

**STUDIES ON
HUMANISTIC BUDDHISM** 

**GLOCALIZATION OF BUDDHISM
佛教全球本土化研究**

Fo Guang Shan Institute of Humanistic Buddhism, Taiwan
and
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ISSUES OF ACCULTURATION AND GLOBALIZATION FACED BY THE FO GUANG SHAN BUDDHIST ORDER

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Abstract

Ever since Buddhism began disseminating from India to other parts of the globe, it has had to find its way through a seemingly endless array of host cultures. As the world's largest Buddhist order, Fo Guang Shan has successfully taken root in some 200 major cities across the five continents. How has Humanistic Buddhism as advocated by Fo Guang Shan's founder Venerable Master Hsing Yun acculturated in a wide range of cultural locations across the world? This paper assesses the progress and acculturation of Fo Guang Shan, and discusses the factors of success and failures in terms of its acculturation strategies, changes in the approaches of Dharma propagation, and the acculturative stress experienced.

Keywords: Humanistic Buddhism, Fo Guang Shan, acculturation, adaptation, integration, assimilation

1. Introduction

Ever since Buddhism began being transmitted from India to other parts of the globe, it has had to find its way through a seemingly endless array of host cultures. The question of whether it has successfully adapted to these cultures can be answered by evidence of existing traditions of Buddhism that have thrived in different cultural locations such as China, Tibet, East Asia, and Southeast Asia throughout the past two thousand five hundred years; and most recently, in the modern West. While growing interests in the doctrine, beliefs, and philosophy of Buddhism have placed this oriental and mysterious religion in the limelight, considerable attention is also being paid to the questions regarding how Buddhism has adapted or acculturated to the unique and varied cultural settings in the era of globalization.

Attempts at acculturation were present from as early as the sixteenth century. Francis Xavier (1506-1552 C.E.) was the first Jesuit missionary to venture into the Far East. Struggling to learn the local languages in the face of opposition, he had little success in the spreading and maintenance of Catholicism in China. Among his many successors was Matteo Ricci (1552-1610 C.E.), who exerted tremendous influence on the Jesuit China Mission.¹ His success in bridging Western and Eastern cultures can be attributed to his new missionary policy of completely understanding and appreciating Chinese cultural and moral values. He learned to speak and write the Chinese language with proficiency, relinquished his missionary attire, dressed like a Chinese scholar, and mastered the Confucian classics as the price of entrance to a conversation with the Chinese elite, and his knowledge of the Western classics gave him the authority to offer an alternative to Confucianism.² He was prepared by rigorous study to confront skeptical opponents with learned confidence. Nonetheless, his greatest method of acculturation was not his intellectual brilliance, but his ability to maintain his “foreign” religion in China without threatening Chinese cultural identity. By adapting Catholicism to Chinese language and traditions rather than trying to create Europeans out of the native Chinese population also meant adapting the teachings of the Church to Chinese society, and to accommodate Catholic devotional and liturgical life to Chinese sensibilities.

In considering Matteo Ricci’s intense academic and spiritual activity, we cannot but remain favorably impressed by the innovative and unusual skill with which he, with full respect, approached Chinese cultural and spiritual traditions. It was, in fact, this approach that characterized his mission, which aimed to seek possible harmony between the noble and millennial Chinese civilization and the novelty of Christianity, which is for all societies a ferment of liberation and of true renewal from within, because the gospel, universal message of salvation, is destined for all men and women whatever the cultural and religious context to which they belong.³

Such an innovative approach to assimilating and integrating Catholicism and Chinese culture would be an exemplar for any “foreign” customs or beliefs that set out to take root in a place other than that of their origin.

Although Chinese Buddhism found its way into the West much later than Japanese Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism, whose language advantage gave them an early exposure in the United States and Europe, the third wave of Chinese immigration that took place in the second half of the 1900s eventually gave Chinese Buddhism a huge nudge in its progress of globalization. It is now gaining considerable exposure around the world. A major cause for such rapid development can be attributed to the Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Order.

Founded in 1967, the Fo Guang Shan (Buddha's Light Mountain) Order expanded steadily across Taiwan, and subsequently to Los Angeles in the United States, and then to the major cities of the globe. Within a short period of twenty years that followed, it is now a headquarters for two hundred branch temples spread across the globe, and the Buddha's Light International Association (BLIA), an NGO recognized by the United Nations, with a membership of two million lay and monastic Buddhists, as well as home of the Fo Guang Shan Buddha Museum (formerly known as Buddha Memorial Center), a Buddhist landmark that attracted over ten million visitors within the first year of its grand opening.

How has Humanistic Buddhism as advocated by Fo Guang Shan's founder Venerable Master Hsing Yun acculturated to a wide range of cultural locations across the world? As the world's largest Buddhist order, Fo Guang Shan has successfully taken root in some two hundred major cities across five continents. This paper assesses the progress of Fo Guang Shan's acculturation, and discusses the factors of success and challenges in terms of its acculturation strategies, changes in the approaches of Dharma propagation, and the acculturative stress experienced.

2. The Fo Guang Shan Order and Venerable Master Hsing Yun's Concept of Acculturation

Fo Guang Shan Monastery is the headquarters of approximately two hundred branch temples in thirty-three countries and regions around the world. Seventy-four branch temples are located in Taiwan, while one hundred and sixteen are situated in other countries. The first step of globalization was taken when its first overseas branch temple—Hsi Lai Temple—was established in Los Angeles in

the United States. Known as the largest Buddhist temple in North America, Hsi Lai Temple, whose name means “The Dharma Coming West,” was inaugurated on November 16, 1988, and has since served as a multi-purpose international monastery. Hsi Lai Temple is known as “The Forbidden City of America,” and also listed as the largest Buddhist temple in the Western hemisphere. Other notable branch temples include:

Nan Hua Temple in Bronkhorstspruit, South Africa – Along with the African Buddhist Seminary, Nan Hua Temple serves as a religious and educative center in Africa, providing monastic training to Africans who aspire to become a part of the order’s Dharma propagation endeavors, as well as skills training for those in search of a job to support themselves.

Nan Tien Temple in Wollongong, Australia – Known as “Paradise in the Southern hemisphere,” it is also the largest Buddhist temple there. Situated on over fifty-five hectares of land, Nan Tien Temple was inaugurated on October 8th, 1995, and has since been a major center of Buddhist practice in Australia. Especially after becoming a stop on the 2000 Sydney Olympics torch route, it has been receiving even greater visibility as the most popular Buddhist spot in Australia.

Templo Zu Lai in Sao Paulo, Brazil completed in 2003, is not only Fo Guang Shan’s very first branch in South America, it is also the largest Buddhist temple there.

With the temples as the bases of Dharma propagation in and outside of Taiwan, Fo Guang Shan was ready to expand its endeavors in education on an international basis since the early 1990s. Its educational undertakings include sixteen Buddhist colleges, seventeen libraries, nine art galleries, four universities, two senior high schools, two junior high schools, four kindergartens, thirteen community colleges (formally known as Open Universities), City Buddhist

College, and the Shrimala Institute, as well as over fifty Chinese schools abroad.

There are also cultural undertakings such as *The Merit Times* (newspaper), Beautiful Life Television, Fo Guang Publishing Enterprise, *Universal Gate Buddhist Journal*, Gandha Samudra Culture Company, Voice of the Ganges Records, the Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Canon Committee, and the Fo Guang Shan Electronic Buddhist Canons, all of which focus on Buddhist academic research and promoting the popularization of Buddhism by using modern technology and the power of modern media.

In terms of charity, Fo Guang Shan has established various charitable enterprises that provide care and support for individuals at every stage of life, from birth to death. There are volunteer services that provide medical care, emergency care, and disaster relief in and outside of Taiwan, as well as children's homes, retirement homes for seniors, and hospice care centers.

In addition to all these achievements there is the Buddha's Light International Association (BLIA) established by Venerable Master Hsing Yun in 1991. At present, it has more than two hundred chapters and over one thousand subchapters in over one hundred and seventy countries and regions around the world, with a total membership of over two million. BLIA has members from all walks of life, including business entrepreneurs and professionals in education, culture, academics, and charity. Founded out of the spirit of equality among monastic and lay Buddhists, BLIA members work hand in hand with the Fo Guang Shan Monastic Order like the two wheels of a cart or the two wings of a bird, and together, they shoulder the grand mission of propagating Humanistic Buddhism to benefit all sentient beings.

One may find it hard to fathom how this Buddhist monk managed to accomplish so much in a matter of few decades, not only by his wholehearted dedication, but also by inspiring over one thousand monastic disciples and millions of devotees to follow his lead in realizing the aspiration, "May the Buddha's Light shine over the entire universe; and the stream of Dharma flow across all five continents." To him, the answer is quite simple:

I had no particular strategies. All that came to mind was the need to consider each human being's needs and place that as the top priority, because Buddhism is a religion for humans. The Buddha was born in the human world, he also cultivated, attained enlightenment, and taught the Dharma in this world, therefore, if one cannot apply the teachings of the Buddha to daily life, then one may as well consider that teaching useless.

Although Venerable Master Hsing Yun insists that there were no strategies, one can nevertheless discover the “humanistic” approaches in his every effort to propagate the Dharma to human beings. In the particular discussion of this paper, the following are his ideas of how Buddhism can become acculturated to respective countries:

2.1 Native-born Abbots for Native Temples

When the Indian monks went to China, they dedicated their effort to the translation of Buddhist texts into Chinese, and left the responsibility of building Buddhist temples as centers for spiritual cultivation to the local monks. Imagine if Kāśyapa-mātaṅga and Dharmaratna chose to stay in China instead of returning to India after their jobs were done, what would have become of Chinese Buddhism today? Bodhidharma also demonstrated the very idea of acculturation by transmitting the Dharma to Huike (487-593 C.E.), who was a native Chinese, and subsequently passed down the Chan lineage to other Chinese monks generation after generation. Similarly, Venerable Master Hsing Yun, as an immigrant from mainland China, having only served as the Head Abbot of Fo Guang Shan for eighteen years after founding the monastery, passed the abbotship to his disciple Hsin Ping (1938-1995), a native of Taiwan, despite the objections that Venerable Master Hsing Yun was still young and should continue his term as abbot for many more years. In doing so, not only did Venerable Master Hsing Yun make a perfect demonstration of his ideal that the baton should be handed to talented young leaders of the order so that Fo Guang Shan can continue to thrive under the alternations of each generation's leaders, he was also demonstrating an awareness

of the importance of realizing the acculturation of Fo Guang Shan Monastery in Taiwan.

Generally speaking, acculturation is usually defined from a subjective point of view, but my definition says otherwise. I place myself in the shoes of the culture of settlement, and hope that one day the temples that I have built can be handed over to the leadership to the native-born people. For example, a temple built in Africa should be managed by a native African leader, and a temple built in Europe should be run by a native European. Some of my disciples have objected, “Venerable Master, we have put so much blood and sweat into constructing these temples, how can we just hand them over to the hands of these foreigners like this?” I replied, “In the past, such Indian Buddhist masters as Kumārajīva and Dharmaratna came to China to transmit the Dharma, if the temples remained in the hands of these Indian monks, do you think there would be such a thing as Chinese Buddhism today? The Dharma is for all sentient beings, and all sentient beings need the Dharma. These native-born monks will do a much more effective job in propagating Buddhism in their own country than us...I hope that our temples can be placed in the hands of native-born monastics within the next two or three decades. Therefore it is our duty to support them in every way possible so that Buddhism can be disseminated globally at a much faster pace.”⁴

In March 2013, Venerable Master Hsing Yun announced at the Inaugural Ceremony of Fo Guang Shan’s 9th Abbot, that Most Venerable Hsin Bau would be assisted by five newly appointed deputy abbots, among them was Venerable Hui Feng, a native New Zealander who has studied and practiced at Fo Guang Shan’s temples in South Africa, China, Hong Kong, and the headquarters in Taiwan for

over a decade. Venerable Hui Feng's appointment symbolizes a giant leap in the realization of Venerable Master Hsing Yun's ideal of acculturation.

Any Chinese tourist in America would know better than to eat at a Chinese restaurant, because the best fried rice can only be tasted in China, just as the best pizza is most likely to be produced in Italy, and the best sushi in Japan, only the locals know how to produce the best for their own people. In the same manner, the best way to ensure that Buddhism, either as a religion or way of life, to find its way into the lives and hearts of the local people, is to entrust this mission to any native-born who possesses sufficient knowledge about Buddhism and their own culture to bridge the gap and blend the two into one.

Since ancient times, many Buddhist masters in China have opted to step outside of monasteries situated deep in the mountain forests, and to reach out to society to serve people, because they were aware of the needs of human beings. In the same manner, Humanistic Buddhism is something people in the West are able to connect with and feel its relevance to real life; and the best catalyst to the acculturation of Humanistic Buddhism would be a native-born spiritual leader who knows how to create such connections.

2.2 The Legitimacy of Having Equal Devotion to Two Religious Beliefs

While one must not forget the love of their mother, one cannot forget the protection offered by their father either. In the same manner, Venerable Master Hsing Yun advocates that having two religious beliefs at the same time is not wrong, nor is it any different from offering equal devotion to both of one's parents.

Not only do I encourage the people from Malaysia, a Muslim country, to follow two religious beliefs simultaneously, I also advocate that Christians or Catholics in countries such as America and Australia should be able to take refuge in Buddhism without having to convert from their original beliefs. I am confident that the compassionate Buddha has a heart

big enough to understand my intentions and see it as an expedient Dharma propagation method.⁵

In saying so, Venerable Master Hsing Yun's definition of commitment to a religious belief is one of democracy and freedom. For most religions, the action of taking refuge or being baptized symbolizes wholehearted and lifetime commitment, and converting to other religions would be deemed a transgression or cause for some kind of divine punishment or retribution. On the contrary, Venerable Master Hsing Yun offers at every Triple Gem Ceremony a more open perspective of taking refuge. He explains the act of refuge taking as the result of an individual's freewill, because Buddhism is not a means of control over what one should believe. Each individual has the total freedom to decide what they want to believe or not to believe. Buddhism demonstrates a large degree of religious freedom and does not claim exclusiveness over any doctrine. As long as it assists in improving moral values, bettering people's lives, and purifying human minds, it is suitable for any human being regardless of race, religion, or culture. He uses the example of transferring from one school to another to explain the Buddhist view of conversion to other religions,

When one takes refuge in the Triple Gem, it is similar to enrolling in a school. Should that individual choose to convert to another school one day, he will not be penalized or judged, it only means he has chosen to learn something different, and all he needs to do is to go through the procedure of disenrollment. It should be noted though, it is also a promise which he has made, but failed to keep in the end.⁶

This level of magnanimity was demonstrated by Śākyamuni Buddha. Many of his principal disciples such as Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana began as followers of Brahmic teachers and displayed certain levels of doubt upon their first encounter with Buddhism. Uruvilvā-kāśyapa, Nadī-kāśyapa, and Gayā-kāśyapa who were originally priests of fire-sacrifice with over a thousand disciples. Not only did the Buddha embrace them despite their backgrounds, he even instructed them to

pay equal respect to their previous teachers and continue to serve them as dutiful pupils. Such nobility has aided the further development of Buddhism and won even more respect for the Buddha.

2.3 Additional Options are Better than Fewer Choices

By presenting Buddhism as an additional option instead of as a mutually exclusive belief pitted against other existing religions that already have a long history in Europe, America, Asia, and Africa, Venerable Master Hsing Yun has given Fo Guang Shan a much wider range of development, particularly in Catholic and Muslim countries. Believing that participation in religious rites should be by choice rather than coerced, the seemingly indispensable rules and regulations which give a religion its sacredness are relaxed at Fo Guang Shan's overseas temples to inspire willing acceptance. For example, at Hsi Lai Temple, Americans who visit are given the choice not to bow or prostrate to the Buddha at a Dharma service unless they themselves were absolutely happy to do so; hamburgers and fries are an option on the menu at the tables of Buddhist meals; English is used as the chanting language at Dharma services; and the BLIA lay Dharma Lecturer's system was introduced to offer lay Buddhists the opportunity to teach the Dharma, thereby lifting the rigid rule that only allowed monastics to lead in spiritual cultivation and Dharma propagation. Along with the aspiration to appoint a native-born abbot to the temple, Venerable Master Hsing Yun has also come closer to the internationalization and concomitant acculturation of Humanistic Buddhism.

For many years, I have hoped to achieve the "internationalization" of Buddhism by propagating it in various parts of the world; while doing so, I have also actively promoted the "acculturation" of Buddhism. Nevertheless, in the process of doing so, I choose to offer additional options to people instead of lessening their choices by trying to convert them from their original religious belief...My purpose in constructing Buddhist temples on the five continents is to enrich people's spiritual world by introducing

Buddhism to them. For example, when I constructed Hsi Lai Temple, what I had in mind was that in a country of technological advancement and freedom of religious belief, wouldn't it be even better if Buddhism became an additional choice for them? It did not take long to prove that America was after all a huge melting pot. The fact that she was willing to accept new cultures, and draw on the strength of each to offset her own weaknesses is exactly what makes her one of the world's greatest countries.⁷

Furthermore, upon hearing news of the September 11 attack that took the lives of thousands and changed America forever, Venerable Master Hsing Yun not only insisted that the Fo Guang Shan Monastic Choir's continue their 2001 tour of the United States, so that Buddhist music could bring peace and solace to fearful and broken hearts, he even led his disciples to ground zero in person, and prayed for the victims. Being fully aware that the thousands who had lost their lives to this tragic event were from different backgrounds, his purpose there was not to deliver the Buddha's blessings but solace from God, Allah, and many other figures of belief. Through an amplifier in front of the burning debris, he softly prayed:

Oh Buddha, Dear God, Dear Lord Jesus Christ, Dear Allah, they are in dire need of your blessings and protection!

They are like lost travelers looking for a secure home...
Dear Buddha, Dear God, Dear Lord Jesus Christ, Dear Allah, please bless and protect your people...
Please grant them the confidence to live a new life.⁸

Having said that Humanistic Buddhism is any teaching that "what the Buddha taught, what is essential to human beings, what purifies, and what is virtuous and beautiful,"⁹ in such a prayer, Venerable Master Hsing Yun has offered Buddhism as, among many other religions, a belief that can bring happiness and

peace into people's lives, something which serves as a spiritual shelter to those who are feeling weak and helpless, and something like a ray of hope in times of despair and hopelessness, as long as they are willing to embrace it and experience the beauty it has to offer.

Buddhist organizations such as the World Fellowship of Buddhists and the International Association of Religious Freedom have collaborated with Fo Guang Shan temples worldwide to organize international conferences and events. With such openness and friendliness, Fo Guang Shan has, throughout the years, consistently cultivated the right causes and conditions to put itself on the international stage.

2.4 Teach New Things to the Locals in Their Own Language

From large countries to small regions in the world, each has their own language or dialect, and using the local language is the most direct way for a foreign culture to blend into the life and mindset of a host culture. For example, the first Indian monks Kāśyapa-mātaṅga and Dharmaratna who brought Buddhism into China not only learned how to speak Chinese, they also translated foreign texts into the Chinese language. Because of their efforts, Buddhist texts such as the *Sūtra in Forty-Two Chapters* became widely disseminated. This shows that the acculturation of Buddhism cannot take place without the use of the local language to win acceptance by the local populace.

Language serves as the bridge that links Buddhism to each part of the world. It is so essential that the propagation of the Dharma is almost impossible if not done in the local language, let alone showing people why Buddhism is a good option for a better life. In light of this, Śākyamuni Buddha instructed his disciples not to teach the Dharma in the divine Sanskrit language, because it would hinder the popularization of Buddhism among the locals, most of whom only spoke the common dialects.¹⁰

Not forgetting the Buddha's compassionate intentions, Fo Guang Shan has adopted an extremely wide range of language abilities in disseminating the Dharma. For example, the International Translation Center was established at

Hsi Lai Temple to translate Buddhist texts into more than twenty-six languages. Training programs for Dharma propagation in English and Japanese were introduced by Venerable Master Hsing Yun from as early as 1976 to enhance the global propagation of Dharma, which later developed into the English Buddhist College and the Japanese Buddhist College. To date, among Venerable Master Hsing Yun's over one thousand disciples, there are people from some twenty-six countries; and hundreds of graduates of these programs are now serving at Fo Guang Shan branches worldwide, propagating the Dharma in English, Spanish, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, French, German, and many other languages.

In terms of language application, Hsi Lai Temple in America has held the Triple Platform Full Ordination Ceremony on two separate occasions, one was a month-long period in 1988, and the other a two-week long ceremony in 2008. In addition, Nan Tien Temple hosted the first ever Triple Platform Full Ordination Ceremony in Australia for a period of two-weeks. On each occasion, the ceremonies were conducted in Mandarin Chinese, English, Cantonese, and even Korean for the participants from different parts of the world. These events also encouraged inter-tradition and cross-region dialogues among Buddhists.

Chanting services at Hsi Lai Temple, Nan Tien Temple, and Templo Zu Lai were adapted into English and Portuguese to enable a greater sense of involvement through an actual understanding of what is being chanted instead of the conventional method of having non-Chinese-speaking participants to merely chant along in pinyin, not understanding the meaning of the words which they were chanting. In addition, although conducted in different languages, the procedure is standardized so that the devotees can get right into the chanting services wherever they go in the world. Venerable Hui Chuan, President of the Supervisory Council, indicated that in recent years:

The Dharma practices at Fo Guang Shan have become more standardized and more routine in nature, including the time when such Dharma assemblies are conducted. The sequence of actions in conducting a Dharma assembly have been integrated into a unified process that is consistent at all branch temples around

the world. What this means is that no matter where a devotee goes, they can quickly join in, sparing them from having to adapt to something new all over again.¹¹

By always putting the devotees' needs into consideration, Fo Guang Shan has been able to spread Humanistic Buddhism in America and Europe smoothly and rapidly.

2.5 Incorporating the Spirit of Respect, Tolerance, Peace, and Equality

The Humanistic Buddhist approach to acculturation is progressive, harmonious, friendly, respectful, tolerant, and embracing. Furthermore, Humanistic Buddhism is a teaching that is easily applied to one's daily life, and this teaching is propagated with the objectives of bettering the world, improving the quality of life, and raising moral values.

Venerable Master Hsing Yun stresses that Buddhism was never intended to be used as a tool by one culture to eliminate the other; instead, it seeks to coexist and develop as one with existing cultures. Therefore, Humanistic Buddhism seeks to integrate with the local culture in every country it reaches, and to develop in accordance with the unique characteristics exhibited by that country.¹² "Joy and Harmony," "Respect and Tolerance," "Oneness and Coexistence," "Peace and Equality," "Wholeness and Freeness," "Nature and Life," "One Truth for All," "To Resolve and to Develop," "Self-Awareness and Practicing the Buddha's Way," "Change the World and Benefit Humanity," "Bodhisattva and Volunteer," "Environmental and Spiritual Preservation," and "Happiness and Peace" are the themes of the BLIA General Conferences throughout the past twenty years.¹³ These themes also serve as the guiding principles for BLIA members in their efforts to progress in their own spiritual cultivation, as well as in offering their services to the world. Furthermore, these themes also serve as common goals for global Fo Guang Shan and BLIA members who wish to contribute to the acculturation of Humanistic Buddhism.

Modern Buddhism is no longer regional or divisional...
Buddhist development should be a harmonization

between Mahāyāna and Theravāda, between the lineages of Northern and Southern Buddhism, between the Saṅgha and the lay community, of all four orders, and between orthodoxy and modernity.¹⁴

Having the capacity to transcend regions, traditions, and schools, Fo Guang Shan has shown to the world that acculturation does not have to be achieved through overpowering or eliminating others; instead, it needs to be achieved by a willingness to coexist, through cooperation and mutual inspiration.

The Triple Platform Full Ordination Ceremony held by Hsi Lai Temple in 1988 broke down the barrier between Southern and Northern Buddhism by having Buddhist masters from both traditions jointly preside over the ceremonies. In 1998, Venerable Master Hsing Yun took the ceremony to Bodh गया, India, and assisted over two hundred Buddhist nuns from twenty countries in becoming fully ordained under the witness of Mahāyāna and Theravāda masters, thereby restoring to the Southern Buddhist tradition of the *bhikṣuṇī* precepts that had disappeared for almost a thousand years. To reunite Buddhists at the place of Buddha's enlightenment became yet another unprecedented accomplishment of Fo Guang Shan.

3. Strategies of Acculturation

If the Fo Guang Shan Order is considered as a cultural group, then without a doubt, in its process of acculturating in thirty-three different countries, the issues of how to encounter people of different cultural backgrounds, seeking avenues of mutual understanding, negotiating and compromising on their own initial positions, and achieving some degree of harmonious agreement must be addressed.

Groups and individuals seek to engage in the process of acculturation in a variety of ways, and the variations have been termed acculturation strategies.¹⁵ These strategies are: assimilation, separation, marginalization, and integration. By assessing the current development of Fo Guang Shan temples in different parts

of the world in terms of these four strategies, the questions of whether the order is successful in its attempt of acculturation or not can be addressed.

John Berry defines acculturation as:

Acculturation is the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members.¹⁶

He further defines acculturation as based on two principles: (1) Cultural maintenance: The extent to which individuals value and wish to maintain their cultural identity. (2) Contact participation: The extent to which individuals value and seek out contact with those outside their own group, and wish to participate in the daily life of the larger society.

In another formulation, acculturation is defined as:

Culture change that is initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural systems. Acculturative change may be the consequence of direct cultural transmission; it may be derived from non-cultural causes, such as ecological or demographic modification induced by an impinging culture; it may be delayed, as with internal adjustments following upon the acceptance of alien traits or patterns; or it may be a reactive adoption of traditional modes of life.¹⁷

Additional complications are faced by Fo Guang Shan, which not only confronts the challenges of having to adjust to different cultures of settlement in thirty-three countries, but is itself a culture of origin that consists of members from over twenty-six countries. Furthermore, although the order has the background of Chinese Buddhism,¹⁸ when it enters Catholic and Christian countries such as Brazil, the Philippines, and those in Europe having encountered the massive

waves of Chinese immigration across the globe, besides the culture of settlement it must encounter, there is yet another culture to which it must encounter and adapt to at the same time.

For example, Fo Guang Shan's settlement in Australia began in the late 1980s, which is also the time when the peak of Chinese immigration took place.¹⁹ When a center was established near the Sydney airport in 1992, the first people to approach the center were Taiwanese and Cantonese people who, upon arriving in a strange land where people spoke a different language and lived a very different lifestyle, had the need to fulfill their spiritual needs while making efforts to adapt to Australian society.

Unlike others, when Cantonese immigrants arrive in a new country, the first thing they look for is not a place to eat or to make money; instead, the first place they visit is a place to pay respect to the Buddha.²⁰ Therefore, a place where people spoke their language and shared similar religious practices was the place closest to being called home. Very quickly, the center became too small for the fast growing population of devotees, and Fo Guang Shan sought a new location in Parramatta, a town forty-five minutes from central Sydney by car. While continuing to offer spiritual service, Fo Guang Shan also introduced a Chinese school to assist third-generation Chinese immigrants in maintaining their "mother-tongue." By tending to such needs, Fo Guang Shan quickly became successful in its development in Australia. IBAA Parramatta had a regular Sunday attendance of two hundred or more where people enjoyed spiritual solace and a sense of belonging. Up to this point, the separation strategy appears to have been adopted, where individuals place a value on holding onto their original culture, and at the same time, wish to avoid interaction with others.²¹ Having acculturated to a so-called alien culture of settlement, Fo Guang Shan was far from being completely acculturated.

At the same time when IBAA Parramatta was thriving with the support of Chinese immigrants, Fo Guang Shan continued to seek yet another location. A hilltop in Wollongong situated on the outskirts of Sydney became Nan Tien Temple, the building of which was completed in 1995. With its unprecedented Chinese palace style architecture in Australia, Nan Tien Temple quickly became a popular spot for tourists, school groups, and individuals who were ready to embrace

Buddhism. Every week, school groups pour into this majestic Buddhist temple on religious and cultural excursions, tourists drive from places as far as the Blue Mountains and Melbourne to enjoy the peaceful atmosphere inside the Temple's Main Shrine, and to see the museum that exhibits Buddhist art and culture—all accompanied by the serene sounds of the gong and drum in the early morning and evening. Weekend meditation retreats, regular meditation sessions, vegetarian cooking classes, Tai chi instruction, Buddhist studies, Chinese language courses, and even calligraphy classes conducted in English began to attract the locals who gradually began to volunteer to become tour guides and helpers at the temple. The Pilgrim Lodge, Tea House, and Reception Center even became popular with Australian job seekers who began to see Nan Tien Temple as their home. The annual Buddha's Birthday Celebration at Sydney's Darling Harbour attracts more than 60,000 visitors. In 2010, the Nan Tien Institute received final approval from the New South Wales Department of Education and Training as a higher education provider, offering undergraduate and graduate courses in Buddhist studies with courses related to ethics, psychotherapy, and religious studies. Traits of the integration strategy can be detected, where Fo Guang Shan has managed to both maintain the heritage culture while in daily interactions with other groups. In this case, there is some degree of cultural integrity maintained, that is, traditional Buddhist practices, and at the same time seeking, as a member of an ethnocultural group, to participate as an integral part of the larger social network.

Clearly, the transition from separation strategy to the integration strategy was an acceptable and smooth one for Fo Guang Shan, as it began with the support of a similar ethnic group that was ready to embrace the commonalities between themselves and what Fo Guang Shan already has to offer in a strange land, thereby developing a steady support for further development, and then began its outreach to the larger culture of settlement by accommodation of language and their needs and interest in Buddhism as a new religion in Australia.

Among the many views regarding the meaning of acculturation, the following formulation has been mentioned frequently:

Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different

cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups...under this definition, acculturation is also to be distinguished from culture

change, of which it is but one aspect, and assimilation, which is at times a phase of acculturation.²²

By assimilation, it means when individuals or groups chose to shed their cultural heritage, and become absorbed into the dominant society. In other words, without maintaining their cultural identity, they seek daily interaction with other cultures. Such a strategy, although largely undesired, appears somehow necessary for Fo Guang Shan in countries where another culture or religion enjoys a long and strong history. To explain this from a different perspective, as the non-dominant group, Fo Guang Shan's task in such countries is to observe and discover what the people need first, in other words, to place itself in a position where it is needed by people.

The first example is Templo Zu Lai in Brazil. In light of the growing number of children without support for their daily needs and education, the Temple and BLIA in Brazil established the "Sons of Zu Lai" Charity and Education Project in 2003.²³ Children between the ages of seven and seventeen from nearby areas of poverty are brought to Templo Zu Lai on a weekly basis to receive education in language, health care, and dancing, while those older than thirteen are provided with training in skills such as pizza-making and baking to prevent them from becoming marginalized in society due to a lack of skills to support themselves financially. Each week, these children are given a basket of food and daily necessities to take home. Concepts such as the Three Acts of Goodness and the Five Precepts were incorporated into their daily learning to help turn negative attitudes into positive ones. In 2013, the first class of the "Sons of Zu Lai" graduated from the project with an average age of twenty-three, some have progressed to tertiary education, while others have a steady income to support their own families. Without the project, many of these children would possibly have become drug dealers or thieves struggling to feed themselves.

The government recognized this project by providing a free parcel of land measuring 1,223 square meters for twenty years, so that Templo Zu Lai can build the Sons of Zu Lai Hope Education Center that will offer programs in general education, meditation, English, computer skills, soccer, capoeira, ballet, choir, music, drama, aerobics, kung fu, painting, Chinese, and poetry; and also in cooperation with SENAC, establish the PET-Programa de Educacao para o Trabalho to provide career advice and support.

In terms of charity, BLIA Paraguay has in the past fifteen years been actively engaged in charitable works. So far, it has donated more than a thousand wheelchairs to handicapped people, and over a thousand tons of rice, clothing, and medical supplies to the poor and needy. To abide by the Buddha's compassionate spirit in relieving people from illness and suffering, the Hospital Los Angeles Paraguay-China was established in November, 2003, and has since provided free medical care to the ill, in particular giving twenty baby incubators to local hospitals and providing the expenses required to care for premature babies. In 2011, the emergency infant care center was established by BLIA Paraguay, along with a monthly subsidy of US\$180,000 in personnel expenses paid by the ITAIPU Dam, as well as four medical apparatus at the price of several hundred thousand US dollars, donated by the Ciudad del Este District Attorney's Office. Furthermore, BLIA Paraguay also works closely with Bishop Rogelio in the soy milk machine project in Ciudad del Este. With the help of Paraguay Catholic Church and the First Lady of Paraguay, eighty-four soy milk stations have been set up to give away free soy milk two to three times per week, producing 71,000 liters of free soy milk to 4,500 families and two hospitals every month. The joint effort of Fo Guang Shan and the local government as well as local churches is an example of mutual or reciprocal acculturation, where the powerful role played by the dominant group in influencing the way in which acculturation would take place, where Fo Guang Shan's objective of benefiting society through charity has been actualized in South America.

The second example of assimilation is Fo Guang Shan in the Philippines. Clearly, in a Roman Catholic country, Buddhism cannot develop without both parties accepting diversity as a feature of the society as a whole, while managing to maintain its own culture. In this case, some long-term adaptation is deemed necessary.

Adaptation refers to the relatively stable changes that take place in an individual or group in response to external demands. Individuals or groups may change to become more like their environments, or there may be resistance and attempts to move away from them altogether. One either becomes well-adapted or becomes unable to carry on in the new society.

Once again, a similar approach to that in Australia was adopted here, where the spiritual needs of the Chinese community were fulfilled first to maintain patronage for the temple. In 1988, the Filipino couple Mr. and Mrs. Lu His-chung, at the behest of their late mother in her generous will, donated a piece of land of over one thousand pings to build a Buddhist temple to be called Chu Un Temple. Due to a lack of local monastic leadership, the couple paid several visits to Fo Guang Shan through the recommendation of friends, in the sincere hope of inviting some of Fo Guang Shan's monastics to reside in Cebu so as to propagate Buddhism.

Venerable Master Hsing Yun was deeply moved by the Lu family's dutifulness, and delegated Venerable Tzu Jung as the first abbess of the temple, a role which was later taken on by Venerable Yung Guang as the successor to take up the mission of continuing Dharma propagation across the Philippine archipelago.

The development of Buddhism in the Philippines began to take a different route when the element of music was added. Starting with the hosting of the Sounds of the Human World Music Competition, Fo Guang Shan found a link to local musicians and singers, and this connection was deepened by the musical production of *Biography of the Buddha*. In a form of artistic self-fulfillment, the performers who came to rehearse at Chu Un Temple were introduced to the values of the Noble Eightfold Path, the Four Noble Truths, and the Middle Way through singing these doctrines as songs, and were introduced to meditation and chanting as part of their training during rehearsal. Slowly they become accustomed to the Buddhist practices of joining palms, and greetings of "Omitofo," which means goodwill, and they began to see the temple as their second home where they enjoy friendship and self-discovery through interaction with the devotees and Buddhist nuns. Although they rehearsed at a Buddhist temple and were performing a musical centered around the story of the Buddha, the Buddhist nuns at Chu Un

Temple abided by Venerable Master Hsing Yun's instructions to give the locals space and to respect where they come from. In 2008, during their rehearsal breaks inside Taipei National Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Memorial Hall, Catholic priests were invited to the hall to hold a misa for the performers so they would not feel too distant from God after being on the road for weeks. On the level of individual enlightenment, the performers were able to maintain their faith while offering devotion to Humanistic Buddhism as a way of life, which fits well with Venerable Master Hsing Yun's endorsing the legitimacy of having two religious beliefs without interfaith clashes.

Though Buddhism seems to have become acculturated, no conversion is taking place in this case.

We may say that acculturation of the Buddhist faith to the non-Buddhist participants took effect, but this doesn't mean that there's religious transformation... the participants are acculturated with the kind of faith towards the values of the Buddha' teachings. The faith towards the teachings offered a great impact in the dealing of their daily life's endeavors...their faith towards the teachings combined with their artistic expression...was some degree of spiritual transcendence experienced which resulted in the strengthening of their Christian faith.²⁴

Marie Antoinette Gorgonio, who played the role of Yasodhara in the Musical, feels that having encountered Buddhism has made her a better Christian, and she and at least a dozen other performers remain in close and friendly contact with Fo Guang Shan.

In this case, the formulation is from the perspective of non-dominant people, and is based on the assumption that such groups and their individual members have the freedom to choose how they want to acculturate. There is no denying that acculturative stress existed due to resistance resulting from issues regarding conversion and conservative beliefs that hinder some of the people's

participation, because the majority of Filipinos are Roman Catholics who have been raised with the belief that bowing to other gods is the sin of idolatry. Added to the fact that performing such a musical would mean an action of propagating another religion, anyone who remained with the production may be taken as someone who is willing to be a part of a group conversion. Nevertheless, taken from the perspective of character and personality development, the youth have become attracted to Buddhism without the pressure of such stresses. Many of the performers remain active members at Chu Un Temple, either participating in or teaching classes, as well as participating in songwriting workshops, essay writing contests, the Chinese New Year musical, and the Humanistic Academy of Life and Arts.

4. Resolving Conflicts

Cultural maintenance, contact and participation, and the power to decide how acculturation will take place are the dimensions of acculturation which Fo Guang Shan, based on what has been said above, has managed to take into account in its efforts to develop globally. Clearly, marginalization or separation is avoided most of the time, because these two almost always lead to conflict and failure of acculturation.

In the effort of its global development, Fo Guang Shan has minimized acculturation stress by upholding the spirit of peace and equality, respect and tolerance, as well as oneness and coexistence in the following aspects:

4.1 Make Yourself at Home Wherever You Go

Any attempt to marginalize or separate oneself from the country or culture in which one lives will only hinder the process of acculturation.

When I travel the world, I continue to advocate localization of Buddhism. By localization I mean an attitude that is willing to contribute, to be friendly, and to compliment instead of reject and deny. For example, although many Chinese immigrants have

obtained American citizenship, they do not necessarily recognize America as their home country. This is why I encourage BLIA members to proudly claim that “I am American” when they take part in the Independence Day parades, because in my mind, if you live in America, then you should be like an American. It will do no good for you to be in a nation apart from your geographical nation.²⁵

Therefore, something as simple as your willingness to make yourself at home can progress in acculturating to the culture of settlement.

4.2 Respecting Cultural Values

Humans may turn each other into enemies, but they must never make enemies of culture. Just as we wish for others to accept our own culture, others would wish for the same.

In the past, no matter where the Chinese went or what they did, they claimed to be “glorifying and promoting the Chinese culture.” This is not entirely appropriate, because in Asia, there is Asian culture, in America, there is American culture, and European has its own European culture, and African culture. We must respect each culture and aim to achieve harmonious integration instead of trying to take over what is already there. I once gave a talk at Cornell University, and Professor John McCrae said to me, “It is okay to say you are here to propagate Buddhism, but the constant mentioning of the Chinese culture will make it sound like you are here to conquer the American culture.” This was a very good reminder for us to respect different cultures. We should be there to contribute and to serve in the same way as Buddhists offer flowers to buddhas and bodhisattvas as a form of goodwill.”²⁶

Instead of striving for conformity, freewill offers a greater sense of harmony and prevents rejection or marginalization in the culture of origin.

4.3 Accepting Diversity with Consistent Dialogue

Venerable Master Hsing Yun continues to stress, “There are so many Buddhist organizations across the globe, only by regarding others as we do ourselves and coexisting in harmony can we share a future.”

Not trying to be exclusive, Fo Guang Shan also maintains friendly relations with other religions. For example, Venerable Master Hsing Yun has had friendly exchanges with Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI. He has been received by the current and previous two prime ministers of Malaysia. He has also met with various religious leaders and talked about interfaith harmony. By being open and magnanimous, Fo Guang Shan maintains friendly relations with different social and religious circles throughout the world.

5. Future Challenges

While one may say Fo Guang Shan’s current progress in acculturation is more of a success than a failure, some future challenges must not be overlooked. For example, attention must be paid to the aging community of the Chinese patrons who played a vital role in Fo Guang Shan’s early development across the globe. Should Buddhism cease to be a family heritage, the changing values in third-generation Chinese immigrants whose Chinese language proficiency is evidently much lower than that of their parents may cause a dramatic change in patronage. When this happens, can sustained development be maintained? Can the Fo Guang Shan Order react quickly enough to respond to such a change when faced with the pressure of having to adapt to the culture of origin?

Another challenge that needs to be confronted is the amount of cultural maintenance and assimilation that can be allowed so as to efficiently achieve acculturation without dramatic changes in Fo Guang Shan’s values. In the process of introducing Humanistic Buddhism to the culture of settlement, will conformity prevail? Or will freewill give a broader direction to their future development?

These are only a few of the foreseeable issues which Fo Guang Shan must face. In an era of rapid change and development, can the current strategies continue to keep up with the current pace of globalization?

6. Conclusion

It seems certain that cultural diversity and the resultant acculturation are here to stay across the globe. Finding a way to accommodate each other poses the challenge of adaptation when the right strategy is chosen, or rejection if the strategy causes irritation. In Fo Guang Shan's effort to acculturate in different parts of the world, clearly, a mixture of the integration and assimilation strategies has been effective in the accomplishment of that goal. Although the process is a long and tedious one, Venerable Master Hsing Yun has already provided very clear goals for members of the Fo Guang Shan Order in assisting Humanistic Buddhism to develop in accordance with the needs of people in each country of the world, in particular, respect and tolerance, and peace and equality shall eventually bring beneficial changes to humanity and offer happiness and peace around the globe.

Notes

- 1 The history of the missions of the Jesuits in China is part of the history of relations between China and the Western world. The missionary efforts and other work of the Society of Jesus, or Jesuits, between the 16th and 17th century played a significant role in continuing the transmission of knowledge, science, and culture between China and the West, and had an impact on Christian culture in Chinese society today.
- 2 Goodman and Grafton, "Ricci, the Chinese, and the Toolkits of Textualists," *Asia Major* 3rd ser., 1993, 102.
- 3 Pope Benedict XVI in a letter to the Bishop of Macerata, Italy, May 18, 2009.
- 4 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, "The Human World and Life," in *The Essence of Humanistic Buddhism: BLIA World Headquarters General Conference Keynote Speeches (1992-2012)*, (BLIA World Headquarters), 2012, 97.
- 5 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, "Establishing the Characteristics of Humanistic Buddhism," in *Happily Ever After, Hsing Yun's Hundred Saying Series*, vol. 3, (Fo Guang Shan Board of Directors, 1999), 213.
- 6 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, "The Significance of Triple Gem Refuge Taking and Five Precepts," in *Where is Humanistic Buddhism* (Commonwealth Publishing, 2012), 157.
- 7 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, "My Opinion on Desinicization," *Universal Gate Buddhist Journal* 28 (2005).

- 8 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, “A Prayer for Victims and Families of the September 11 Disaster,” *Pearls of Wisdom: Prayers for Engaged Living II*, trans. Shujan Cheng and Tom Manzo (Buddha’s Light Publishing, 2003).
- 9 Manyi, *Humanistic Buddhism in the Hsing Yun Model* (Commonwealth Publishing, 2005).
- 10 *The Vinaya-Matrka Sūtra*, T24, No.1463.
- 11 Fu Chi-ying, *Bright Star, Luminous Cloud*, trans. Robert H. Smitheram (Buddha’s Light Publishing), 181.
- 12 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, “The Human World and Life,” in *The Essence of Humanistic Buddhism: BLIA World Headquarters General Conference Keynote Speeches (1992-2012)*, (BLIA World Headquarters, 2012), 97.
- 13 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, *The Essence of Humanistic Buddhism: BLIA World Headquarters General Conference Keynote Speeches (1992-2012)* (BLIA World Headquarters, 2012).
- 14 Fu Chi-ying, *Handing Down the Light*, trans. Amy Lui-ma (Buddha’s Light Publishing, 1995), 247.
- 15 Berry, J.W. “Psychology of Acculturation” in Berman, John J. (Ed.), *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation, 1989: Cross-cultural perspectives. Current theory and research in motivation*, vol. 37 (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1990): 201–234.
- 16 Berry, J.W. “Acculturation: Living Successfully in Two Cultures,” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 29 (2005): 698–699.
- 17 Social Science Research Council, 1954, 974.
- 18 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, founder of Humanistic Buddhism, is of mainland Chinese origin. He is in the Linji Chan School lineage and has been educated in monasteries from the Chan and Vinaya traditions.
- 19 The peak of Chinese immigration in Australia was in the early 1990s. In 1996, there were 99,600 Chinese-born people living in Sydney. This had risen to 146,000 by 2006.
- 20 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, “My Interpreters,” in *Buddhist Affinities Across 100 Years*, vol. 2 (Fo Guang Shan Board of Directors, 2013).
- 21 Berry J.W. “Acculturation: Living Successfully in Two Cultures,” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 29 (2005): 705.
- 22 Redfield, R., Linton, R., & Herskovits, M. (1936) “Memorandum on the Study of Acculturation,” *American Anthropologist*, 38, 149–152.
- 23 “Causes of the Sons of Zu Lai Charity and Education Project,” *20th Anniversary of Templo Zu Lai in Brazil Special Edition*, 60.
- 24 Marie Antoinette R. Gorgonio, *The Study of the Impact of the Influence of Humanistic Buddhism Music on the Participants of the “Biography of the Buddha,”* (MA diss., Fo Guang University, 2010), 64.
- 25 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, “My Opinion on Desinification,” *Universal Gate Buddhist Journal* 28 (2005).
- 26 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, “The Human World and Life,” in *The Essence of Humanistic Buddhism: BLIA World Headquarters General Conference Keynote Speeches (1992-2012)*, (BLIA World Headquarters, 2012), 97.