. The news was reported in the Chinese newspapers with an interview, and some video clips were posted on YouTube¹²⁰. The urban miracle occurred at the Pu Xian Service Center at Jalan Raja Laut near Bukit Bintang, the golden-triangle commercial area located at the center of Kuala Lumpur.

¹²⁰ Video Clip about Talking Buddha Statue 1, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qpqn4walgJl&feature=related>; accessed 4 January 2012. Video Clip about Talking Buddha Statue 2, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g6pzOXPNpvg&feature=related>; accessed 4 January 2012.

The incident first occurred on the eve of the Chinese New Year. However, only a few worshippers witnessed it. The incident recurred three weeks later. On that day, 20 to 30 individuals noticed that Buddha statues were talking, which then attracted approximately one hundred additional people from the other floors, who proceeded to the second floor to observe the miracle. According to the report, four Buddha statues, each weighing approximately 100 kg, were either talking, beaming, or breathing. One witness heard the talking Buddha chanting a sutra (Guang Ming Daily 2011c).

The YouTube videos spread quickly. They were shared and reposted by Facebook users who were amazed by the extraordinary amateur video of the talking Buddhas. The videos showed the Buddha statues opening their mouths. One statue was emitting blue rays of light. In another video, the eyes of a bronze Buddha were winking. Some videos were not clear because the shaking of the cameras caused the images to tremble. Because of the instability and irregular shooting angle, the images appeared real. Therefore, the amateurishness of the recording helped to authenticate the videos and the events they showed. For this reason, the videos were popular among Facebook users. The use of new media such as YouTube and Facebook to broadcast the event sensationalized the astounding phenomenon.

I refer to this event as an urban miracle because the incident occurred in a city and possessed a miraculous or supernatural element. The event was highly significant within the context of the Buddhist revitalization that has dominated the religious landscape of Malaysian Chinese. When a journalist contacted MBA for an explanation, the national Buddhist organization refused to comment. Surprisingly, the defender of *Zheng Xin* Buddhism YBAM was also silent and did not issue a press

statement, although the organization frequently issued statements under similar circumstances in the past to clarify the so-called misguided teachings of Buddhism.

This reticence occurred because the center has been perceived as part of the larger discourse of *Zheng Xin* Buddhism. The name of the centre is qualified as a *Zheng Xin* group to most Chinese Buddhist. Pu Xian¹²¹ is a popular Bodhisattva in Chinese Mahayana Buddhism. The Pu Xian Service Center was established 30 years ago with the aim of following the path of the Bodhisattva. At the temple, only Mahayana and Theravada Buddha statues are worshipped. The four Buddha statues that could “talk” were purchased from Thailand. There were no other traditional Chinese deities at the temple. The temple has organized various charities to help the poor and needy as a way of practicing Buddhism. The center participated in the annual Wesak Day celebration organized by YBAM and Sinhala Buddhist Maha Vihara in Kuala Lumpur. Therefore, to judge from appearance and certain practices, such as meditation, monks robe offering, the Wesak Day celebration, and charity work, the temple fulfilled the criteria of *Zheng Xin* Buddhism. Therefore, the center was accepted as a participant in the larger discourse of Buddhist revitalization.

The person-in-charge of the temple, Tony Chew, was speaking the language of *Zheng Xin* Buddhism when he was interviewed by the mass media. He told the press that the miraculous incident occurred because the practice of the followers in the centre was compatible with the teaching of the Buddha and Bodhisattva. Moreover, a witness to the incident spoke the similar language of a follower of the *Zheng Xin* discourse. She said that the miracle showed the existence of dharma in this world. Postings on the temple’s Facebook fan page were further examples of the Buddha’s

¹²¹ Pu Xian is called Samantabhadra in Sanskrit.

teaching. They emphasized compassionate love to others and the impermanence of the world we inhabit. For example, one posting encouraged the believers as follows to:

“purify the mind, charity, control of mind, self-restraint, selfless service, study of the religious scriptures, practice of morality, cleanliness, contentment, austerity, self-surrender to Lord Buddha, and meditation. Then a new kind of indescribable bliss will dawn in you. You will be convinced of a supersensual spiritual bliss. You will have to feel this spiritual bliss yourself. You will have to eat it yourself”.¹²²

In addition to the interview that appeared in a national daily, several video clips were posted on YouTube by the witnesses.¹²³ The urban miracle was filmed with mobile phones. In a city such as Kuala Lumpur, the use of iPhone or other multifunctional handphone is common. Using state-of-the-art technology to capture a miracle signified an act of rationalization process. At the same time, the video makers knew that the paranormal phenomenon was unacceptable in contemporary times. Filming the miracle by using high-tech tools powerfully portrayed the scientism of the modern world. In this way, the unscientific aspect of the miracle was justified, at least for those who believed in the supernatural. Hence, the event orchestrated a perfect urban miracle.

Multiple Counterforces to the Buddhist Revitalization

Buddhist revitalization in Malaysia is a struggle between different cultural and religious actors in the Chinese communities. The criticism of Chinese religions by

¹²² Pu Xian Service Center, “Spiritual Bliss”, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/350501689271/>; posted 27 October 2011 at 8:58 p.m.; accessed 4 January 2012.

¹²³ Talking Buddha Clip 3, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f7zvKOTtnPI>; accessed 5 January 2012. Talking Buddha Clip 5, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zcczASmxdVY&feature=related>; accessed 5 January 2012. Miracle of Talking Bronze Buddha Statue in Puxian Buddhist Mission, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRwEBI3qjEI&feature=related>; accessed 5 January 2012. Buddha statue in Puxian, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4oP5FpGHTWw&feature=related>; accessed 5 January 2012. Miracle at Puxian Buddhist Mission 5 (Blue light emitted by Buddha); <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXXULOMYIEU>; accessed 5 January 2012. Miracle at Puxian Buddhist Mission 4, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7JDvXyq9D8>; accessed 5 January 2012. Miracle in Puxian Buddhist Mission 6, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eSB22UQ6WLg>; accessed 5 January 2012.

reformist Buddhist groups has the intention of strengthening the communities through religious efforts. Malaysian Buddhist organizations and those from Taiwan have jointly contributed to the prosperity of the Buddhism they promote. However, the traditional Chinese religions have been involuntarily undermined by the larger force of Buddhist revitalization. In facing this challenge, traditional Chinese religious practitioners have expressed an unwillingness to conform to religious standardization.

The counterforces in Chinese religion are expressed on two levels, the personal and the communal. On the personal level, the feeling toward traditional Chinese religion remains valid for those who come from families that practice ancestor worship. Buddhism, traditional Chinese religion, and culture are not mutually exclusive categories. On the everyday level, Chinese Buddhists practice and share various cultural traditions that are interwoven with ancestor worship and Chinese religions. Ancestor worship is part of the larger religious worldview of Chinese culture. Furthermore, the religious worldview includes Chinese religions. Therefore, Chinese culture and Chinese religion are inseparable, and the practice of Chinese religions is the practice of Chinese culture.

This reciprocity between Chinese culture and religions is shown through the severe distress among my family members and friends over the decision to conduct a Buddhist funeral ceremony for my father. The Buddhist funeral was invented on the initiative of reformist Buddhist groups in recent years. The funeral is conducted by a Buddhist monk, and the entire ceremony consists of the chanting of the Heart Sutra (*Prajñāpāramitā Hrdaya*). The stories of bringing the deceased to cross a river from this world to the next, breaking the door of hell, drinking a cup of water to forget everything in this world, and the burning of paper clothes, a house, and money on behalf of the deceased are omitted in the Buddhist ceremony. The traditional Taoist

funeral that incorporates the images of Chinese culture, deities, and popular epics is considered more authentic by those who still believe in traditional funeral than the recently created Buddhist funeral.

On the communal level, Chinese religions maintain their authority even while being attacked as superstitious by Buddhist reformist groups and certain Christian denominations. In Jenjarom, in addition to the popular deities, there are newly resurrected deities, some of whom are part of local cultural practices, such as *dato keramat*, and some deities are wholly imported from overseas either from Taiwan or China. These deities appear because of public demand. For example, the spirit mediums¹²⁴ in the temples predict numbers for lottery gamblers and tell fortunes that pertain to everyday, cyclical or important life moments of worshippers. The worship of Chinese deities is a form of low-cost psychological counseling session for certain individuals. Usually, it is free of charge or just need to give a small *angpow* to the medium. Therefore, this type of traditional religious authority performs specific tasks for the community.

The case of Fo Guang Shan in Jenjarom shows that the traditional Chinese religion and reformism Buddhism can coexist. As the oldest temple in the village, *Wan Shou Gong* has been rooted in the villagers' everyday life in various ways. It owns a piece of land that is used as a hawker center under the shade of large trees. The temple is always open to villagers who wish to gather for relaxation, discuss important matters, and gossip about village happenings. The temple functions as a religious facility, an eating place, and a community center. It is a popular location in the village for spiritual, communal, and emotional sharing. The traditional religious actors are grounded in the lives of the villagers from one generation to the next.

¹²⁴ DeBernardi (2006: 38) argues that spirit mediums can play in the role of “folk healer, moral guide, inventive performer, and charismatic leader” for the local community.

Religious life and village life are entwined in various ways. At the identity level, the Chinese religious practitioners also “localize, perform, interpret, and transmit an understanding of Chinese history, philosophy, and cosmology through diverse media of local religious culture, including temples, festivals, sacred texts, and ritual performances” (DeBernardi 2004: 9).

The traditional Chinese temple has performed the function of reproducing Chinese culture. It has strong ties with Chinese identity formation, “transmission and construction of tradition, historical myth, social memory and the embodiment of a traditional [habit]” (DeBernardi 2006: 7). Certain religious festivals at the temple are connected with Chinese education, whereby the festival becomes a fund-raising event for Chinese schools. This bond with Chinese education contributes to ethnic identity-building and consolidation through the religious call for donations to support Mandarin education when such education is marginalized by the Malay-speaking state. Therefore, the traditional religious actors produce the ethnic identity of the community through a complex social network. The traditional religious institution has maintained community social connections that are advantageous to community continuity. Based on a position of privilege established long before the Buddhist revitalization movement began, Chinese folk religions continue to exist despite the unsympathetic trials imposed on them by forces of modernity because they are “a structured cosmology, a form of social memory, and a social process” (DeBernardi 2004: 12).

The encounter of Chinese folk religion with the new trend of religious rationalization has caused traditional Chinese practitioners to adapt and innovate their beliefs in various ways, such as to increase charity work, textualize their teaching, and be involved in environmental conservation. At the same time, Chinese folk religious

institutions maintain their traditional functions, such as playing a shamanistic role in advising troubled worshippers, providing a communal center for a village or residential area, and playing an essential part in the maintenance of Chinese culture. They “are engaged in an ongoing dialog with modernity” (DeBernardi 2006: 14).

Many aspects of the traditional Taoist funeral have been changed to accommodate Buddhist reformist ideals of minimalisation. Five days after my grandfather’s Taoist funeral, the piece of sackcloth pinned on one’s sleeve as a sign of mourning was removed and burnt. During the 1980s, all family members had to wear that piece of cloth for 49 days, 100 days, 1 year or even 3 years. In addition, the color of the cloth during the first five days of the funeral has changed from black to white, and wearing blue jeans is now permissible. Many aspects of the ritual have been simplified while meaningful actions have been maintained by which the family members to share in bidding farewell to a loved one. The decoration of the funeral hall has become more colorful. Formerly, the decoration was predominantly black, which intensified the sadness. Some of the innovations in ritual have been copied from Taiwan. At the end of the funeral, the Taoist priest asks the family members to shout “*huat ah, huat ah, huat ah*”. These words are dialect, and they pray that good fortune will visit the family after the funeral. The phrase is usually used during the Chinese New Year celebration. However, it can now be used at a funeral.

Counterforces within Chinese Buddhism

There is always an extraordinary dimension to the Buddha and Bodhisattvas in the various ways in which they are interpreted in Buddhist sutras. This customary extraordinariness is why when the incident of the talking Buddha statues occurred, the general Buddhist communities remained silent. In addition, it explains how a

miraculous moment, media attention, a city, current technology, the educated class in the capital city, and the language of *Zheng Xin* Buddhism were able to orchestrate an urban miracle. Chinese Mahayana Buddhism, is a complex religious system formed by various traditions over a long period. Within Chinese Buddhism, there are various schools of thought. Moreover, there is lack of a single authority to alleviate any confusion, and there are many forms of Buddhism rather than one. These circumstances have enabled the rise of counterforces that contest *Zheng Xin* Buddhism.

In 1982, there was an interesting debate between Chi Chern and the followers of Tibetan Buddhism. As an acting editor of the Buddhist magazine *Everlasting Light*, he published an article that criticized Tibetan Buddhism harshly (Chi Chern 1982: 1-5). Chi Chern based the argument on studies of Tibetan Buddhism using the sources from Chinese Mahayana Buddhism. He contended that the attitude of Tibetan learners was incorrect because they were seeking a shortcut to nirvana, acquire supernatural powers, and to become rich (ibid. 2&3). In Chi Chern's view, certain Tibetan masters were irresponsible to their disciples because the masters simply introduced a method and then left the country, which resulted in misconceptions and malpractice by some of their disciples. He concluded by advising all Buddhist organizations to avoid organizing Tibetan Buddhist activities (ibid. 4). With the article, Chi Chern attached three sets of his personal correspondences in which he discussed Tibetan Buddhism with Yinshun, Sheng Yan, and a famous scholar in Taiwan, Lan Jifu, all of whom hold a similarly negative perception of the tradition. Chi Chern (1985: 95) expressed his worry about the emergence of Tibetan Buddhism in Malaysia. This concern can be understood because Tibetan Buddhism only arrived in Malaysia in the mid-1970s

with the spread of the Karma Kagyu Sect. For Mahayana Buddhism, the sect was still new in the early 1980s.

The labeling of Tibetan Buddhism as *mijiao* (mystical religion) paralleled the existing perception of Chinese Mahayana Buddhism. The promoter of *Zheng Xin* Buddhism, Yinshun, has argued that one factor leading to the demise of Buddhism in India was the trend of mystifying Buddhism (Yinshun 1987: 305-326). Another famous monk, the founder of Dharma Drum Mountain, Sheng Yan (1997), took a similar position in his book on the history of Buddhism in India. The stigmatization of *mijiao* has been passed down and attached to Tibetan Buddhism. Chi Chern was closely involved with Yinshun and Sheng Yan in a teacher and disciple relationship at different stages of his life.

In the 2000s, Tibetan Buddhism is recognized by Buddhist communities in Malaysia. It is represented by a national organization, the Vajrayana Buddhist Council of Malaysia. Some of the groups have been invited by MBA to join the Wesak Day procession. The groups have been attracting different segments of the Chinese Buddhist community, particularly businesspersons who believe the mystical power of certain masters can bring them wealth. Nonetheless, this form of esoteric Buddhism tends to attract followers of traditional Chinese religion and “[t]heir appeal to Malaysian Buddhist is reinforced by local beliefs and practices that give precedence to mystical experiences and deity devotion” (Lee and Ackerman 1997: 76).¹²⁵ In the 2000s, reformist Buddhist groups have accepted this tradition of Buddhism that employs mantras, mandalas, mudras, and initiation rituals for those who seek protection, wealth, health, longevity, and good fortune. There is a doctrinal relaxation

¹²⁵ Lee and Ackerman (1997: 76) argue that “the rationalization of tantrism has developed only to a limited extent, while charismatic aspects continue to predominant. The majority of lamas sponsored by Vajrayana centres in Malaysia devote most of their time to performance of initiations, healings, exorcism, protective rituals, and personal consultations”.

of *Zheng Xin* Buddhism within Buddhist communities facing competition from the magical form of Chinese religions, Tibetan Buddhism, and new syncretic religions bearing the name of Buddhism. Certain scholars have proposed the understanding of folk Buddhism (*Minsu Fojiao*) in contrast to only perceiving Buddhism as an elite religion (Gu 1993; Wang 2007; Li 1996; Zürcher 1997). Folk Buddhism is a belief system that incorporated elements of Buddhism in popular religion and that is practiced by individuals who believe in gaining worldly benefit from the deity. The YBAM magazine *Buddhist Digest* published a special issue discussing the relationship of Buddhism with Chinese folk belief (Buddhist Digest 1996). The acceptance of folk Buddhism shows that reformist Buddhist groups realize the limitations of and the extent to which *Zheng Xin* Buddhism can advance in the Chinese cultural context.

The Relaxation of Political Correctness in Zheng Xin Buddhism

In 2006, The Malaysian Buddhist Consultative Council (MBCC)¹²⁶ disapproved of an exhibition entitled “*The Relics Expo of the Buddha and His Chief Disciples*” organized by the Kuala Lumpur Kadhampa¹²⁷ Buddhist Association. The Council questioned “the authenticity of the large number of relics being promoted to the public” and “appealed to the Buddhist and public not to support the event nor attend the relics expo”.¹²⁸ In 2010, the exhibition was organized again, and the same groups disagreed with it. The venue of the exhibition was Bukit Jalil, the largest stadium in

¹²⁶ The council is composed of MBA, YBAM, the Buddhist Missionary Society, the Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society, Fo Guang Shan Malaysia, Tzu Chi Malaysia, and the Vajrayana Buddhist Council of Malaysia.

¹²⁷ Kadhampa was a new branch of a sect split from the Yellow tradition in Tibetan Buddhism. The tradition was highly controversial even in its Tibetan homeland. However, with the internationalization of the group, it has become a popular form of Tibetan Buddhism among overseas devotees.

¹²⁸ “Malaysian Buddhist Coordination Committee disapproves ‘Relics Expo of the Buddha & His Chief Disciples’”, *The Buddhist Channels*, 18 October 2006, <http://www.buddhistchannel.tv/index.php?id=56,3303,0,0,1,0>; accessed 12 January 2012.

Malaysia.¹²⁹ This time the growing popularity and strength of the Kadhampa Buddhist Association in Malaysia enabled it to fight back against the accusations. Before the exhibition, a large sum of money was spent to advertise in a national newspaper for many days to inform the public. The association succeeded in creating interest among Chinese Buddhists about the opportunity to view the “Buddha relics”. Visitors flooded the exhibition. The association claimed that the relics exhibition was the world’s largest. The theme was “Millennium Secret”.¹³⁰

Hui Jixiang, the guiding abbot of the Kadhampa in Malaysia, publicly urged the Malaysian Buddhist communities to tolerate different opinions and Buddhist traditions. He invited all of the Buddhist organizations that opposed his group to meet and discuss their differences. In a press statement to counter the attack, the Kadhampa Association argued that they belong to *Zheng Xin* Buddhism and so-called *Zheng Xin* Buddhist groups should firmly follow the Buddha’s teaching by not criticizing other Buddhists. MBCC maintained its position that Buddha relics are sacred objects and should not be used to solicit material and monetary donations. In responding to the challenge of Kadhampa, the YBAM, organized a discussion forum on how to differentiate real from fake relics. The speakers at the discussion were the chief abbot of Fo Guang Shan Malaysia, Venerable Jue Cheng, and a Rinpoche of traditional Tibetan Buddhism from Tibet, Chagtrul Thupten Thinley Rinpoche.¹³¹

In 2008, a new Buddhist sect known as *Zhen Fo Zong* (*The True Buddha School*) was founded by Lu Shenyan, who claimed to be a living Buddha consecrated by Gautama Buddha, Amitabha Buddha, Maitreya, and the founder of Tibetan

¹²⁹ Poster of the exhibition from the association’s official website, <http://www.kadhampa.com/RelicsEvent2009-1.html>, accessed 12 January 2012.

¹³⁰ According to the official website of Kadhampa, Buddha left 84,000 relics and the relics could replicate into a billion. See the official website of the Kadhampa Buddhist Association, <http://www.kadhampa.com/relics.html>; accessed 12 January 2012.

¹³¹ Lao Huang, “The issue of Buddha relics”, *Fa Qing*, 26 December 2011, <http://www.faqing.org/forum/viewtopic.php?t=7914>; accessed 12 January 2012.

Buddhism, Padmasambhava. However, Lu Shenyang was accused of having no official recognition as a living Buddha from any Tibetan tradition. The cult was banned in China and it was labeled as a non-Buddhist sect by Buddhist communities in Taiwan. *The True Buddha School* arrived in Malaysia in 2011. It used a commercial advertising strategy to propagate its activities and accumulate donations from followers. The founder, who was a married man, announced to the public that he was the Buddha. He collected donations through auctions, selling his used cap for USD300,000 and his clothing for USD100,000.

MBCC issued a press statement advising Buddhists from Theravada, Mahayana, and Tibetan Buddhism to avoid the “wrong teaching” of the group. They urged Buddhist organizations in Malaysia to publish more books and magazines to promote *Zheng Xin* Buddhism to lessen the influence of the mistaken cult. *The True Buddha School* was accused by the Buddhist groups of promising the attainment of wealth through donations and encouraging the use of sexual relations to cure disease and change bad fortune.¹³² An article about the sexual misconduct of Lu Shen Yan was circulated on the Internet, in which a woman in the United States accused Lu Shen Yan of harassment and took the case to court.¹³³

Despite the firm stand of the Buddhist groups, there was independent reflection by certain Buddhist activists. A coordinator of a Buddhist forum, Lao Huang, posted the press statement from the Buddhist organizations and started a discussion by criticizing the manner in which the Buddhist communities responded to *The True Buddha School*. He emphasized the importance of not overreacting to the new religion. The way in which the national Buddhist organizations rejected the new

¹³² Lao Huang, “Seven Buddhist Groups Urge Government to Stop Cult”, MBA, <http://www.mba.net.my/BuddDatabase/MainFrame-Budd-Database.htm>; accessed 9 January 2011.

¹³³ “The Court Case of Lu Shen Yan Accused by a Woman in the United States of Harassment”, a blog entitled *Zheng Fa Chang Zhu*, http://unveilufowaidao.blogspot.com/2008/07/blog-post_4412.html; accessed 9 January 2012.

religion was questioned by an anonymous user known as Upatissa, who called for self-reflection. Upatissa asserted that the harsh rejection of the new religion would help the religion to gain more publicity and sympathy, which was how the Unity Sect prospered despite the intense pressure imposed by traditional Buddhist groups. The issue of right faith and wrong faith was raised. An active Buddhist layperson involved in Buddhist organizations, Ang Choo Hong, argued that “deviationist cults are always there. Our educational process must always go on, but don’t expect them to disappear. The Righteous and the Non-Righteous will always co-exist. That was evident in history”.¹³⁴

The Politics of Buddhist Unity

Within Buddhist communities, there are many traditions that do not comply with the strict practice of *Zheng Xin* Buddhism advocated by the major Malaysian Buddhist organizations. The politics of Buddhist unity has eased the internal differences and lessened the conflicts between Buddhist communities. Unity is required for Buddhism to gain strength in the competition with the other religions and in the face of the pro-Islamic public policy. There has been a tradition of cooperation among various Buddhist communities since British colonial rule in Malaya. The question of Buddhist unity arose before Malaya’s independence. The balancing of Buddhist diversities has restrained the *Zheng Xin* movement. I will investigate the popularization of the Wesak celebration to understand how the politics of harmony has moderated the critical stance of reformist groups toward other Buddhist traditions.

¹³⁴ “Seven Buddhist organizations rejected True Buddha School”, *Fa Qing*, 18 July 2007, <http://www.faqing.org/forum/viewtopic.php?t=4063&postdays=0&postorder=asc&start=30>; accessed 12 January 2012.

Wesak Day Celebrations

The Wesak day celebration can be traced to the late 19th century in Northern Peninsula Malaya and Kuala Lumpur. Burmese, Thai, and Sinhalese Buddhists have traditionally celebrated Wesak Day, a day of the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Buddha in their respective temples on a smaller scale. The formal celebrations of Wesak emerged out of Dharmapala and Olcott's Sri Lanka in the 19th century. The Wesak Day celebration was started by Theravada Buddhist communities, above all the Sinhalese Buddhists, which can be observed back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In 1896, the celebration in Brickfield, Kuala Lumpur included a "procession round the town and its outskirts on the night" (de Silva 1998: 269). The procession went on until 3 a.m., although the police permission was for the hours between 8 p.m. and 11 p.m. (ibid.). This Wesak procession was most likely the first in Malayan history. In 1928, the Wesak celebration organized by the Sinhala Buddhist Maha Vihara was on "a grandeur scale than ever in the history of Malaya" and hundreds of Buddhists gathered for the Wesak celebration ceremonies at the Brickfields temple (ibid. 271). Wesak celebrations were always important for the Buddhist Maha Vihara, even during the Japanese occupation years. Later, the Wesak celebration of Buddhist Maha Vihara became a model for other Buddhist temples throughout Malaya to follow.

The Wesak celebration was a political event in Sri Lanka, where the event was marked by ethno-religious conflict in 1915. The celebration had "stimulated the maturation of nationalism" in Sri Lanka (Blackton 1970). The local newspaper in Malaya reported the incident in detail:

"Colombo exchanges to hand yesterday brought details of the recent rioting among certain sections of the native community in Ceylon. The trouble seems to have commenced over the Wesak festivities at Kandy and spread to other parts of the island.... Exhaustive attempts to

disperse the crowd having failed, orders were given to use military force. All units had been supplied with ammunition and the firing began last night” (*The Straits Times* 1915).

The Struggle to Make Wesak a Public Holiday

The Wesak Day celebration in Malaya and later Malaysia has taken another political path. The festival was a catalyst for Buddhist unity. The suggestion to appeal to the British colonial government to declare Wesak Day a public holiday was proposed by the Sinhalese monk K. Gunaratana in 1926. Gunaratana was the abbot of the Mahindarama Temple in Penang. The idea was ignored until the Japanese occupation. With the help of the Japanese Director of Education in Penang, a Pan-Malayan Buddhist Federation was formed to seek the recognition of Wesak Day. The first meeting could not be held because of the bombing by Allied Powers aircraft in 1945.

After the war, leading Buddhists in Selangor suggested that the Penang Buddhist Association should establish a committee to provide leadership, and the opinions of Buddhist monks were sought on the date of Wesak celebration. Unfortunately, the division between the Theravada and Mahayana sanghas in Malaya over which day should be Wesak Day was unresolved. The Mahayana monks “wanted to celebrate the occasion on the 8th Day of the Chinese 4th month” (Lim n.d.).¹³⁵ However, the Theravada monks insisted on the orthodox day of their tradition on 5th day of 6th lunar month. The disagreement was prolonged until 1949, when consent was received from the Mahayana monks to follow the Wesak Day tradition of the Theravada. Finally, Penang, Melaka, Kedah and Perak were granted a holiday in 1949. Meanwhile, the public holiday was approved in Singapore in 1956. The Chief Minister of Singapore, David Marshall, wrote to Buddhist community as follows:

¹³⁵ Lim, Teong Aik (n.d.) “Wesak Public Holiday”, http://www.mba.net.my/public_html/Chi/MainFrame-MBAArchives.htm, 6 October 2008.

“I am indeed happy to have been able to assist a large body of loyal, peaceable and worthy citizens in achieving their legitimate claim. I am particularly happy that on the 2500th Anniversary of the founding of a noble culture which has been one of the greatest civilizing influences of humanity, Buddhists in Singapore will be able to enjoy a proper recognition, and full holiday”.¹³⁶

Another phase in the effort to make Wesak Day a national public holiday began after Malaya's independence, when the Buddhist community commenced its appeal to the federal government to declare Wesak Day a holiday for the entire country. In certain states, it was difficult to gain recognition for Wesak Day. The MBA, which was formed in 1959, took the lead by sending out a petition to the Ministry of the Interior to demand that Wesak day be national recognized as a holiday from the federal government. The petition argued that

[i]n accordance with the government's declared policy of full and sympathetic tolerance to all faiths, customs and traditions of the people, it is sincerely hoped that the happy relations which exist between the administration and the followers of the Buddhist religion will not only be maintained, but further enhanced, by the just recognition of this appeal (Lim 1985: 57).

In the articles on the struggle to establish a Wesak holiday, the theme of Buddhist unity has continually emerged. Even in the petition, a paragraph explained that Theravada and Mahayana Buddhists had determined that Wesak Day should be the day of the full moon in May. The Theravada and Mahayana Buddhists realized that a “lack of unanimity has militated against a joint appeal for this holiday” (Lim n.d.: 55). The Buddhist community worried that the appeal might be refused by the federal government. Therefore, all Buddhists irrespective of tradition urgently put aside their differences to fight for this national holiday. Finally, the national holiday status was officially granted by federal government in 1962 to all the states in Malaya.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

The Religious Celebration of Buddhist Unity

On 1 May 2007, a Tuesday, the roads on Penang Island was unusually quiet. There were only few vehicles on the streets. The hustle and bustle of everyday life was absent. The day was a dual holiday: Labor Day and Wesak Day. When I arrived at the Penang Buddhist Association, there were many devotees, old and young, in the main shrine hall. Cars and motorbikes were parked along the road outside the association. Some people were offering flowers to the Buddha. However, most of the individuals present were praying to the Buddha statue using joss sticks. One elderly woman was chanting and circled the prayer table many times. Individuals were lining up to pour water over a small Buddha statue in one corner of the hall and to take a bag of water back home to be sprinkled as a blessing.

In the evening, there was a procession of floats along Burmah Road. There were approximately fifty floats. The Buddhist associations and Buddhist societies of the secondary schools in Penang and nearby states such as Perak, Kedah and Perlis participated in the procession. The main parade route was crowded with onlookers. There were some temporary stalls selling a variety of food and drink. The Buddhist organizations that joined the procession sent their members to form a team that accompanied the floats. The procession lasted approximately two hour.

The Wesak procession showed the diversity of Malaysian Buddhism. The Buddhist organizations designed colorful floats with flowers and lights that reflected their understanding of Buddhism. On the *Zheng Xin* floats, only the Buddha was displayed. On the floats that belonged to *nianfo*¹³⁷, the Amitabha Buddha was the main statue on display. The Buddhists who worshipped a range of Bodhisattvas put

¹³⁷ The *nianfo* way of practicing Buddhism is to chant the six words *Namo Amitabha*. *Nianfo* followers believe that when they die, they can go to the Western World of Magnificence to continue their practice with the blessing and tutelage of Amitabha Buddha. This sect was criticized by the reformist groups.

the relevant statue at the center of their float. The Tibetan Buddhist groups displayed their living Buddha's picture. There were a few Rinpoches, tulkus or lamas who rode on floats. A range of sutras was loudly broadcast by the sound systems of the floats. The languages used in chanting the sutras represented an amalgamation of the Buddhist world: Mandarin, English, Japanese, Pali, Sanskrit, Sinhalese, Burmese, Thai, Nepali, and Tibetan.

The Wesak celebration created a sense of Buddhist *communitas*. The celebration is inter-traditional, involving Theravada, Mahayana, and Tibetan Buddhists, and some practitioners of Chinese religion. To successfully organize the event, support from a variety of Buddhist groups is crucial. The Wesak procession is a public embodiment of the search for the official recognition of Buddhist unity. To achieve the support of all of the Buddhist communities and to accommodate differences, tolerance is required. The organizer of procession in Penang was the MBA. The procession is the climax of Penang's annual Wesak Day celebration. The politics of the procession is significant in a Muslim-majority context. A permit is required because the event involves road closures. Police and *rela* (a paramilitary group) are recruited to control the traffic and ensure public safety and the smooth movement of the procession. In the past, ethnic conflict has occurred during processions. A procession embodies the freedom to publicly display of religious liberty and rights in multiracial and multi-religious Malaysia.

Statistical Legitimacy

There has been an increasing awareness of the practicality of *Zheng Xin* Buddhism in Malaysia. The acceptance of the popular form of Buddhist practice could at least retain the self-proclaimed identity as "Buddhist" that individuals declare to census

enumerators. The politics of statistical legitimacy is important for Buddhist groups to claim a sizable numerical representation. Moreover, in recent years, the reformist Buddhist group has been facing rivalry from Chinese religionists.

Buddhist groups perceive the statistical figure in the census report as an important form of political legitimacy. The figure is crucial for national Buddhist organization to claim religious representativeness. By examining the census reports, the following section will show the demographic trend of the Chinese Buddhist population in Malaysia. The official category of “Buddhist” first appeared in the 1970 census.¹³⁸ The census noted that the Buddhist population in Peninsular Malaysia was mainly Chinese; 78.9% of the Chinese communities were Buddhist.¹³⁹ Apparently, this percentage of Buddhists among the Chinese communities were inflated because the 1970 Census did not provide for a specific category of “Confucianism/ Taoism/ other traditional Chinese religions”. Consequently, in the next census in 1980, when Buddhism was distinguished from “Confucianism/ Taoism/ other traditional Chinese religions”, only 55.8% of the Chinese were categorized as Buddhist, whereas 38.6% worshipped according to “Confucianism/ Taoism/ other traditional Chinese religions”. Nevertheless, the Chinese comprised the majority of Buddhists in 1980 (Table 6.1).

¹³⁸ There is no Buddhist category in the 1921, 1931 and 1947 censuses, and there are no religious data available in the 1957 census.

¹³⁹ Some 12.4% of Chinese were reported in the category of “Other” religions. No further information was provided in the category of “Other” religions. Nevertheless, this category might refer to the traditional Chinese religions. The census reported, “the higher percentage among the Chinese community could be [Taoists] because a large number of Chinese described themselves as ‘Confucians’ or ‘Taos’ and because there was no specific category for recording Confucians and Taos, they were included in the ‘Other’ category” (Census 1970: 451).

Table 6.1 The Distribution of Religion among Ethnic Chinese in Peninsular Malaysia, 1970 and 1980 (by Percentage)

Religion	Chinese	
	1970	1980
Muslim	0.2	0.2
Christianity	3.5	3.3
Hinduism	0.1	0.1
Buddhism	78.9	55.8
Confucianism/ Taoism/ other traditional Chinese religions	-	38.6
Tribal/ folk religion	-	0.2
Others	12.4	0.2
No Religion	4.9	1.6

Source: Census 1970 and 1980

Ironically, the next two census reports indicated a sharp increase in the percentage of Buddhists. In 1991, 68.3% of Chinese were Buddhist. The number increased to 76.0% in 2000. Meanwhile, the followers of “Confucianism/ Taoism/ other traditional Chinese religions” decreased from 20.2% in 1991 to 10.6% in 2000. This decline in the category of “Confucianism/ Taoism/ other traditional Chinese religions” is significant. Apparently, the Chinese are increasingly reasserting their self-identification as Buddhists rather than as followers of “Confucianism/ Taoism/ other traditional Chinese religions”. In the 2010 Census, the Buddhist population was 19.8%, and the number of Malaysians who professed other Chinese religions decreased to only 1.3%. Within the Chinese communities, those individuals who

claimed to be Buddhist increased to 83.6%, whereas only 3.4% identified themselves as followers of Chinese religion (Table 6.2).

Table 6.2 The Distribution of Religion among Ethnic Chinese in Malaysia, 1991 and 2000 (by Percentage)

Religion	Chinese		
	1991	2000	2010
Muslim	0.4	1.0	0.7
Christianity	7.8	9.5	11.1
Hinduism	0.2	0.3	0.2
Buddhism	68.3	76.0	83.6
Confucianism/ Taoism/ other traditional Chinese religions	20.2	10.6	3.4
Tribal/ folk religion	0.1	0.1	*
Others	0.3	0.2	0.1
No Religion	2.7	1.7	0.8
Unknown	0.3	0.7	0.2

Source: Census 1991 and 2000

* In 2010, the tribal/ folk religion group belonged to the category of Confucianism/ Taoism/ other traditional Chinese religions.

The Federation of Taoist Associations Malaysia was formed in 1994 to represent all Taoist groups, which are mainly popular Chinese religions. The association is growing stronger with the support of politicians from the MCA. More co-operation and interaction between this national body and various smaller groups have been observed. An annual “Taoist Festival Day” has been organized since the federation’s inception. Additionally, various activities have promoted the teaching of Taoism, such as “seminars, dialogues, Taoist cultural training classes, conversion

ceremonial proceedings, Taoist Mantra Choir, [and the] National Day grand prayer congregation”.¹⁴⁰ With the collaboration of the MCA, the federation published a booklet entitled *Expose Conman’s Tactics on Religious Ground*. This booklet addressed the religious cheating phenomenon that damaged the image of popular religious practitioners, such as Taoist priests and spirit mediums.¹⁴¹

In 2006, Taoism was recognized by the Malaysian government, and the followers were allowed to use the name of their religion in official government forms. In the same year, Taoism was accepted as a member of the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Sikhism (MCCBCHS). Formerly, the application to join the council had been objected to by the Buddhist group. In 2008, the Federation of Taoist Associations Malaysia launched a campaign to urge traditional Chinese temples to become members (Guang Ming Daily 2012). Additionally, the federation encouraged Taoist followers to establish more branches nationwide at state and city levels. The international linkages of the association with overseas Taoist groups have improved its public image. There were collaborations in Taoist priest training between the association and overseas Taoist training institutions.¹⁴² Exchanges of doctrine, ritual, and new practices have advanced the quality of Taoist priests and the services that they provide. The promotion of Taoism according to both traditional and modern doctrines is a way to rationalize popular belief. This promotional effort will affect the development of Taoism and may influence Malaysia’s future Chinese religious landscape. In fact, the Taoist group has started negotiating with Buddhist groups.

¹⁴⁰ Official website of the Federation of Taoist Associations Malaysia, “About Us”, <http://www.taoismmalaysia.com/AboutUsCN.aspx>; accessed 1 February 2012.

¹⁴¹ Official website of the Federation of Taoist Associations Malaysia, “About Us”, <http://www.taoismmalaysia.com/AboutUsCN.aspx>; accessed 1 February 2012.

¹⁴² Official website of the Federation of Taoist Associations Malaysia, “About Us”, <http://www.taoismmalaysia.com/AboutUsCN.aspx>; accessed 1 February 2012.

In 2009, Chen Wen Cheng, the president of the Taoist association, urged all Chinese who practiced ancestor worship to declare their religion under the category of “traditional Chinese religions” instead of “Buddhism” in the national census. Ancestor worship is a common cultural practice of the Chinese communities. If the followers determined to declare as Taoists rather than Buddhists in the census form, then the percentage of Buddhists would decrease dramatically. YBAM issued a press statement to correct Chen Wen Cheng’s argument that ancestor worship only belonged to the Taoist tradition. The Buddhist youth group insisted that ancestor worship has no contradiction with Buddhism (YBAM 2010).

The politics of statistical representation has obliged reformist groups to be more tolerant toward Chinese religions when pursuing their *Zheng Xin* Buddhist agenda. The *Zheng Xin* Buddhist group takes a more lenient and pragmatic attitude toward Chinese religions. In the interview, the MBA secretary Lim said, “Buddhism relies on Daoism to develop. When the followers of Daoism were separated out, the percentage of Buddhist will fall sharply in the census report. Chinese do not differentiate Buddhism and Daoism. This is not a problem. In contrast, by blurring the line of Buddhism and Daoism not only can have a bigger population of ‘Buddhist’ but also could attract Daoism followers to join our Buddhist activities especially charity”.

Summary

Buddhist revitalization in Malaysia has not been smooth. Counterforces from within the Buddhist communities and Chinese religious practitioners have surfaced and questioned *Zheng Xin* Buddhism as the only authority for Chinese Buddhists. Reformist Buddhists are challenged at different levels, particularly at the cultural level of traditional practices in a typical Chinese family. Chinese Buddhism might continue

on its current path of increasing revitalization but not without the resistance of counterforces that have relaxed and softened the insistence on a formal, doctrinal Buddhism among reformist groups. In the case of modern Buddhism's encounter with Chinese religions, the rationalization process is more multifaceted than what reformist groups have imagined.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

In this thesis, I discussed processes of religious revitalization undertaken by Chinese Buddhist groups in Malaysia. I explored the meaning of revitalization for Malaysian Chinese Buddhists. My analysis advanced the idea that Buddhist revitalization is an attempt to remake Chinese communities as part of a larger nation-building project. Simultaneously, the responses of traditional actors, specifically adherents of Chinese religions, have tactically challenged the legitimacy of the reformist Buddhist groups, which portray themselves as the sole religious authority and the interpreter of Chinese Buddhism.

The study of religious transformation in Malaysia's Chinese communities lead to a number of questions: What is the future of Chinese religions when confronted by the power of a transnational Buddhist modernism? What are the possible scenarios for changing Chinese religiosity in Malaysia? In many parts of Malaysia, traditional Chinese religions could not compete with the powerful strategies of the reformist Buddhist groups. The reformist Buddhists have been supported by the groups from Taiwan in creating new ways to attract followers, new interpretations of Buddhism and new tools of proselytization. There are Chinese who have been officially converted through refuge-taking ceremony to Buddhism, and the number of individuals who believe in a relatively more doctrinal form of Buddhism is steadily increasing.

In the small village of Pendang in the state of Kedah there is an active Buddhist society that preaches *Zheng Xin* Buddhism. Parents send their children to

learn the dharma in classes conducted by Buddhist society at a young age. The Taoist-type traditional temple is facing the problem of aging. The religious role that the temple once played is being replaced by the Buddhist society. This case shows that to a certain extent the efforts of the *Zheng Xin* movement have had results.

The promotion of the Buddhist family since the late 1970s has produced a new generation that has grown up familiar with theoretical Buddhism because of their parents. Usually, parents are influenced by Zheng Xin Buddhism, and some even decide to have a Buddhist wedding, as encouraged by YBAM. Such families pray only to Buddha rather than other Chinese deities. The children are exposed to Buddhism through various activities from a young age. The most important choice parents make is to send their children to dharma classes to learn a more organized form of Buddhism. One distinctive characteristic of such families is their rejection of praying to popular Chinese deities. The members of the new Buddhist generation tend to criticize non-Zheng Xin Buddhist practice for being superstitious.

Sometimes the dynamism between Buddhism and traditional Chinese religions is beneficial. Ching (n.d.) investigated how a Chinese temple, *Tian Hou Gong*, transformed itself from one based on traditional Chinese religion to one focused on Buddhism. He observed that the temple gradually introduced Buddhist activities such as organized dharma discussion with invited monks and nuns, established Buddhist sutra-chanting sessions, encouraged vegetarian instead of meat offerings, arranged a refuge-taking ceremony, celebrated Buddhist festivals, and established a dharma propagation group. Eventually, an official formal Buddhist society was formed under the auspices of the temple. The reform was proposed by the temple's committee members. However, a previous practice of worshipping a goddess *Tian Hou* has been maintained for devotees who were familiar with the traditional goddess.

A traditional Chinese temple not only provides for the spiritual needs of the faithful but also plays a role as a community center in the everyday life of villagers. Moreover, the temple becomes essential as a place to seek blessings on ritual occasions. It is also a place for political contestation. Members from different political parties compete for office at the temple. Aiming to exploit the significant influence of the temple, politicians from the ruling and opposition parties will attempt to garner political support, usually at the temple's annual celebration. During Malaysian general election, the temple could become a temporary political campaigning center. The facilities of the temple will be used by relevant political party in gathering of party members or volunteers in planning for election campaign and collecting donation. Sometimes political talk will be organized at the temple's compound area.

Some traditional Chinese religions that have persisted for many years in Malaysia played a larger role in the Chinese communities. Popular trans-local celebrations, such as the Hungry Ghost Festival and the celebration of the Nine Emperor Gods, have become a means for traditional religious authority to unite the Chinese communities. DeBernardi (2004) observed that the Hungry Ghost celebration in Penang has become an expression of Chinese unity through political mobilization to support Chinese education and culture. Traditional Chinese religions are thus involved in the drawing of ethnic boundaries. This cultural function will not disappear under the pressure of modernity that seeks to rationalize religious belief. Instead, it has transformed and integrated itself with modernity.

Buddhist transnationalism has contributed significant resources to the development of Chinese Buddhism in Malaysia. Traditional Chinese religions do not have this privilege. The pressure imposed by reformist Buddhism causes the traditional Chinese religions to increase their efforts to preserve themselves. There

would be more Chinese temples actively engaging society through charity work for the poor, blood-donation campaigns, and environmental projects. Although the traditional Chinese religions would occupy a weaker position, the tolerant and flexible cosmology of the ordinary Chinese Buddhists (as opposed to *Zheng Xin* Chinese Buddhists) who have not been influenced by *Zheng Xin* Buddhism will remain the same for a period of time. This persistence will enable the followers of traditional Chinese religions to reconstitute and readjust themselves in responding to the criticism leveled at them by *Zheng Xin* followers.

The findings analyzed here have represented the religious responses of four Buddhist organizations. There are more Buddhist organizations in Malaysia that express a wide range of class, gender, and regional differences. Thus, by focusing on the four organizations, I was able to portray only a portion of Malaysia's Chinese Buddhist community.

Future Research

In this study, I investigated the standardization of Chinese Buddhism through the *Zheng Xin* movement in Malaysia. This process has unavoidably suppressed the Chinese religions of the older generation. Additionally, the increase in religiosity in the form of a relatively more defined religion has stimulated the competition between Chinese Buddhism and other world religions. Therefore, a thorough study of the issue of the "religionization" of Chinese Buddhism and further case studies would increase the understanding of the consequences of this trend.

Second, in consideration of the forces of globalization and new technology, Buddhist transnationalism is another element for future research. Who are the main actors, and how will the process occur in various regions? What are the consequences

of this transnationalism for the nation? Will a global Buddhist identity take form within the constant exchanges between Buddhist communities? How does the global Buddhist identity blend with global politics? Many aspects of this topic remain to be examined.

Third, I am interested in the study of the Wesak Day celebration in Malaysia and other Buddhist countries from a comparative perspective. The Wesak celebration has become a worldwide Buddhist festival that has varied meanings for the different religious communities. That is, the form and significance of the celebration are dissimilar in different Buddhist communities. Therefore, an understanding of Wesak Day is another aspect to grasp local Buddhist community-building and local Buddhist responses to modernity and globalization.

A new Buddhist identity has emerged among Chinese Buddhists in Malaysia since the 1990s as a result of Buddhist revitalization. Increasingly, the religious orientation of certain Malaysian Chinese has changed from a relaxed attitude of syncretism to one of doctrinal piety. This transformation can be contextualized within the shifting cultural and political landscape of the Malaysian Chinese. Buddhist revitalization is a response to Islamization but this process goes beyond that of a simple religious competition with the majority religion. At the same time, the *Zheng Xin* movement of reformist Buddhism has triggered responses and protests from followers of Chinese religions that show the complexity of the religious modernization project as envisaged by Buddhist communities.

Chinese Buddhist revitalization in Malaysia has been the outcome of historical processes of colonization, modernization, and globalization. It portends unknown and hidden consequences. The unfinished project of Buddhist modernism, which expresses an age of multiple religious modernities, is not limited to a specific country.

The rationalization of religion is not a linear progression but multi-dimensional. Rationalization does not separate religion from politics. In contrast, there is a political dimension of it. Buddhists are joining these large forces of religious polarization and politicization that directly or indirectly cause conflict within their community and with other religious groups.

Appendix 1 Song of Triple Gem

《三宝歌》歌词

作者：太虚大师

人天长夜，宇宙黢黯，谁启以光明？三界火宅，众苦煎迫，谁济以安宁？大悲大智大雄力，南无佛陀耶！昭朗万有，衽席群生，功德莫能名。今乃知：唯此是，真正归依处。尽形寿，献身命，信受勤奉行！

二谛总持，三学增上，恢恢法界身；净德既圆，染患斯寂，荡荡涅槃城！众缘性空唯识现，南无达摩耶！理无不彰，蔽无不解，焕乎其大明。今乃知：唯此是，真正归依处。尽形寿，献身命，信受勤奉行！

依净律仪，成妙和合，灵山遗芳形；修行证果，弘法利世，焰续佛灯明，三乘圣贤何济济！南无僧伽耶！统理大众，一切无碍，住持正法城。今乃知：唯此是，真正归依处。尽形寿，献身命，信受勤奉行！

Night is endless, man's world is dark, who lead us to the light? Who will free all living creatures from the scorching fire, Mercy wisdom and Great Might, Namó Buddha Ye! You are lighting up my hearts and warming my body. Follow you, then I know. It is just the time. From now on, believe in you, offer all my life.

Here we have two truths and three studies, farming grand dharma. Bondless pious, deed help me enter land of Nirvana! Cause and impermanence decide all. Namó Dhrama Ye! You can uncover all the truth as sun shining bright. Follow you, then I know. It is just the time. From now on, believe in you, offer all my life.

Obey discipline; show the kindness, paragon from Linshan. Spiritual progress does good to the world, Buddha lamps never die. Men of virtue are so many. Namó Sangha Ye! You can command the people to guard the sublime. Follow you, then I know. It is just the time. From now on, believe in you, offer all my life.

Source: Xiyuan Forum,

<http://bbs.jcedu.org/frame.php?frameon=yes&referer=http%3A//bbs.jcedu.org/viewthread.php%3Ftid%3D9513>, accessed 18 January 2013.

Appendix 2: YBAM's Affiliate Members

Perlis

Kaki Bukit Buddhist Association 加基武吉佛教會
Perlis Bodhi Buddhist Association 玻璃市菩提佛教會
Perlis Buddhist Society 玻璃市佛學會
Pertubuhan Buddhist Simpang Empat Perlis 玻璃市十字港佛學會

Kedah

Persatuan Penganut-Penganut Buddha Karma Karuna 鲁乃迦玛迦露那佛教會
Persatuan Buddhist Kodiang 吉北高岭佛學會
Persatuan Buddhist Kuala Pegang 瓜拉不干佛教會
Persatuan Buddhist Merbok 僑莫佛教會
Persatuan Sakya Tengge Ling 双溪大年释迦中心
Persatuan Agama Buddha Semeling 新文英佛教會
Persatuan Penganut Agama Buddha Junjong 三巴央佛教會
Persatuan Buddhist Sik 锡佛教會
Northern Kedah Buddhist Youth Association 吉北佛青社
Persatuan Buddhist Gurun 吉打峨仑佛教會
Persatuan Buddhist Serdang 西岭佛教會
Persatuan Buddhist Pulau Langkawi 浮罗交怡佛教會
Jeniang Buddhist Association 仁岭佛教會
Tokai Buddhist Association 吉打哆皆佛教會
Changlun Buddhist Association 樟崙佛教會
Persatuan Buddha Kota Sarang Semut 竹城佛教會
Jitra Buddhist Association 日得拉佛教會
Persatuan Buddhist Lunas 魯乃佛教會
Padang Lembu Buddhist Association 巴東倫武佛教會
Khong Leng Si Chern Chiah Dharma School 康寧寺正覺佛教義學班
Persatuan Buddhist Pokok Sena 吉打波各先那佛教會
Persatuan Buddhist Kulim 居林佛教會
Junun Buddhist Association 吉打茹嫩佛教會
Chern Chueh Buddhist Association 双溪拉兰正觉佛教會
Tikam Batu Buddhist Association 知甘峇都佛教會
Chiat Yin Buddhist Association 瓜拉吉底觉音佛教會
Bedong Buddhist Association 美农佛學會
Gua Tempedak Buddhist Association 吉中峨占必叻佛教會
Padang Serai Fwu Faa Lin Buddhist Hall 吉打巴东色海佛法林佛學會
Kerpan Buddhist Association 甲板佛學會
Centre Kedah Buddhist Association 吉中佛教會
Persatuan Buddhist Simpang Empat 吉打十字港佛教會

Persatuan Buddhist Baling 华玲佛学会
Tze Yin Buddhist Society Kupang 居邦慈音佛學會
Pendang Buddhist Association 本同佛教会
Kedah Buddhist Association Youth Circle (English Sec), 吉打佛学院青年团（英文组）
Kedah Buddhist Association Youth Circle (Chinese Sec) 吉打佛学院青年团（华文组）

Penang

Mahindarama Sunday Pali School 馬興達拉麻巴利文周日學校
Malaysian Buddhist Association Dharma Society 马佛总槟州佛学研究会
Penang Buddhist Association Dharma Sunday School 檳城佛学院周日学校(华文组)
Juru Buddhist Association 柔府佛教会
Pu Ai Community Service Centre 普爱学园
Persatuan Penganut Ugama Buddha Mandala Pulau Pinang 满达拉佛教会
Persatuan Buddhist Pinang Tunggal Seberang Prai (U) 威北檳榔东海佛教会
Persatuan Agama Buddha Seberang Prai Selatan 威南佛教会
Hui Yin She Youth Dhamma Group 檳城慧音社青年佛学研修组
Hai Yin Buddhist Association 海音佛教会
Persatuan Buddhist Kepala Batas 威北甲拋峇底佛学会
Than Hsiang Buddhist Welfare Association Malaysia 马来西亚檀香佛教福利会
The Buddhist Association Nibong Tebal, Penang 高渊佛教会
The Buddhist Association Seberang Jaya 诗布朗再也佛教会
Butterworth Lay Buddhist Society 北海佛教居士林
The Penang Buddhist Free School Ex-Pupils Association 檳城佛教义学校友会
Penang Buddhist Free School Buddhist Society 檳城佛教义学佛学会
Persatuan Ugama Buddha Kubang Semang 高巴三万佛教会
Pu Xian Buddhist Association 普贤佛教会
Keat Sun Yean Buddhist Society 结善缘佛学会
Bukit Mertajam Buddhist Association 大山脚佛学会青年团
Persatuan Agama Buddha Seberang Prai Tengah 威中佛教会
Butterworth Buddhist Association 北海佛教会
Penang Lay Buddhist Society 檳城佛教居士林
Dhammikarama Burmese Buddhist Temple Dhamma Sunday Sch 緬甸寺周日学校
World Fellowship Of Buddhist Penang Centre Youth Sec. 世界佛教友谊会檳城分会青年团
Triple Wisdom Hall Dhamma Study Group 三慧讲堂佛法研修会
Mahindarama Sunday Pali School 马兴达拉麻巴利文周日学校
Penang Buddhist Association Dharma Sunday School 檳城佛学院周日学校(华文组)

Perak

MBA Perak Branch Chemor Sub-Branch Youth Circle 马佛总霹靂朱毛支会青年团
Taiping English Dharma Youth Movement Wat Bodhiyaram 太平英文佛教青年团

Sitiawan Buddhist Society Youth Circle 實兆遠佛教會青年團
 Taiping Buddhist Society Youth Circle 太平佛教會青年團
 Persatuan Buddhist Liman Kati 利民加地佛教會
 Persatuan Belia Penganut Agama Buddha Chui Chak 水閘佛教會(青年團)
 Tapah Buddhist Society 打巴佛教會
 Persatuan Penganut Agama Buddha Padang Grus, Lenggong 巴登古魯佛學會
 Persatuan Penganut Berugama Buddha Ayer Kala, Perak 霹靂愛育加拉佛教會
 Persatuan Penganut Agama Buddha Lenggong 玲瓏佛教會
 Persatuan Pengajian Prajna Agama Buddha, Ipoh Perak 霹靂怡保般若佛法研修會
 Persatuan Ugama Buddha Kroh Perak 上霹靂高烏佛教會
 Persatuan Penganut Berugama Buddha Kuala Kurau 瓜拉古樓佛教會
 Kinta Buddhist Society Youth Section 霹靂州近打佛教會青年團
 Persatuan Penganut Agama Buddha Sauk 新壽活佛教會
 Persatuan Penganut Agama Buddha Tanjong Piandang 角頭佛教會
 Persatuan Triyana Dharma Cakra Vihara 太平三乘法輪居士林
 Persatuan Buddhist Salak Baru, Salak Utara 霹靂州和豐新沙叻佛教會
 Persatuan Buddhist Pangkor 邦咯佛教會
 Persatuan Buddhist Hilir Perak 下霹靂佛教會
 Persatuan Buddhist Ju-Shi-Lin Bidor 霹靂美羅居士林佛教會
 Buddhist Association Of Parit Buntar 巴里文打佛教會
 Persatuan Pengurusan Tokong Teng Wai Koi, Ipoh 定慧居佛教青年團
 Pertubuhan Buddhist Kuala Kangsar 江沙佛學會
 Sungai Siput (U) Buddhist Association Youth Circle 和豐佛教會青年團
 Simpang Buddhist Youth Circle 新板佛教青年團
 Krian Buddhist Association 吉輦佛教會
 Grik Buddhist Society 宜力佛教會
 Persatuan Belia Buddhist Ipoh 霹靂怡保佛教青年會
 MBA Perak Branch Chemor Sub-Branch Youth Circle 馬佛總霹靂朱毛支會青年團
 Taiping English Dharma Youth Movement Wat Bodhiyaram 太平英文佛教青年團
 Sitiawan Buddhist Society Youth Circle 實兆遠佛教會青年團
 Taiping Buddhist Society Youth Circle 太平佛教會青年團

Selangor & Kuala Lumpur

Chetawan Buddhist Temple Youth Circle 智達苑佛寺青年團
 Buddhist Institute Sunday Dhamma School 十五碑佛寺周日佛法學校
 Buddhist Missionary Society Malaysia Youth Section 馬佛教弘法會青年組
 Sasana Abhiwurdi Wardhana Society Youth Section 佛陀教義弘揚協會青年團
 Hoeh Beng Buddhist Mission Youth Section 鶴鳴寺弘法團青年團
 Petaling Jaya Kwan Inn Teng 八打靈觀音亭
 The Klang & Coast Buddhist Association 巴生濱海佛學會青年組
 Persatuan Penganut Buddha Kok Doh 國都佛學會
 Pertubuhan Alumni Buddhist Universiti Malaya 馬大畢業生佛友會
 Persatuan Penganut Agama Buddha Yuan Jue Chan Malaysia 馬來西亞圓覺禪
 Bandar Utama Buddhist Society 萬達鎮佛教協會

Losang Dragpa Buddhist Society 善慧称佛法中心
 Persatuan Penganut Buddha Bodhi Kuala Lumpur 吉隆坡菩提工作坊
 The Pulau Ketam Buddhist Association 吉胆佛学会
 Sg. Besar buddhist society 大港菩提佛教会
 Robson Heights Buddhist Society 乐圣岭佛学会
 Sabak Bernam Buddhist Society 沙白安南佛教会
 The Banting Buddhist Association 万津佛学会
 Persatuan Penganut Buddha Hong Ying (S/Wp) 雪隆宏愿佛学会
 Sri Jayanti Youth Section
 Persatuan Penganut Buddha Ching Kang, Kuala Lumpur 金刚佛学会
 Serdang Buddhist Association 沙登佛教会
 Persatuan Penganut Agama Buddha Shah Alam, Selangor 雪兰莪莎阿南佛学会
 The Tanjong Sepat Buddhist Society, Selangor 丹绒士拔佛学会
 Persatuan Penganut Agama Buddha Sungai Pelek 双溪比力佛教会
 Buddhist Gem Fellowship Society
 Subang Jaya Buddhist Association 首邦再也佛教会
 Persatuan Penganut Agama Buddha Jinjang, Kuala Lumpur 增江佛教会
 Sepang Buddhist Society 雪邦区佛教会
 Persatuan Buddhis Selayang 士拉央佛教会
 Chempaka Buddhist Lodge 千百家佛教居士林
 Persatuan Buddhis Jonq Shan 众善居士林佛学会
 The Klang & Coast Buddhist Association 巴生滨海佛学会青年组
 Hoeh Beng Buddhist Mission Youth Section 鹤鸣寺弘法团青年团
 Sasana Abhiwurdi Wardhana Society Youth Section 佛陀教义弘扬协会青年团
 Buddhist Missionary Society Malaysia Youth Section 马佛教弘法会青年组
 Buddhist Institute Sunday Dhamma School 十五碑佛寺周日佛法学校
 Chetawan Buddhist Temple Youth Circle 智达苑佛寺青年团

Negeri Sembilan

Rantau Buddhist Association, Negeri Sembilan 马来西亚森美兰晏斗佛学会
 Persatuan Agama Buddha Prajna Seremban 芙蓉般若佛教会
 Persatuan Penganut Agama Buddha Titi, Jelevu 知知港佛教会
 Persatuan Penganut Agama Buddha Triang Hilir 德亮喜利佛教会
 Persatuan Penganut Agama Buddha Kampung Baru Dangi 冷宜佛教会
 Persatuan Penganut Agama Buddha Pertang 葫芦顶佛教会

Melaka

Pertubuhan Dhammacakka Buddha Vihara
 The Buddhasassananuggaha Society Of Malacca 护法苑佛学会
 Persatuan Penganut Agama Buddha Kuala Sungai Baru 马六甲瓜拉佛学会
 Persatuan Penganut Buddha Paya Mengkuang, Melaka 巴也明光佛学会
 Persatuan Penganut Agama Buddha Macap Umboo Baru 马接翁武新村佛学会
 The Karma Kagyu Dharma Society 马六甲密宗（卡玛迦如）佛教会

Malacca Buddhist Fellowship Circle 马六甲佛教联谊会
Persatuan Penganut Agama Buddha Bodhi 菩提佛学会
Simpang Ampat Buddhist Society 新邦安拔佛学会
The Bukit Bruang Buddhist Society 马六甲武吉波浪佛学会
Pusat Buddhisma Kemanusiaan Melaka 马六甲人生佛学中心

Johor

Pertubuhan Meditasi Harmoni Santi Vanaram
Persatuan Penganut Agama Buddha Endau 兴楼佛教会
Pertubuhan Meditasi Fa Guang Chan Xiu Yuan
Pertubuhan Penganut Agama Buddha Ulu Tiram 柔佛地南佛学会
Pertubuhan Penganut Agama Buddha Maha Prajna 柔佛新山宏慧佛教协会
Pertubuhan Agama Buddha Tongkang Pecah 中江佛教会
Pertubuhan Pendidikan Buddha Dharma-Realm 新山法霖学苑
Persatuan Buddhist Pekan Nanas 北干那那佛学会
Persatuan Buddhist Kangkar Bahru 新港佛教会
Persatuan Pengajian Agama Buddha Kulai 古来佛学会
Persatuan Penganut Buddha Sri Gading 四加亭佛教会
The Segamat Buddhist Society 昔加末佛理研修会
Persatuan Penganut Agama Buddha Gemas Baru 金马士峇鲁佛学会
Lam Lee Buddhist Society 南利佛学会
Persatuan Buddhist Bukit Kangkar 武吉港脚佛学会
Persatuan Penganut Agama Buddha Mersing 丰盛港佛学会
Persatuan Penganut Agama Buddha Benut 文律佛学会
The Society Of Pratyaya Buddhism, Batu Pahat 缘之小轩
Muar Buddhist Lodge 麻坡佛教居士林
Persatuan Penganut Agama Buddha Senggarang 新加兰佛教会
Persatuan Pendidikan Agama Buddha Segamat 昔加末佛教会
Persatuan Buddhist Sri Medan 铁山佛学会
Persatuan Penganut-Penganut Agama Buddha Simpang Rengam 新邦令金佛学会
Persatuan Penganut-Penganut Agama Buddha Jementah 利民达佛教会
Persatuan Penganut-Penganut Agama Buddha Kahang 加亨佛教会
Pertubuhan Penganut-Penganut Agama Buddha, Johor 新山柔佛佛学会
Persatuan Buddhist Labis 拉美士佛学会
Persatuan Penganut-Penganut Agama Buddha Pontian 笨珍佛学会
Persatuan Penganut Agama Buddha Paloh 巴罗佛学会
Air Hitam Buddhist Society 亚依淡佛学会
Persatuan Buddhist Pengerang 边佳兰佛教会
Persatuan Buddhist Yong Peng 永平佛教会
Persatuan Buddhist Batu Pahat 峇株吧辖佛教会
Hui Lin Buddhist Lodge 慧林佛苑
Kuan Yin Temple Buddhist Mission, Bekok 彼咯观音寺佛学会
Metta Lodge Pusat Buddhist Johor 柔佛民德佛学会
Persatuan Buddhist Kota Tinggi 哥打丁宜佛教会

Kluang Buddhist Society 居銓佛教會
Sambodhi Buddhist Society 蓮花山正覺寺佛教會
Muar Buddhist Society Youth Section 麻坡佛教正信會青年組

Pahang

Sri Jaya Buddhist Association 彭亨斯里再也佛教會
Kemayan Buddhist Society 金馬揚佛教會
Persatuan Penganut Agama Buddha Kerbau 加流佛教會
Sungai Jerik Buddhist Association 雙溪熱力佛教會
Mengkarak Buddhist Association 明加叻佛教會
Karak Buddhist Association 加叻佛教會
Persatuan Penganut Agama Buddha Kuala Krau 瓜拉吉撓佛教會
Kuantan Buddhist Dharma Society Youth Section 關丹佛學院青年組
Kuantan Buddhist Association 關丹佛教會
Persatuan Buddhist Bentong 文冬佛教會
Lipis Buddhist Association 立卑佛教會
Persatuan Penganut-Penganut Buddha Gambang, Pahang 甘孟佛教會
Persatuan Buddhist Temerloh 淡馬魯佛教會
Persatuan Buddhist Maran 馬蘭佛教會
Triang Buddhist Society 直涼佛教會
Raub Buddhist Association 勞勿佛教會
Persatuan Penganut Buddha Mentakab 文德甲佛教會
Jerantut Buddhist Association 而連突佛教會
Pahang Buddhist Association Youth Section 彭亨佛教會青年組

Kelantan

Persatuan Penganut Buddha Kuala Krai 吉賴佛教會
Persatuan Buddha Wakaf Bharu Kelantan 華哥達北佛教會
Persatuan Buddhist Machang 馬章佛教會
The Gua Musang Buddhist Association 吉蘭丹話望生佛教會
Pasir Puteh Buddhist Society 巴西富地佛學會
Pasir Mas Buddhist Association 巴西馬佛教會
Tanah Merah Buddhist Society (Youth Circle) 丹那美拉佛教會
Kelantan Buddhist Association Youth Section 吉蘭丹佛教會青年團

Terengganu

Ayer Jerneh Buddhist Religious Association 亞益仁耐佛教會
Jerteh Buddhist Society 日底佛教會
Persatuan Penganut-Penganut Buddha Paka 北加佛教會
Wakaf Tapai Buddhist Association 登嘉樓華嘉達拜佛教會
Persatuan Buddhist Kemaman 甘馬挽佛教會
Dungun Buddhist Association Youth Circle 龍運佛教會青年團

Terengganu Buddhist Youth Circle 登嘉楼佛教会青年团

Sabah

Papar Buddhist Association 吧巴佛教会

Jawatankuasa Pembinaan Kuil Guang Ji Keningau 根地咬佛教会广济寺

Persatuan Buddhist Tenom 沙巴丹南佛教会

Labuan Guan Yin Pusa Association 纳闽观音寺

Persatuan Penganut Agama Buddha Kudat 沙巴古达佛教会

Persatuan Penganut Agamaa Buddha Kunak Sabah 古纳佛教会

The Lotus Buddhism Studies Mission 斗湖莲海佛学会

Sabah Buddhist Association 沙巴佛教会

Sandakan Buddhists Fellowship Society 山打根佛教迦音林

Beaufort Buddhist Association 沙巴保佛佛教会

Persatuan Buddhist Semporna 仙本那佛教居士林

Pertubuhan Ugama Buddha Lahad Datu 沙巴州拿篤佛教会

Persatuan Buddhist Labuan 纳闽佛教居士林

Amidism Buddhist Centre 斗湖佛光寺

The Sandakan (Sabah) Buddhist Mission 沙巴州山打根佛教会

The Tawau Buddhist Lodge 斗湖佛教居士林

Maha Bodhi Society Tawau 斗湖佛教会

K.K.Tzer Ying Buddhism Research Society 亚庇慈音精舍佛法研修会

Sarawak

Marudi Buddhist Society 马鲁帝佛教居士林

Persatuan Penganut Ugama Buddha Serian 西连佛教居士林

Miri Orthodox Buddhist Association 美里佛教正信会

Persatuan Penganut Agama Buddha Bhagavan Kuching 古晋菩提法苑

Persatuan Penganut Buddha Horng Guang Kuching 七哩弘光佛教学会

Kapit Buddhist Association 加帛佛教会

Bohdi Buddhist Association Kuching 菩提协会

Bintulu Buddhist Association 民都鲁佛教会

Limbang Buddhist Association 林梦佛教会

The Dalat Buddhist Association Sarawak 拉叻佛教会

Batang Lupar Buddhist Society 峇当鲁巴佛教居士林

Long Lama Buddhist Society 弄拉马佛教居士林

Sibu Buddhist Lodge 诗巫佛教居士林

Lundu Buddhist Society 伦乐佛教居士林

Persatuan Agama Buddha Saratok 砂拉卓佛教会

Kuching Buddhist Fellowship 古晋佛教友谊会

Pertubuhan Ugama Buddha Lawas 老越佛教会

Miri Buddhist Society(1993) 美里佛教居士林(1993)

Binatang Tze Chuan Buddhist Association 民那丹慈銓佛学研修会

Sibu Buddhist Association 砂劳越诗巫佛教会

Limbang Buddhist Society 林梦佛教居士林

Sarikei Buddhist Orthodox Association 泗里奎佛教正信会

Mukah Buddhist Association 砂劳越沐胶佛教会

Kuching Buddhist Society Youth Section 古晋佛教居士林青年团

Kuching Tze Yin Buddhist Orthodox Association 古晋慈云佛教正信会

Appendix 3: List of Tzu Chi-affiliated branches in Malaysia (Source: Tzu Chi Malaysia Official Website, <http://www.tzuchi.org.my/web17/index.php/contact>, accessed 21 January 2012).

馬來西亞分會合心		
馬來西亞分會 Penang Branch	Buddhist Tzu-Chi Merits Society Malaysia 316, Jalan Macalister, 10450 Penang, Malaysia.	Tel: 604 228 1013 Fax: 604 226 1013 email: info@tzuchi.org.my
北海聯絡處	6664, 2nd Floor, Jalan Bagan Ajam, 13000 Butterworth, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia.	Tel: 604 333 1013 Fax: 604 324 1013 email: info@tzuchi.org.my
大山腳聯絡處	34 & 36, Lintang Kota Permai 11, Taman Kota Permai, 14000 Bukit Mertajam, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia.	Tel: 604 508 1013 Fax: 604 508 0013 email: info@tzuchi.org.my
居林聯絡點	104, Kelang Lama, 09000 Kulim, Kedah, Malaysia.	Tel: 6012 473 9931 email: info@tzuchi.org.my
太平聯絡點	c/o. 316, Jalan Macalister, 10450 Pulau Pinang, Malaysia.	Tel: 604 261 1013 Fax: 604 261 1013 email: info@tzuchi.org.my
高烏聯絡點	A-11, Taman Dato Sri Lam Kok Loong, 33100 Pengkalan Hulu, Perak, Malaysia.	Tel: 604 477 8105 Fax: 604 477 0906 email: info@tzuchi.org.my
雙溪大年聯絡點	B22, Taman Semangat, 08000 Sungai Petani, Kedah, Malaysia.	Tel: 604 421 8732 Fax: 604 421 8732 email: info@tzuchi.org.my
巴里文打聯絡點	17, Jalan Rajawali, 14300 Nibong Tebal, SPS, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia.	Tel: 605 716 2184 Fax: 604 593 7546 email: info@tzuchi.org.my
打昔共修處		Tel: 6012 415 1909 email: info@tzuchi.org.my
中南馬合心		
怡保聯絡處	47, Jalan Raja Dr Nazrin Shah,	Tel: 605 255 1013

	30250 Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia.	Fax: 605 242 1013 email: iptzuchiworld@yahoo.com
嘉慶園聯絡點	No.48, Jalan Pengkalan Barat 2, Taman Kar King, 31650 Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia.	Tel: 6017 537 9276
巴占聯絡點	No.81, Hala Tasek Timur 1, Taman Anjung Bercham Utara, 31400 Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia.	Tel: 6012 517 0250
安順聯絡點	No 2, Lorong Panglima 1, Taman Panglima off, Jalan Changkat Jong, 36000 Teluk Intan, Perak, Malaysia.	Tel: 6019 553 3013
半港共修處	No.220, Taman Sri Intan 3, Hutan Melintang, 36400 Perak, Malaysia.	Tel: 6016 553 8969
實兆遠聯絡點	No.4, Taman Tok Perdana, Jalan Raja Omar, 32000 Sitiawan, Perak, Malaysia.	Tel: 6012 520 0954
愛大華共修處	No.142, Taman Sentosa, 32400 Ayer Tawar, Perak, Malaysia.	Tel: 6012 771 2557
雪蘭莪靜思書軒	38, Jalan Awan Hijau, Taman OUG , 58200 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.	Tel: 603 7983 2190 / 603 7980 1192 Fax: 603 7983 2191
新山支會	1 & 3 & 5 & 7, Jalan Jaguh 1, Taman Harmoni 2, 81300 Skudai, Johor, Malaysia.	Tel: 607 554 7703 Fax: 607 554 1703 email: tzuchiib@gmail.com
峇株吧轄聯絡處	11 & 11A, Jalan Susur Pantai Baru, Taman Pantai Baru, 83000 Batu Pahat, Johor, Malaysia.	Tel: 607 431 1013 Fax: 607 433 7013 email: tzuchibp@yahoo.com
笨珍共修處	2, Tingkat 1, Jalan Pengangkutan Medan Koop, 82000 Pontian, Johor, Malaysia.	
古來共修處	No.144 Jalan Kenanga 29/6, Taman Indahpura Kulai, 81000 Johor, Malaysia.	
豐盛港共修處		Tel: 6019 757 1511
東海岸合心		

吉蘭丹支會	PT 209 & 210, Jalan Pengkalan Chepa, 15400 Kota Bahru, Kelantan, Malaysia.	Tel: 609 743 3013 Fax: 609 743 9013 email: tzuchikel@gmail.com
登嘉樓聯絡處	142, Jalan Bandar, 20100 Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu, Malaysia.	Tel: 609 631 7703 Fax: 609 631 7703 email: tzuchitrg@gmail.com
龍運共修處		Tel: 6019 981 1013
彭亨聯絡處	B-2, Tingkat 1 & 2, Jalan Haji Ahmad 3, 25300 Kuantan, Pahang, Malaysia.	Tel: 609 517 2969 Fax: 609 517 2062 email: kuantantzuchi@gmail.com
吉打分會		
吉打分會	535A Jalan Perak, Kawasan Perindustrian Mergong 2, 05150 Alor Setar, Kedah, Malaysia.	Tel: 604 731 1013 Fax: 604 732 1013 email: tzwelfarekd@yahoo.com
玻璃市聯絡處	18, Tingkat 3, Lorong Menanti, Jalan Bukit Lagi, 01000 Kangar, Perlis, Malaysia.	Tel: 604 976 3208 Fax: 604 976 3208 email: tzwelfarekd@yahoo.com
日得拉聯絡處	25-26B, Pekan Jitra 2, 06000 Jitra, Kedah, Malaysia.	Tel: 604 917 9013 Fax: 604 917 0117 email: tzwelfarekd@yahoo.com
蘭卡威聯絡點	8A, Lorong 1, Taman Sri Aman Baru, 07000 Langkawi, Kedah, Malaysia.	Tel: 604 966 6008 Fax: 604 966 6008 email: tzwelfarekd@yahoo.com
波各先那共修處		Tel: 6016 422 6679 email: info@tzuchi.org.my
莪占必叻共修處		Tel: 6012 563 2321 email: info@tzuchi.org.my
雪隆分會		
雪隆分會	55-57A (1st Floor) , Jalan SS 25/2, Taman Bukit Emas, 47301 Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia.	Tel: 603 7880 9048 Fax: 603 7880 8158 email: tzuchikl@my.tzuchi.org
巴生支會	74, Jln Dato Dagang 24, Desa	Tel: 603 5161 2048

	Idaman 2, Tmn Sentosa, 41200 Klang, Selangor, Malaysia.	Fax: 603 5161 7686 email: tzuchiklang@gmail.com
關丹聯絡處	A-71, 2nd Floor, Jalan Teluk Sisek, 25000 Kuantan, Pahang, Malaysia.	Tel: 609 513 9061 / 513 2969 Fax: 609 513 9062 email: tzuchi_kt@yahoo.com
勞勿聯絡處	29 & 30, Tkt 2, Bandar Raub Perdana, Jln Lipis, 27600 Raub, Pahang, Malaysia.	Tel: 609 356 10406 Fax: 609 356 3964 email: tzuchiraub@gmail.com
淡屬聯絡處	No. 28E & 28F, 1st Floor, Jalan Zabidin, 28400 Mentakab, Pahang, Malaysia.	Tel: 609 277 8818 Fax: 609 277 8818
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根地咬聯絡點	1st Floor, Lot 43, Adika Commercial Centre, 89008 Keningau, Sabah, Malaysia.	Tel: 6087 333 893 Fax: 6087 333 8936
山打根聯絡處	Bandar Indah Block 11, Lot 2 and 3, 2nd Floor, Mile 4 North Road, Sandakan, Sabah, Malaysia.	Tel: 6089 212 886 Fax: 6089 212 893 email: tzuchi_sdk@yahoo.com
斗湖聯絡處	1st Floor TB 8271 Perdana Square, Miles 3 1/2, Jln Apas, 91000 Tawau, Sabah, Malaysia.	Tel: 6089 911 896 Fax: 6089 911 895 email: tctawau@streamyx.com
古晉支會	Lot 8304-8305, 1st Floor, Lorong 7 C, Jalan Datuk Abang Abdul Rahim, 93450 Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia.	Tel: 6082 344 706 / 344 707 Fax: 6082 349 707 email: tzuchikuching@gmail.com
美里聯絡處	Lot 1276-1279, 2nd Floor, Centre Point Commercial Centre, Jalan Melayu, 98000 Miri, Sarawak, Malaysia.	Tel: 6085 419 753 Fax: 6085 420 232 email: mitzuchi@streamyx.com

民都魯共修處	新和興茶室 SIN HOE HING No.133, Taman Sri Dagang, 97000 Bintulu, Sarawak, Malaysia.	Tel: 6086 333 089 / 6019 885 3341 (鄧龍年) email: tengdungngien@gmail.com
馬六甲分會		
馬六甲分會	7850, Lot 922-923, Kawasan Perindustrian Batu Berendam Peringkat 3 (B), Batu Berendam, 75350 Melaka, Malaysia.	Tel: 606 281 0818 Fax: 606 281 2796 email: btzuchi@tzuchi.my
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淡邊聯絡處	PT 7000(Ground Floor), Taman Indah, 73000 Tampin, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia.	Tel: 606 441 6068 Fax: 606 443 1068 email: tampintzuchi@yahoo.com.tw
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居鑾聯絡處	8, Jalan Intan 7/2,Taman Intan, 86000 Kluang, Johor, Malaysia.	Tel: 607 773 6115 Fax: 607 771 1266 email: tckluang@streamyx.com
哥打丁宜聯絡處	No.21, Jalan Biru, Taman Laksamana, 81900 Kota Tinggi, Johor, Malaysia.	Tel: 607 882 7736 Fax: 607 882 7737 email: tzuchi_kt@yahoo.com
烏魯地南共修處	No 17, Jalan Beladau 5, Taman Puteri Wangsa, 81800 Ulu Tiram, Johor, Malaysia.	Tel: 6016 733 2861
昔加末共修處	No 29, Tkt Atas, Jalan Putra 1/3, Bandar Putra Segamat, 85020 Segamat, Johor, Malaysia.	

Appendix 4: List of Fo Guang Shan-affiliated branches in Malaysia (Source: Fo Guang Shan Official Website, http://www.fgs.org.my/cn/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=34&Itemid=17, accessed 21 January 2012)

馬來西亞佛光山通訊錄
雪蘭莪 Selangor

馬來西亞佛光山東禪寺
Persatuan Kebajikan Agama Buddha Selangor
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E-mail : 行政 : myfgs@fgs.org.my
寺院 : dongzen@fgs.org.my
查詢 : info@fgs.org.my URL: www.fgs.org.my

佛光山東禪佛教學院
Dong Zen Institute of Buddhist Studies
PT 2297, Jalan Sg. Buaya, 42600 Jenjarom, Selangor, Malaysia.
Tel: 6(03) 3191 1593 Fax: 6(03) 3191 2537
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佛光緣美術館（馬來西亞東禪館）
Fo Guang Yuan Art Gallery (Malaysia)
Tel: 6(03) 3191 1533 Fax: 6(03) 3191 1467
E-mail : art@fgs.org.my 東禪寺滴水坊
Water Drop Teahouse (Dong Zen)
Tel: 6(03) 3191 1533 Fax: 6(03) 3191 1467

佛光文教中心
Persatuan Meditasi Fo Guang Shan Selangor
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Selangor, Malaysia.
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E-mail : pjfgs@fgs.org.my

佛光文化事業(馬)有限公司 (普門雜誌)
Fo Guang Publications Sdn. Bhd.
43, Jalan SS3/29, Taman University,
47300 Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia.
Tel: 6(03) 7877 2246, 7877 0246 Fax: 6(03) 7877 8246
E-mail : 佛光文化 publications@fgs.org.my
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URL: www.fgp.com.my

八打靈大學園滴水坊
Water Drop Teahouse (PJ SS3)

Tel: 6(03) 7875 2800 Fax: 6(03) 7877 6525

E-mail : waterdrop@fgs.org.my

佛光山南方寺

F. G. S. Nam Fang Buddhist Missionary

138-B, Persiaran Raja Muda Musa, 41100 Klang, Selangor, Malaysia.

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南方寺滴水坊

Water Drop Teahouse (Nam Fang)

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佛光山巴生佛光緣

F. G. S. Bandar Baru Klang

32A, Jalan Tiara 5, Bandar Baru Klang,

41150 Klang, Selangor, Malaysia.

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巴生新鎮滴水坊

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八打靈清蓮堂

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森美蘭 Negeri Sembilan

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霹靂 Perak

佛光山怡保禪淨中心
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檳城 Penang

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檳城滴水坊

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柔佛 Johor

佛光山峇株巴轄佛光緣

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