Fo Guang Shan seen through Telescope and Microscope

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Abstract

FGS ("Buddha's Light Mountain") is the largest of several Buddhist movements in today's Taiwan which draw their inspiration from the "Humanistic Buddhism" of the mainland Chinese monk Tài Xū (1890-1947). It was founded in 1967 in southern Taiwan by the Master Hsing Yun (b.1927), also from the mainland, who came to Taiwan as a refugee in 1946. Initially FGS was almost exclusively for monastics, but a lay branch, the Buddhist Light International Association (BLIA), was founded for the laity in 1991 and both organizations have spread across the globe.

The Master is both charismatic and immensely practical, combining aspects of Chinese cultural conservatism with imaginative flexibility to adapt to modern tastes and requirements.

So active and varied an organization cannot easily be summarised, so we are writing a series of articles on some of its aspects. In this paper we try to combine a view of it as if seen through a telescope, i.e., viewed as a whole, with a close up of detailed features which have built it up over time.

In the telescopic view, we suggest that in many different ways the FGS offers its followers features which prima facie appear to contradict each other. Sometimes this may be a matter of ambivalence, sometimes an astute realisation that a religious or political movement has a better chance of success if it answers disparate requirements.

When we apply our microscope, we hope to enhance understanding by summarising the careers and contributions of ten members of the

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movement: five nuns, two monks, and three laity. We also offer details of the movement's organization, which combines a Chinese hierarchic flavour with a somewhat modernised (rationalised) Confucian style bureaucracy.

Part 1: Wood and Trees

Fo Guang Shan (FGS), literally "Buddha's Light Mountain", is a contemporary Buddhist movement with its headquarters in southern Taiwan and branches scattered over the globe. Founded in 1967, it now has several million adherents. It is the creation of one man, nowadays known as the Most Venerable Master[1] Hsing Yun[2] (b.1927). The founder's personality and talents have moulded the movement even beyond the stage at which (as we have argued elsewhere[3]) the movement has made the transition from sect[4] to denomination.

FGS is the largest of several Buddhist movements in Taiwan which consider themselves (albeit in very different ways) heirs of the movement founded in mainland China by the monk Tài Xū (1890-1947). Though it is now most commonly known in English as "Humanistic Buddhism", the movement's original name was "Buddhism for Human life" (Chinese: *rén shēng fó jiào*). This name is more informative, in that the most important of Tài Xū's many ideas was that traditional Chinese Buddhism was far too much concerned with funerary rites and the worship of ancestors. We have shown elsewhere[5] that Tài Xū took the lead in shifting the emphasis to this-worldly activities, above all to education, and that Hsing Yun can claim to be his foremost disciple.

When he was a young monk in China, most of Hsing Yun's teachers had been pupils of Tài Xū, and he himself read Tài Xū's publications. In 1946 he attended a training programme given by Tài Xū on how Chinese Buddhism

[1] Honorifics naturally accumulate with seniority, age and fame.

[2] In Pinyin, the most modern transliteration, Hsing Yun would be written Xīngyún, but he himself prefers to use the old (Wade Giles) spelling, and without diacritics, so we follow his preference.

[3] Richard Gombrich, "Max Weber's Work and the Study of Buddhism Today", paper delivered at conference "Max Weber's Hinduism and Buddhism 100 Years on", SOAS, University of London, 9.9.2016 and accepted for publication in journal Max Weber Studies vol.18.1.

[4] We return below to the matter of calling it a "sect".

[5] Yu-Shuang Yao and Richard Gombrich, "Christianity as Model and Analogue in the Formation of the 'Humanistic Buddhism' of Tài Xū and Hsīng Yún", Buddhist Studies Review v.34.2, 2017, pp.205-37.

should be administered. Under his influence, Hsing Yun strongly took the view that the Sangha should work to help the laity: monks and nuns should teach the dharma and nuns should also take nurturing roles; human life should be presented as valuable and as to be enjoyed. He has written: "[E]ver since I started propagating the Dharma, I have been following the teachings of Master Taixu. … Buddhism is not a religion of empty talk. We have to start by improving people's lives."[6]

While he has consistently followed this line both in principle and in practice, one may ask how far Hsing Yun has managed to maintain Tài Xū's wish to drag Chinese Buddhism away from preoccupation with the dead. It seems to us that the more one studies FGS, the more often one observes a kind of compromise between two polarities. In this case, we have shown in our recent article that the further FGS has spread in Taiwan, the more it has been preserving, or even reviving, the traditional rites for the dead. At the same time, however, when we look at how Hsing Yun built up his movement, how he recruited and what kind of institutions he was keen to create, we find a strong bias towards catering for the needs and feeding the enthusiasms of young people. The Buddha established his religion as the "middle way". Hsing Yun has perhaps achieved a similar result by other means, repeatedly offering at the same time both X and non-X, thus attracting a wide variety of support. Sometimes this may be a matter of ambivalence, sometimes an astute realisation that a religious or political movement has a better chance of success if it answers disparate requirements. We shall give examples of this below in Part 4.

Hsing Yun is an exceptionally active and energetic person, with the result that the organization he has founded has been extremely busy throughout the half century of its existence. Much has been published about FGS, not least by Hsing Yun himself, and yet all the publications have barely scratched the surface.[7] According to the yearbook of 1997, the headquarters in Kaohsiung had at that time 16 administrative departments (we list them below in our Appendix 1), with a couple of extra ones added in the yearbook's *Appendix*, and that does not include the branches both in Taiwan and overseas, so that to document them all would require a cross between a chronicle and an encyclopaedia; to create it would require a team of writers and editors, and it could only be used as a work

[6] Hsing Yun 1987, p.30, quoted in Pittman 2001, p.273.

[7] All the primary sources are of course in Chinese. The scarcity of material in English is, naturally, even greater.

of reference. Our original impulse, to write "a book" about FGS, was obviously naïve. Besides, for such an enterprise our own resources of time and money are utterly inadequate.

Consequently, having produced two articles on aspects of FGS, one primarily historical[8] and the other sociological[9], we have decided that the next thing to do is to resort to the English cliché about the wood and the trees. To do so, in this article we make an attempt, however foolhardy, to point out some salient characteristics of FGS as a whole -- in other words to give our public some idea of the character of "the wood", as if seen through a distant telescope, and to combine this with a very close look at two cohesive masses of microscopic detail, masses important enough to be integral to any account of the whole, even though by their very nature they do not reveal the same characteristics. For "the trees'' we have chosen to look at an array of the first individuals whom Hsing Yun recruited to form his following, in particular its core institution of the Sangha, the body of ordained monks and nuns. Many of the individuals who played a part in this development have by now passed on, and others are reluctant to make themselves available for interview; but we do have some reliable data. We have then added to this (a) in Part 3: information about three individuals who have given crucial lay support to FGS; and (b) in three appendices: some further details from the 1987 *Yearbook*. Out of these contrasting but complementary ingredients, we have made a sandwich of an article, beginning and ending with views of the wood formed by the trees described in between.

First, however, let us briefly explain our claim that even when seen through a telescope the FGS movement appears as ambivalent or two-sided. In his book *Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State 1660-1990* Charles Brewster Jones caught this rather well. In a footnote near the end of his book he summarises from Bryan Wilson's work eight defining characteristics of a sect. Wilson was working in the Weberian tradition, and so were we in the article we cite in the first paragraph of this article. Jones, however, takes a far simpler view. He writes: "…[O]ne may view FKS[10] as a sectarian phenomenon based on the following criteria: (1) It is based upon a comprehensive religious vision as articulated by its founder, Xingyun. Furthermore, both he and his followers see this vision as sufficiently different from Buddhism as practiced elsewhere in

[8] See fn.4 above.

[9] See fn.3 above.

[10] Jones writes "FKS" where we prefer "FGS".

Taiwan that it may only be actualized within the context of the FKS or one of its subsidiaries; one may not practice "FKS Buddhism" in other temples."[11] Jones adds two further criteria but they do not supplement or modify this first one in any important way. Moreover, the eight criteria he cites from Wilson fit very poorly, if at all: for example, FGS does not claim a monopoly of the truth, show an anti-sacerdotal bias, demand total allegiance, or originate as a protest group.

What it boils down to is that FGS is a separate organisation within the far larger unit of Chinese (not merely Taiwanese) Buddhism because its founder has made it that way and keeps it that way in practice, preserving his own unique authority. Incidentally, such a thing is possible only because it exists within a pluralistic democracy: a totalitarian government would not permit it.

We close this Part with one illustration of what this means in practice. At the beginning of his classic account *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism 1900-1950*, Holmes Welch explains that in China there used to be two kinds of Buddhist temple, the public (*shí fāng cóng lín*) and the hereditary (*zî sūn miào*). "The essential characteristic of the hereditary temple was private ownership. It belonged personally to a monk or group of monks, who operated it as they pleased. On the other hand, the public monastery was supposed to be the property of the whole Buddhist sangha and to be operated in accordance with a common monastic rule …"[12] FGS is a private temple owned by Hsing Yun, but he has given it features otherwise found only in public temples; the most important is that a member of the Sangha is not admitted (ordained) into the lineage of a current monastic individual but acquires the whole ordaining generation as his/her collective master. We believe this hybridity of temple type to be unique.

Part 2: Some Trees

Hsing Yun came to Taiwan in 1949 with the Sangha medical relief team of the Nationalists (Guomindang/GMD).[13] He first stayed at Yuan Guang Temple in Zhongli (near Taipei), then joined the seminary founded by Ven. Ci Hang. He, Ci Hang and other fellows of the seminary were accused of being in contact with the Chinese Communists, and were sent to prison. With the help of some influential Buddhists, Hsing Yun was released after 23 days, and advised to become a member of the Guomindang. In the early 1950s, Hsing Yun was

[11] Jones, p.197.
[12] Welsh, p.4.
[13] Also anglicised as Kuomintang/KMT. Even today it is one of the two main parties in Taiwan.

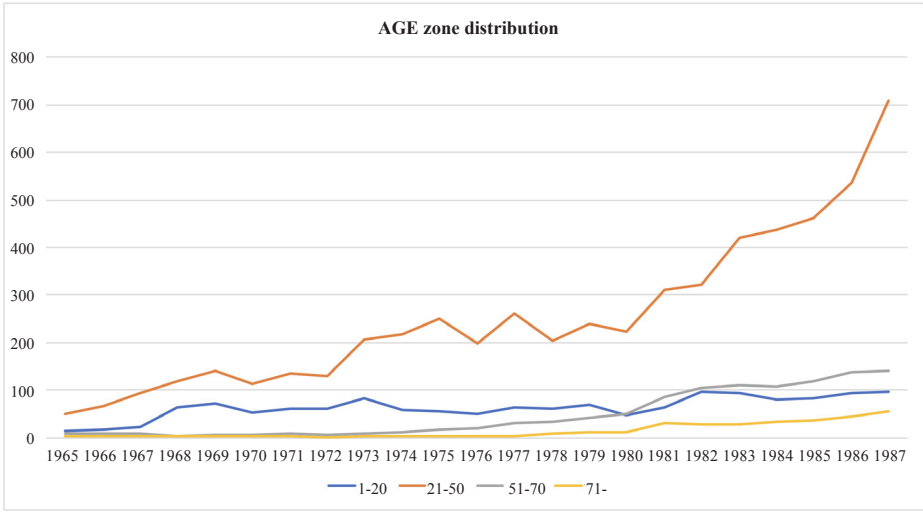
wandering among Taiwanese temples and editing a few Buddhist magazines, though he was still under suspicion of links with mainland Chinese.

On taking power in Taiwan, the Guomindang under Chiang Kai Shek arranged to control Buddhism through a continuation of the organisation which had played this role in mainland China, the BAROC.[14] In 1952 in Yilan (the NE district of Taiwan), a wealthy Buddhist layman called Li Juiher, who owned Yilan's first department store, had been trying in vain to invite a Buddhist monk from Taipei to come and preach in Yilan. At a BAROC meeting he met Hsing Yun and persuaded him to take charge of Leiyin temple. There Hsing Yun launched his career as a Buddhist leader. Mr Li and his wife visited the temple almost every day to act as interpreters between the locals and Hsing Yun, who did not speak the local dialect.

In 1967 Hsing Yun bought some barren land in the southern district of Kaohsiung and there founded Fó Guāng Shān, building first a seminary and then a monastery; the latter soon became his headquarters, which it remains to this day. In this period FGS was purely a clerical organization, though it had a few lay supporters. Its lay counterpart was founded only in 1991. Moreover, until 1963 all the Sangha members were nuns; and even after the foundation of FGS monks remained very much in the minority. When we refer to a monastic member of FGS, the reader should assume that it is a nun unless specifically told otherwise.

Besides this sheer imbalance in gender, we note that it has been the general practice in FGS for men to be ordained at a younger age than women. The reason is not entirely clear. It could be because of opposition from the families of the women, who retain hopes that their daughters will marry and produce offspring until that becomes unlikely. Another factor could be that men are allowed to leave the robes and then re-ordain, whereas for women the first decision to be ordained has to be final.

[14] The Buddhist Association of the Republic of China; its antecedents go back to the foundation of that republic in 1911. Until the end of the GMD dictatorship in 1989 all ordinations in Taiwan had to be performed and registered by BAROC



We have obtained a copy of the 1987 FGS *Yearbook*. It marks the 20th anniversary of FGS and contains a vast amount of information, though not all of it is self-explanatory. In what follows we have relied mainly on this source, but supplemented it with material from Fu Zhiyin's book *Xin Huǒ: Fó Guāng Shān chén xiān qǐhuò de gùshì* ("The story of Fo Guang Shan's transmission").[15] Our first biography, that of Xin Ping, is entirely from the latter source, because by 1987 he had died.

Xin Ping, b.1938 in Yilan, became the second abbot of FGS. He was born in the family of Wu, whose home was very close to Leiying Temple. He regularly prayed at the temple on the first and the fifteenth days of the lunar month. Early on, he joined the students' committee of the temple and thus got to know the Master better.

He was trained as a printer and often printed material free of charge for FGS. After his military service he was working at a printing factory when Hsing Yun phoned to ask him for help. At this he left his job and moved to live with Hsing Yun (in Taipei). He formally ordained (was tonsured) on 1 January 1963, and was officially announced as Hsing Yun's first disciple. More than a thousand people attended this ceremony. He was fully ordained in the same year in Hai

[15] Taipei, Commonwealth Publishing, 1997.

Hui Temple in Jilong. He was sent to study in the Buddhist seminary and the Chinese Buddhist Academy, both in Taiwan. In 1973, when FGS founded its own Sangha, he was its first leader, and Hsing Yun again publicly declared him to be his first disciple. When Hsing Yun resigned as abbot in 1985, Xin Ping became his successor and received the Dharma scroll from him. By this act he became the 49th patriarch in the lineage of Lin Ji Chan.

For many years he was the only male in the FGS Sangha. His work focussed on the production and distribution of publications. When Hsing Yun moved the HQ to Kaohsiung, Xin Ping was usually the only FGS person to stay on the site. His life style was primitive: he had his own small hut, drank water from the stream, collected firewood for cooking, and lived on fresh vegetables. He recorded the local geography, flora and fauna, and climate. Hsing Yun said he was the person who had to be given the credit for their buildings there. When Hsing Yun was on his travels, Xin Ping took over his duties and responsibilities back at base. Though modest about his gifts, he was known to sing beautifully, had excellent visual taste, and was a superb cook. However, he died of liver cancer in 1995, aged 58. See also Appendix A below.

Although Xin Ping was at least twice declared to be Hsing Yun's first disciple, within the movement great importance is also attached to the first nuns. Sometimes, ignoring Xin Ping, five of them are referred to as the first disciples. One may presume that this is because when the Buddha began to preach, he first converted five disciples, who then became remembered as a group. Similarly, Ci Zhong, Ci Hui, Ci Rong, Ci Jia and Ci Yi have a special place at the top of the FGS hierarchy. All five were sent to be educated in Japan. But one also notices something else about them: they specialised in different areas so that their responsibilities were arranged to be complementary. This may recall how the Buddha in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (1.23-6) declared of the leading monks and nuns how each was pre-eminent in a different respect.

First came Ci Zhong (b.1931), daughter of the Mr Li who brought Hsing Yun to Yilan. She was at that time a high school graduate and was working in the local school office. She was very good at maths, English and Japanese, and regarded Buddhism as a superstition fit only for the elderly. She wondered why her parents were so interested in this young monk, so she visited the temple. At New Year 1954 Hsing Yun led his followers on a tour and Mr Li registered his daughter to go on it. On getting to know Hsing Yun, she found him unselfish and compassionate, and began to take a more favourable view of Buddhism. She started to do voluntary work at the temple, and joined the choir. She frequently

heard Hsing Yun lecture, both at the temple and on tour, and passed exams that he set. After following him for 12 years, in 1965, she took ordination as the Ven Ci Zhong. By then, FGS had its own temple in Kaohsiung. In the same year she took triple ordination in Fa Yun temple in Miaoli. Later her father, aged 73, also became a monk; so did her two nephews. In 1959, she founded the Buddhist Culture Service Centre. She imported many publications from Hong Kong, and gradually took charge of all FGS publications; this induced local Buddhists to read books, rather than merely to chant from memory. She also imported from Hong Kong such items as Buddhist shoes and robes, and instruments such as the wooden fish; and she became a conduit for passing such materials on to monasteries in SE Asia. All this brought a remote provincial monastery to learn and adopt more traditional practices.

Hsing Yun arranged for her to study in Kyoto; on her return in 1974 she persuaded him to found the first two branches of the FGS in Taipei; in 1978 she inaugurated the branch called Pu Min, which became famous. This is Taipei's oldest Buddhist temple to be distinctively urban, being in one large building rather than spread over a campus. She also inaugurated the custom of holding a weekly pilgrimage from Pu Min to Fo Guang Shan. Such pilgrimages have become a means by which some people, such as Yung Ping, abbess of the Taipei branch, and Yung Wen, former President of Hsi Lai Chinese school in the U.S.A., have been drawn into joining the FGS Sangha.

Two months after inaugurating Pu Min, Ci Zhong was sent by Hsing Yun to the U.S.A., to set up the FGS there. She arrived with only twenty thousand U.S. dollars, and encountered opposition from several American local communities. After ten years of hard work, including six public judicial hearings and more than a hundred public meetings, she had set up the organization Friends of Hsi Lai, and created in Los Angeles the first American "Forbidden City". This title refers to the architectural style, which emulates the great imperial palace in the centre of Beijing, with yellow roofs and red columns. The LA version was used for a huge triple ordination ceremony (the first held anywhere by FGS), a "Water and Land" Dharma meeting (to expel ghosts and gain merit), and a meeting of the World Fellowship of Buddhists. Since then, she has travelled over much of the world, often in the course of setting up new branches of the FGS.

In sum, Ci Zhong created the FGS as an international institution, and is venerated as the doyenne of the Sangha of FGS nuns.

Ci Hui, b.1934, was also born in Yilan. She was tonsured in 1965, and received full ordination in that year in Fa Yun Temple in Miaoli. She is the first

Taiwanese nun to have earned a Master's degree in Japan. Hsing Yun gave FGS four missions: education, culture, charity and collective cultivation (worship, liturgy and meditation, usually practised in groups). He put Ci Hui in charge of education – particularly for the monastics -- and culture. From 1964 she was dean in charge of Shou Shan, the first FGS seminary, which was originally in Kaohsiung district and then in the Kaohsiung HQ. FGS now has eleven seminaries, covering three levels.

More than 800 members of the FGS Sangha, including all the abbesses, have been educated under her supervision. In 1957 she founded in Yilan an FGS kindergarten for the public, the first Buddhist kindergarten in Taiwan. Over five years she founded for the public in Kaohsiung a kindergarten, a junior high school, a senior high school and a night school. She then moved to Hsi Lai, where she headed the department of education and then became Vice-President and President of the University. Back in Taiwan, she was in charge of the founding of Fo Guang University and Nan Hua University, and she chairs the Board of Trustees at both universities. She is chief editor of FGS's two main journals, *Awakening* (*Juě Shì*) and *Universal Gate* (*Pŭ Mén*). Since 1982 she has also organised many international Buddhist conferences, and arranged various international academic exchanges and co-operative schemes.

She is Hsing Yun's chief interpreter into Hokkien, the Taiwanese form of the Chinese language. He says that without her he would not be able to convey his message in Taiwan, for she not only conveys the content but also his style and spirit, and he has recounted that when he has tried to preach by himself people have complained that they prefer to listen to her.

Ci Rong, b.1936 in Yilan. Ordained 1969 at Jilong, Hai Hui. She took a university degree in social welfare in Kyoto. She knew Ci Hui and Ci Zhong. When she was 18 her mother took her to hear Hsing Yun speak, hoping to improve her health and peace of mind. She joined a Buddhist study group and became a Buddhist. She followed Hsing Yun on a 44 day trip round Taiwan to popularise the Tripiṭaka by distributing photo-copies. She wanted to be ordained like her friends, but her mother was upset, so she held back for some years, while working in the kindergarten. After ordaining she edited *Awakening*, and was in charge of the FGS orphanages and their homes for old people. She insisted that material charity should always be accompanied by Buddhist preaching.

When Hsing Yun moved the HQ to Kaohsiung, he asked her to take over Pu Min temple in Taipei. She so managed Pu Min that each month there were at least 70 regular activities, not counting special events. Every day the temple

offers a free vegetarian lunch. It has acted as the main host centre for overseas visitors to FGS.

On 3 Feb 1991 she founded the Buddha Light International Association (BLIA), with an initial membership in Taipei of 3,000, and it expanded so fast that on 16th May 1992 the Los Angeles branch (Hsi Lai) was inaugurated. Within another 4 years it had 2 HQs (Taipei and Los Angeles), 79 international branches, 27 offices, 30 committees, and over a million lay members in 51 countries. She herself founded the Australian branch, which was important because both Australia and New Zealand have many immigrants from Taipei. Her younger sister followed her into FGS, and she herself gave her inheritance from her mother, ten million Taiwanese dollars (about 250,000 UK pounds), to FGS.

Ci Jia, b.1939 in Yilan. Tonsured 1965, fully ordained in Miaoli Fa Yun Temple. Graduated in social welfare from Buddhist college in Kyoto. The first person to be tonsured by Hsing Yun. She was the Master's personal assistant for very many years.

She lived close to Leiyin temple but did not go there much. However, she went to Hsing Yun's lecture series and passed the exam, for which he gave her a prize, which led to her moving into the temple at the age of 18. She was at first in charge of the housekeeping. She was considered outstanding for her domestic skills and Buddhist learning. She used the latter in writing many articles for the FGS magazines. She became a lecturer at the Buddhist seminaries, typically lecturing for 12 hours a week or more; and she was warden of the seminaries. When FGS moved into the cities, she lectured to the public on such topics as the Buddhist precepts. At the three platform ordination in Hsi Lai in 1988, she became for a month the Master of Precepts.

Her talent for technology led to her spearheading computerisation at FGS.

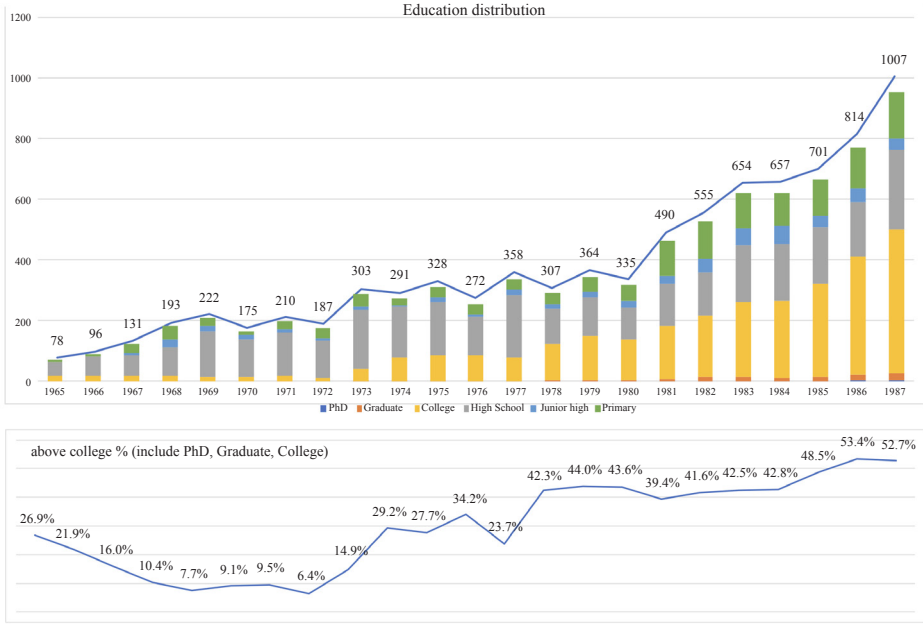
Ci Yi b.1943 in Taichung. Tonsure and ordination as for Ci Jia. BA and MA at Tokyo Buddhist College, then studied for a Ph.D. there in 1996, while abbess of FGS Osaka.

She was born in the Yang family; her great grandfather passed a Ching imperial exam. Her grandmother was a devout Buddhist who took her to visit temples, after which visits she gave her biscuits. She was beautiful, and passed the exam to become a stewardess. But she happened to be lent Hsing Yun's biography of Śākyamuni. Then when he came to lecture she met him, and he showed her his other books. She read that a Buddhist seminary in Hong Kong was recruiting pupils, and applied, but was rejected because she was not a nun.

She told Hsing Yun and he said no matter, she could come and study at the Kaohsiung seminary. But her parents were dismayed and fetched her back home. She tried several more times and her father even reported to the police that the temple were kidnapping her. Then he tried to kidnap her to get her married. She went on hunger strike, then escaped. Her father announced that he was disowning her. At the seminary she thereupon decided on immediate tonsure.

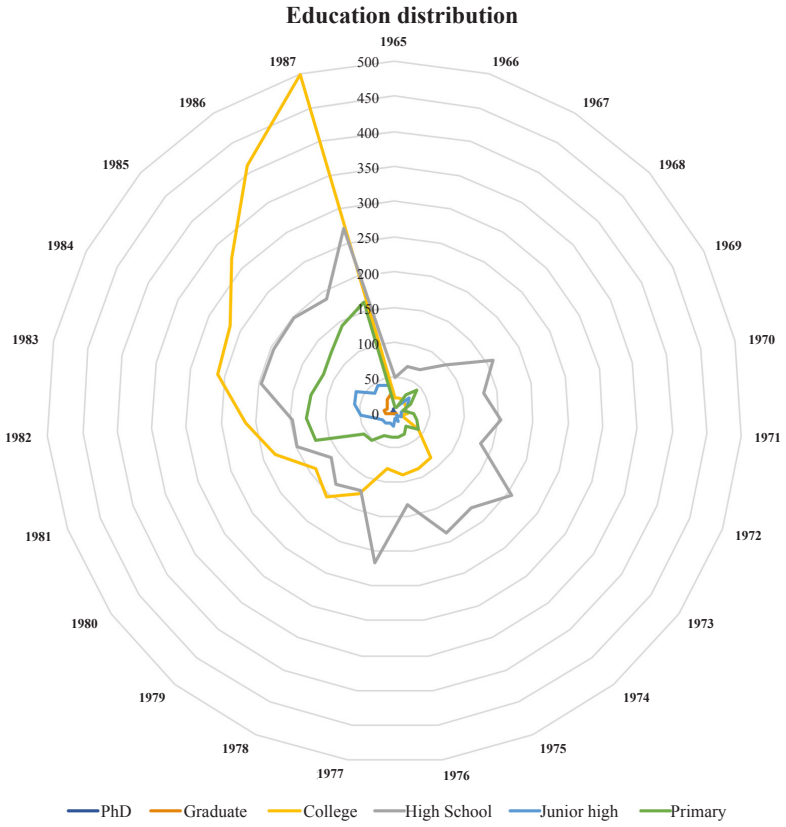
Two years later she published her diary. She went with two companions to study in Kyoto. On return to FGS she became dean of the orphanage and abbess of Fushan temple and dean of the Fushan seminary.

She took charge of re-editing the Chinese Tripiṭaka (=*Agon shu*) for easier reading and has so far helped to edit 4 vols of it; she is also chief editor of the FGS Buddhist dictionary. She has been editing a history of every aspect of Buddhism throughout the world from the beginning until now; so far it is about 7 million words long.



Xin Ding, monk, b.1944 in Yinlin (central Taiwan). In 1968 he was tonsured in FGS, next year received full ordination in Hai Hui temple, Jilong. He is known as the first monk "made in Taiwan". Born in the Shi family, who were farmers. A.k.a. Hui Xi, he was the 49th generation of the Lin Ji lineage. While on military service on a remote island he began to read Buddhist books, and was impressed by a senior soldier who was always chanting. When posted with his troop to Kaohsiung, he visited FGS HQ. Hsing Yun gave him literature. After military service he did voluntary work at FGS HQ. Hsing Yun offered him more education; he accepted and was sent to the FGS Eastern Buddhist Academy. He took tonsure inspired by the example of Xin Ping, and thus became the third monk in all. He took an MA in Indian studies for 2 years at Wen Hua University. He was admired for his strength and fitness, which he would make evident by taking direct part in building work, and in particular by installing all the Buddha statues. As Secretary for Religious Affairs, he played a major part in creating the codes of conduct rules for promotion to the various categories of FGS membership, and was in overall charge of lay membership. As the movement expanded throughout Taiwan, he planned and directed the foundation of new branches.

As the audiences became ever larger, he invented and supervised the arrangements for the Master's lectures; for instance, he bought and installed a projector – an innovation for Buddhist preaching. He was a gifted singer and knew both Cantonese and English, and used these gifts to create albums of chants, and composed (with others) a musical on the life of the Buddha. When he became abbot of FGS in Malaysia, he preached in the local form of Chinese. He is now abbot in the Philippines. Since the death of Xin Ping he has been second in the Sangha hierarchy.



Part 3: A few more trees

The most basic reason why Fo Guang Shan should interest historians of Buddhism is that it has attracted so many followers: hundreds of thousands in Taiwan, and millions overseas. We do not know how many of the lay followers give FGS their exclusive religious allegiance; that is not demanded of them and normally nobody asks. Chandler has written in some detail about FGS finances, and though his information could be updated, that is always a tricky subject, and perhaps not of fundamental importance. We think it may be more significant to record cases of individuals who have used influence to ease the way for FGS; using influence of course does not preclude giving cash, but may be even more valuable.

Eminent lay members.

There have been at least three important lay patrons of FGS, apart from its hundreds of thousands of BLIA members.

(a) Sun Zhang Qing Yang (f.), in the 1987 yearbook is classified as on scale 8 of sponsors.[16] picture p.75. She was born in 1913 in Funan, China, in a rich family. Her mother was a devoted Buddhist. RC high school. 1923 studied in Nanjing, at Jing Ling girls' high school, at which time she met her future husband, Sun Liren, who was an officer. Married 1930 in Shanghai. In 1934 she had a dream: a Bodhisattva came to her with a bottle of water and said she was related to Buddhism so should begin self-cultivation asap. Her mother and husband told her to learn more about it before she left home. In 1935 her mother gave her a rosary. She was not keen on chanting but liked to visit temples with her mother. In 1936 she took Bodhisattva vows at Qi Xia Shan under Ven Zhou Chen, while HY was a novice at that temple. Summer 1946 was very hot and she had a heart problem. She wrote a letter to Ven Dong Chu (who later became the master of Sheng Yen of Dharma Drum) at the Ding Hui temple in Jiaoshan, asking to be allowed to stay in the monastery to recuperate, and spent the summer there.

In 1948 her husband was posted to Kaohsiung Feng Shan (near FGS). The chief BAROC temple in Taiwan was the Shan Diao temple in Taipei. It was occupied by the Taipei City government and a few Buddhist nuns. BAROC wanted it back in order to devote it to collecting and studying Taixu's writings and property, which they had brought over from China. She donated ten million dollars to pay to recover the temple for BAROC, while another devout and influential Buddhist, Li Zikuang, paid 5 million. This became the HQ of BAROC. In 1949 many Buddhist monks in Taiwan were imprisoned, including Hsing Yun. Mrs Sun and Mr. Li used their connections to have them released. They also got other important monks out of China. They organised a dharma *pūjā* for soldiers killed in the wars, a "Royal Ceremonial to Protect the Country from Calamity and to induce Prosperity in the Country and Society". Chiang Kai Shek lent his support. She further organised the Taipei Chanting Association. In 1955 she arranged for the army to bring a copy of the Japanese version of the Tripiṭaka to Taiwan

[16] Biog on internet, http://buddhism.lib.ntu.edu.tw/museum/formosa/people/3-sun-zhang-qing-yang.html.

when there was no other means to transport it. When her husband became Commander-in-Chief of the army, and got the UK CBE, she persuaded many politicians and other leaders of society to become Buddhists. In 1956 her husband was put under house arrest. She later donated her house to the FGS. She always valued Hsing Yun. Died 1992, aged 80.

(b) Wu Boxiung is the honorary Chairman of the BLIA. He was born in 1939, in Taoyuan, Taiwan, to a wealthy and powerful political Hakka family. His uncle was killed in the "228 incidents" of February 1947, in which mainland Chinese immigrants massacred many Taiwanese. Wu himself has been Home Secretary, Secretary General of the R.O.C., Head of the National Security Council, Secretary-General of the Presidency, Mayor of Taipei and KMT chairman. The FGS record says that four generations of Wu's family have been devotees of FGS. Wu's father, Wu Honglin (1899-1995), was one of those who helped Hsing Yun and other Buddhist clerics to leave prison in 1949. When Hsing Yun was released, Wu Honling, then a MP for Taoyuan, helped Hsing Yun to register residency, which enabled Hsing Yun to stay in Taiwan rather than move to Hong Kong.

Though Wu Boxiung was a very high profile politician, he declared that he was a volunteer for FGS. Hsing Yun has acted as Wu Boxiung's mentor in many of his political decisions. A famous one was in 1995, when Wu competed with another KMT candidate to be elected Governor of Taiwan. Having two candidates would weaken KMT power, so that the KMT might lose the election. Hsing Yun invited Wu to FGS Taipei branch and had a talk with him for three hours. Wu listened to Hsing Yun's advice: he renounced his candidacy on the following day, and the KMT won the election.

When Wu's father died, Hsing Yun made a special trip from abroad and presided at a grand funeral for him. In 1995 there was a lot of bad publicity for religions, which led to attempts to stop religious education in Taiwan schools. Hsing Yun spoke publicly in Taipei on "Buddhist wisdom and life". Wu Boxiung, who was then KMT Secretary-General, attended the meeting and supported the FGS, who successfully opposed the move.

In 1987, when FGS was preparing to found the lay Buddhist association which became the BLIA, Wu wholeheartedly supported the idea and spread the news to other eminent politicians. When in 1991 the BLIA was founded in Taipei, he came to the opening ceremony and invited others to support the event; he even got a congratulatory telegram from the President of Taiwan,

Li Deng-hui, a Presbyterian. The BLIA was and remains the biggest religious organisation ever founded in Taiwan. When it was formally inaugurated in 1992 in Los Angeles, an event attended by 4,000 people from 45 countries, Wu was elected as one of four vice-chairs. He later became its president, and now he and Master Hsing Yun are the honorary Presidents of BLIA World. Wu gave his family home in Zhongli as the FGS provincial office. He attends most of the important FGS public meetings. He has promoted July in the lunar calendar, which the rest of Chinese culture considers to be the month of ghosts, to be the month of compassion (*ci bei*), and in cooperation with FGS he launched the campaign to promote the Three Virtues (*Shan Hao*: good deeds, good words and good intentions). Wu also accompanied Hsing Yun and other dignitaries in leading hundreds of Buddhists on a trip to Thailand to bring back the third Buddha tooth to Taiwan in 1989 (Chandler 2004: 250-1).

(c) Another important lay patron of FGS is a lady, Zhao Liyun, b.1952, a politician. She was President of BLIA for five years (2013-2018). She was born into a Hakka family in Xinzhu; her mother is a famous Hakka folk song singer. Zhao has an Ed.D. from Columbia University in New York. She has been a high civil servant, Chief of Sport Administration in the Ministry of Education. Zhao's political career in the KMT has been very successful. She has been, a National Assembly Representative and President of it, and a member of the KMT General Council, and is currently a Legislator and a member of the National Examination Council.

Zhao became a Buddhist due to her husband, Jian Wenfeng who was a very successful architect. In the 80s, Jian had already made lots of money, but he was upset that he had to go to many entertainments with his business clients. While Jian was wondering about the meaning of life, he was given a book on Buddhism. It changed his life. In 1982, he had an opportunity to meet Ven. Jin Kong (Pure Land master, b. 1927 in China). Jian learnt from him that it would be a great meritorious act if he could find a place where they could preach Buddhism and educate others to become preachers. Since Jian was an architect, he knew of a piece of land which they could use. There Jian and Jin Kong founded a foundation called *Fotuo Jiaoyu Jijinhui* (The Foundation for Buddha Education). The aim of the foundation was to create a Buddhist library and distribute Buddhist books free of charge, including free copies of the Chinese Tripiṭaka. In the

90s the foundation had developed a scheme to print and distribute series of Master Jin Kong's lectures on cassettes and videos, and to broadcast them on television, and to hold free lectures. This campaign has made Jin Kong one of the pioneers to preach in China; his Buddhist lecture cassettes are very easy to obtain on the mainland, and lots of Chinese listen to and watch his lectures.

Nevertheless, Zhao preferred a more visual approach to Buddhism. While she was working in the Ministry of Education, she was looking for some teachings which she could put to use in her job. She was very happy to discover Hsing Yun's teaching on Four Gifts (*ci ji*): to give happiness, to give support, to give hope and to give help. Zhao then became a follower of FGS. She organised some of the male members of BLIA into teams (*jing gang*) dedicated to particular tasks, such as standing guard in temples, acting as receptionists, being stewards at events, acting as chauffeurs. Because of her social credentials she was made President of Fo Guang University for a while, and she is the current President of Chinese BLIA[17], the first woman to hold this position.

Part 4: Back to the wood

In the final part of this article we return to general features of FGS. Of course, hardly anything of what we have here recorded could have taken place without the Master himself; so in this final section on FGS, his creation, he will figure as an individual. Overall, he may perhaps be summed up as resembling the Buddha himself in his combination of charisma and pragmatism. This combination has enabled him to say (in an FGS promotional video) that FGS is like a "department store that sells many things."[18] He embodies, among other things, the unlikely combination of traditional Chinese patriotism with American capitalist salesmanship.

So far we have said next to nothing about the soteriology of FGS: how it considers that the individual may attain salvation. This may strike a reader from a monotheistic culture as strange; but it reflects not merely the religion of FGS but that of a large segment of Chinese Buddhism in modern times, for it combines two soteriological traditions which at first appear antithetical: Zen and Pure

[17] The Chinese BLIA and the World BLIA have become different organizations.
[18] Quoted by Madsen, p.58.

Land Buddhism (also know as Amidism). In Japan Zen is held to be typical of *jiriki*, literally "own power", meaning that one can only reach Enlightenment by one's own efforts, while Pure Land Buddhism is typical of *tariki*, literally "other power", according to which Enlightenment can only come through the help of Amida Buddha. For a clear description of how the two are combined in daily monastic practice see Holmes Welch, pp.398-9. One can call this a soteriology of "belt and braces": if one form of practice does not satisfy, one is free to try something quite different – and need not even entirely abandon the first option.

However, this still understates the case. After giving the "department store" quote, Richard Madsen has written:

> Buddha's Light Mountain also intends to unify the eight major lineages of Chinese Buddhism. Almost any kind of Buddhist practice can be engaged in at the temple – from the austere practices of Chan (Zen) meditation to colorful folk Buddhist devotions. Since most people in Taiwan engage in some form of Buddhist practice at some phase of their lives, the complex of symbols offered by [FGS] contains something that can speak to almost everyone. Its symbolic net is wide enough to be able to represent much of the diversity of the society as a whole. It is wide enough even to include non-believers. 'This isn't a religion,' said one of the [FGS] nuns … 'It is our cultural tradition.'[19]

Let us now approach this subject from a slightly different angle. In 1998 Hsing Yun was entrusted with the custody of a relic, one of the Buddha's teeth; the ceremony took place in Bangkok at the HQ of the World Fellowship of Buddhists, of which Hsing Yun remains Hon. President. In order to house this in sufficient sanctity and splendour, he had built at FGS the Buddha Memorial Center, which is not a single building but a huge complex which exhibits to the public what Hsing Yun, who designed it, considers the essentials of Buddhism. This complex was opened to the public late in 2011, and at the time of writing (2017-8) has recently been finished by erecting in the middle a new College of Humanistic Buddhism.

It also features a Historical Museum. This issues an illustrated folding leaflet, from which we learn that FGS has "the objectives of propagating Buddhism through

[19] *Democracy's Dharma*, p.58. Madsen goes on to give a range of ever more "demanding options" for those who want to engage more fully with FGS religion; we cannot recommend his account too highly.

culture, fostering talent through education, benefiting society through charity, and purifying the human mind through cultivation to advance Buddhism past the new milestone of modernization and spread Humanistic Buddhism from Taiwan to the world." The aim of Buddhism is thus not to help people to escape from life, but to show them how to solve its problems by deploying their talents. They should engage with society, not avoid it, and eliminate obsolete customs and prejudices.

In this same pamphlet we read of Hsing Yun: "His arhat shoes leave behind traces of four-colored lotus flowers, and his waving robe sleeves produce Pure Lands with seven gems." In the very next paragraph we read: "Throughout his life, the Venerable Master Hsing Yun never received a formal education and never received an official diploma. … His every thought, spoken word, and action all abide by the principle of being an ordinary monk who never does anything that is not for Buddhism."

This well illustrates the double vision presented to devotees throughout the FGS: the Master is at the same time an enlightened being (the charismatic side) and an ordinary monk without even the advantages of a superior education (the pragmatic side). Similarly, FGS pragmatically sets about turning our world into a Pure Land (a heaven on earth, a Christian would say), but in fact that Pure Land is already here, constantly evoked in art, music, rituals, and the never failing benignity of the Master.

Let us take money as an example. In 1961, Hsing Yun wrote in an article:

> I think that nowadays our society has changed from being agricultural to being industrial. Money is the food which nourishes learning dharma and is the basis of Buddhist activities. The buildings and institutions we use to promote dharma cannot survive without money. Some think that poverty is how one shows one is a good Buddhist and they are afraid of being attacked for being rich, but ironically the same people go and beg money from others. Contemporary Buddhists need to change their views: there is no shame in being rich. It is poverty that is evil. We should not be jealous of the rich, or sarcastic. We hope that everyone will be rich: that will make Buddhism prosperous… Don't make money by lending at high interest. At death Buddhism does not know where you have put your money, so lending it out would be a huge mistake.[20]

[20] Article in *Awakening*, 1 October 1961, reprinted in *Writings in Awakening*, 1982, pp.48-50: "Everybody Rich" (*Dà jiā fā* ci*á*). Fo Guang Publications, *Collection on Buddhism* vol.6. This is our translation.

One may comment on this that while outsiders have estimated that FGS is enormously rich, Hsing Yun has tended to give away money so fast – sometimes before it even reaches him – that he can at the same time maintain the image of the worthy mendicant.

In early Buddhism, monks were not allowed to handle or possess any money at all, and their begging bowls were used only for daily collecting the food to maintain their lives. It conveys something of the flavour of Hsing Yun's innovations that his monks and nuns use their begging bowls as collection boxes.

Let us return to the pamphlet from the Historical Museum. The attitude to education is striking; in this case one can call it an ambivalence. Hsing Yun has followed Tài Xū in attaching paramount importance to educating his Sangha. When other founders of religious movements would probably begin by building a shrine, Hsing Yun founded the HQ of FGS by establishing a seminary, and the early years of FGS saw a seemingly non-stop flow of foundings of educational institutions from kindergarten to night school. Rank within the Sangha was largely determined by educational achievement (see Appendix A below), and formal examinations played as great a part as in any Confucian establishment. Hsing Yun himself has been a tireless author and educator.

Yet when in 2013 FGS established at Fo Guang University a Research Centre of Buddhist Studies and the Master came to open it, his short speech declared that research into Buddhism was not an important goal![21] While FGS nuns have been working for years to produce an edition of the Canon which they claim will make it more accessible, for instance by adding punctuation, nobody concerned seems to envisage that this could result in anyone finding out anything new. The key probably lies in his *Biography of Śākyamuni*: p.3 says that the B's teachings "are still hampered by those who mystify the teachings and ignore the spirit of the Buddha coming into this world. When their philosophy transcends the practical, they fail to experience the Buddha's intention."[22]

Is there one final point which could encapsulate the flavour of the Grand Master's pragmatic and compassionate adaptability?

There are so many … So let us arbitrarily choose a favourite, a gobbet of "inside information". Many westerners find their access to Chinese rituals

[21] We owe this information to our colleague Prof. Stefano Zacchetti, who was present as an invited guest.

[22] Originally pub 1955 as *Shìjiāmóuni fó zhuàn*, Foguang Publications. Trans. Alex Wong, 1913, Buddha's Light Publishing, L.A.

impeded by the strict convention that they must kneel or sit cross-legged for long periods. So the Ven. Hsing Yun permits people – even monastics ---to sit on chairs.

Appendix A

FGS code for ranking the Sangha: our translation. 20th Yearbook, 1987. Ed. by the Religious Affairs Committee, headed by Shì Xīn Píng, FGS Kaohsiung, pp.38-40.

Translators' note: "monks" here always refers to both monks and nuns.

Rule 1: The seniority of the Sangha has the following 6 grades:

Qīng jìng shì. The 6 grades of elementary school.
Xué shì. This has 3 levels, each of which covers 3 years.
Xiū shì. This has 3 levels, each of which covers 4 years.
Kāi shì. This has 3 levels, each of which covers 5 years.
Master, or Elder (*zhǎng lǎo*).

Rule 2: If any member fulfils the above requirements but has no outstanding achievements, they are categorised as *ān shì*.

Rule 3: Anyone categorised as *ān shì* is further categorised by the first 3 categories in Rule 1: as *qīng ān shì*, *xué ān shì* or *xiū ān shì.* One can be promoted from any of these categories after one year.

Rule 4: Newcomers will be categorised according to their previous backgrounds, which have 6 facets:

Educational level
Length of participation in Buddhism as a layman
Social experience
Career
Special skills or talents
Time since ordination

Educational level. *Qīng jìng shì* ***has 6 scales,*** *Xué shì* ***has 2.***

If educational level is only elementary, use scale 2, which starts from year 2 of *Qīng jìng shì*. Scale 3 starts with Senior High School, including starting at a Buddhist Seminary. Scale 4 starts with a High School degree, including

Vocational High School or Advanced Buddhist Seminary. Scale 5 is for college students of 5 years standing or 2 years after High School. Scale 6 is for monks with a university degree.

Scale 1 of *Xué shì* is for a fully ordained monk with a graduate degree below PhD. Scale 2 of *Xué shì* is for a fully ordained monk with a PhD.

Length of participation in Buddhism as a layman.

Every 2 years of service count as one year after ordination. Graduates of seminaries count their time in the seminary as years of service.

Social experience

If one has not taken the precepts in full, one cannot advance beyond scale 6 of *Qīng jìng shì*, but this does not apply to those with a special talent or contribution. Once one has taken the full precepts, length of time in Buddhist service, in Buddhist education, career in Buddhism and commitment to Buddhism are taken into consideration for promotion. For those with special skills or talent, there are 4 criteria: special relationship with Buddhism or contribution to Buddhism; experience and achievement in society; personality, education, morality; usefulness for the monastery.

Rule 5: Anyone who enters FGS as a dharma disciple is credited for every two years of service he has rendered to Buddhism in another institution as if it were one year in FGS.

Rule 6: Anyone ordained in FGS when over 60 cannot rise higher than scale 6 of *Qīng jìng shì*.

Rule 7: Criteria for promotion within the Sangha.

a. Study of Buddhism. Study Buddhist practice with deep understanding of the Teaching; progress in preaching and lecturing; publish theses or other writings; move to a higher level of education.

b. Career in FGS. Be dedicated, diligent and responsible; make outstanding contribution to temple management; implement new ideas on how to preach Buddhism.

c. Self-cultivation. Attend morning and evening services with alert participation; go to breakfast regularly and following a daily routine; maintain a good demeanour and follow the precepts.

d. Anyone sent abroad by the FGS in order to study for an MA is promoted immediately; if for a PhD, promotion is to *Xiū shì*.

e. If the Religious Affairs Committee regards a monk as having made a special contribution, he can be promoted. Should a monk's administrative position require it, he may be given the appropriate promotion.

f. For a monk to be promoted from *Qīng jìng shì* to *Xué shì*, the head of his unit must report favourably to the Religious Affairs Committee; anyone not qualified both in the five kinds of practice[23] and in the use of tools cannot be so promoted.

Rule 8: Those who promise to serve FGS and take salaried positions with them will be categorised in the above manner, but every two years that they fulfil a requirement will count only as one year, and they cannot rise above category 3, *Xiū shì*. For lay followers the rules are different.

Rule 9. Those conscripted into the army retain their status and on return they will be credited with the time present serving there.

Rule 10. Leaving the temple to study or go abroad without the consent of FGS will lead to loss of rank and status. On return they will still be credited with their educational background but not with their time of participation. However, the meeting of FGS abbots may take special circumstances into account.

Rule 11. All the above rules have been passed, and also their draft form emended, by the Religious Affairs Committee.

[23] These are morning chanting; evening chanting; morning breakfast; lunch; feeding the hungry ghosts during evening chanting.

Appendix B

In the 20th Yearbook on pp.40-41 we find a "catalogue of FGS members by name and rank". For ranks see **Appendix A**. We may add that ranks also serve to grade salaries.

Sangha.

Head: Grand Master Hsing Yun.
2nd scale of Kai shi: 5 members (4 nuns, 1 monk).
3rd scale of Xiu shi: 3 members (2 nuns, 1 monk)
2nd scale of Xiu shi: 9 members (8 nuns, 1 monk)
1st scale of Xiu shi: 15 members (10 nuns, 5 monks)
3rd scale of Xue shi: 38 members (36 nuns, 2 monks)
2nd scale of Xue shi: 55 members (51 nuns, 4 monks)
1st scale of Xue shi: 84 members (72 nuns, 12 monks)
6th scale of Qing jing shi: 69 members (61 nuns, 8 monks)
5th scale of Qing jing shi: 64 members (59 nuns, 5 monks)
4th scale of Qing jing shi: 47 members (42 nuns, 5 monks)
3rd scale of Qing jing shi: 6 members (6 nuns, no monks)
2nd scale of Qing jing shi: 7 members (5 nuns, 2 monks)
1st scale of Qing jing shi: 4 members (4 nuns, no monks)
Total: 407 members (360 nuns, 47 monks)
Total: 407 members (360 nuns, 47 monks).

Laity.

All of these were women and some had the same surnames and middle names, which suggests that most of them were related.

2nd scale of Xiu shi: 1 member
1st scale of Xiu shi: 2 members
3rd scale of Xue shi: 1 member
2nd scale of Xue shi: 2 members
1st scale of Xue shi: 4 members
6th scale of Qing jing shi: 1 member
Total: 11, all female

Why so few laity? The BLIA (Buddhist Light International Association) was only founded in 1991 and before that lay supporters of FGS were not organised.

There were 24 apologies for absence, which indicates a formal meeting. The apologies were from Sangha members and their names are listed.

Ages of Sangha members (pp.44-5).
21-30: 383 members
31-40: 262 members
These 2 groups together are said to be 64% of the whole.

Education.

In 1967 only one third of Sangha members had high school or college degrees. In 1987 twice as many had college degrees as high school degrees. The number of those with graduate degrees below Ph.D. was 1 in 1967, in 1987 it was 26. The number of Ph.D.s was 1 in 1967, in 1987 it was 5.

Origin (patrilineal) of Sangha members numbering 983.

Appendix C

The 16 admin. depts of FGS according to a chart in the 30th Yearbook, 1997. Published by Kaohsiung Religious Affairs Committee.

1. The elderly. Two sections: patrolling; heads of dioceses (American, European, Pacific, Africa, Taiwan (divided into N, central, S and E)).
2. Inspections in Taiwan. Four sections.
3. Inspections overseas.
4. Education.
5. Culture.
6. FGS Tripiṭaka editing.
7. FGS Cultural Foundation. Digitising Tripiṭaka. Museums.
8. Pure Land Cultural Foundation.
9. Donors' association.
10. University education: preparatory committee. [This was before their own Taiwanese universities had started.]
11. TV and satellite.

12. IBLA Committee.
13. International Buddhist Progress Association.
14. Religious Affairs Development Committee.
15. Meditation Centre.
16. Religious Affairs office.

The volume's appendix says that this omits the College for Transmitting Light, and the Secretary of Dharma Hall.

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