# Humanistic Buddhism in Taiwan: Generational differences among members of Fo Guang Shan

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# Content

# Introduction

The Fo Guang Shan International Buddhist Order or Fo Guang Shan or Fo Guang Shan 佛光山 is a religious organization founded by Venerable Master Hsing Yun 星雲 (1927-2023) in Taiwan. Its English name is "Buddha's Light Mountain", and the organization's religious beliefs build on Humanistic Buddhism.[1] It has spread from Taiwan to the rest of the world with more than one hundred temples and institutions built in other countries.[2] Its founding headquarters are located in the hill lands of Dashu District 大樹區 near Kaohsiung City 高雄, Taiwan. This complex consists of a monastery to house, teach, and entertain monastic people and visitors. Among the buildings are the Fo Guang Shan Buddha Museum 佛光山佛陀紀念館, a place filled with Fo Guang Shan's history, teachings, art, and the Dharma Sutra Repository, a massive library built in the style of a Buddhist temple.[3]

During visits to the Fo Guang Shan complex in Taiwan, it could be observed that the majority of the people present were part of older generations. This observation led to the following research question: "How do generational differences in religiosity affect competition in the religious market of Taiwan?"

Existing literature on this topic either addresses the situation of China or China and Taiwan grouped. A report by Pew Research Center[4] has indicated a growing decline in religiosity among younger generations across the world. However, It is unclear if this conclusion applies to the situation in Taiwan. The report does not include data on this topic from Taiwan, only data from mainland China. Sources providing data solely from Taiwan are not abundant. Besides this report, not many sources specifically address age gaps in religiosity. This thesis seeks to fill the research gap.

A case study on generational differences among members of the religious order named Fo Guang Shan will be presented. This consists of interviews conducted in the Fo Guang Shan Monastery and Buddha Museum.

The thesis is composed of three chapters. The first chapter will address the concept of the religious market theory, present the religious market of Taiwan and dedicate a section to generational differences within religious markets. This will provide the circumstances in which the Fo Guang Shan organization was founded and expanded its domain. The second chapter will introduce Humanistic Buddhism, the religious faith Fo Guang Shan is built. In addition, it will present details on the founding of the Fo Guang Shan organization and its leader. The last chapter will discuss the results of the interviews about generational differences among members of Fo Guang Shan.

[1] Hsing Yun, *Humanistic Buddhism: Holding True to the Original Intents of Buddha*, ed. Arthur Van Sevendonck, trans. Miao Guang, 3rd ed. (Fo Guang Cultural Enterprise Co., Ltd., 2016), i-xxi.
[2] "Fo Guang Shan Monastery Worldwide Web," n.d., https://www.fgs.org.tw/en/worldwide/Index/.
[3] Own notes.
[4] "The Age Gap in Religion Around the World," *Pew Research Center*, June 13, 2018.

# Chapter One: The Religious Market of Taiwan

In the field of the sociology of religion, the term "religious market" is frequently mentioned. To understand this concept, it is important, to begin with religious market theory. The theory is based on the religious economic model which is derived from the economic theory of "Supply and Demand".[5] This model describes religion as a commodity that can be "bought" in the marketplace. However, for people to want to "buy" a religion, it should be attractive.[6] This attractiveness of religion could be the religious norms and values of the religion speak to people or the provided activities adherents of the religion or religious group could participate in. In connection with the supply-demand theory, religious groups supply the attractiveness, and the consumers voice their demands. Also, this model views religious adherents as individual actors who decide their choice of religion and level of religious participation based on provided benefits.[7] In terms of this model, continuing to attract new adherents while maintaining its present members is what makes a successful religion or religious group.[8] Multiple actions are carried out to achieve this: following and applying the latest trends, placing religious advertisements, and modifying religious characteristics to remain distinguished.[9]

Competition is also present in the religious market. As suggested above, religions work parallel to the economic model of supply and demand: the most attractive religion should entice the most people to become adherents. This is why material wealth could assist religions in competitive religious markets.[10] Politics could further provide aid in three ways. Firstly, politically supported religious organizations have a bigger chance of gaining state funding to enlarge their "economic competitiveness".[11] Secondly, politically influential religious groups can lobby for exemptions to laws or for legislation that adjusts to their religious principles. And thirdly, they can use their political power to weaken other religious organizations.[12]

## Regulated and deregulated

In the world societies there are regulated and deregulated religious markets. Every country accommodates a different range of religions which makes the religion-state arrangements and structures in every society different. Some structures of state-regulated religious markets are religious monopolies, providing support for certain dominant religions. According to Patrikios and Xezonakis, utilizing the religious market theory, the state can enforce different degrees of social

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[5] Jianlin Chen, *The Law and Religious Market Theory: China, Taiwan and Hong Kong* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 13; Laurence R. Iannaccone, "The Consequences of Religious Market Structure," Rationality and Society 3, no. 2 (April 1, 1991): 156, https://doi.org/10.1177/1043463191003002002.

[6] Laurence R. Iannaccone, "The Consequences of Religious Market Structure," *Rationality and Society* 3, no. 2 (April 1, 1991): 158, https://doi.org/10.1177/1043463191003002002.

[7] Larry Witham, *Marketplace of the Gods: How Economics Explains Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 12-3; Anthony Gill, *The Political Origins of Religious Liberty* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 28-31; Shaun P. Hargreaves Heap, "What Is the Meaning of Behavioral Economics?" *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 37 (2013), 985, 986-989.

[8] Chen, *The Law and Religious Market Theory: China, Taiwan and Hong Kong*, 14.

[9] Evelyn Bush, "Explaining Religious Market Failure: A Gendered Critique of the Religious Economies Model," *Sociological Theory* 28, no. 3 (September 1, 2010): 319-21, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9558.2010.01376.x; Jianlin Chen, "Money and Power in Religious Competition: A Critique of the Religious Free Market," *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion*, June 1, 2014, 217-19, https://doi.org/10.1093/ojlr/rwt069; "Religious Market Theory," sociologytwynham.com, May 2, 2018, https://sociologytwynham.com/2018/05/02/religious-market-theory-3/.

[10] Rosalind I. J. Hackett, "Religious Pluralism in an Undecidedly Secular World," *Human Rights* 33, no. 3 (2006), 21-22, https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_relipubs/11/.

[11] Karrie J. Koesel, *Religion and Authoritarianism: Cooperation, Conflict, and the Consequences* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 22-3.

[12] Chen, *The Law and Religious Market Theory: China, Taiwan and Hong Kong*, 46.

control on religious competition and the consumers' choice. This would allow the state to shape the religious market of a country.[13] Moreover, Hagevi emphasizes that a deregulated religious market with a "competitive and pluralistic supply" is preferred over a religious monopoly by the standard of satisfying religious demand. A supply of a religious market with various religious groups will meet the people's demand, encouraging religious interest. On the other hand, a regulated religious monopoly can enhance secularization. Forced religious regulations in religious monopolies can have the negative influence of avoiding religion in the case of compulsory religion on people.[14]

## Religious Landscape of Taiwan

The Taiwanese often claim to be involved in multiple religious practices at once, in most cases folk religion in combination with Buddhism or Daoism.[15] This makes the religious landscape of Taiwan a complex concept. A consequence is the issue of not knowing which religion someone practices. A study by Zhang and Lin in 1992 shows that above 85% of the Taiwanese population did believe in or even worshipped gods, even though they claimed to be not religious.[16] Qu further argues that the 70% who claimed to be followers of Buddhism were practitioners of folk religion as they did not perform rituals of conversion.[17] The 2012 global survey of religious groups by Pew Research Center concluded that in 2010, the Taiwanese population was distributed as follows: Chinese folk religions (44.2%), Buddhism (21.3%), other religions (16.2%), non-believers (12.7%), and Christianity (5.5%).[18] In 2013, this changed as Buddhism took the lead with 34.7 percent, then Chinese folk religions (26.4%), Daoism (19.8%), non-believers (8%), Christianity (6.8%), and others (≈5%).[19]

The second half of the twentieth century sketched the beginning of the contemporary religious market in Taiwan. After the Kuomintang (hereafter KMT) took over from the Japanese colonial government in 1949 it promoted an authoritarian regime by implementing martial law. This meant a tightly regulated religious market to safeguard the KMT against any challenges of religious organizations.[20] Every religious movement was permitted one religious organization within a "niche". For example, the Association of the Republic of China (BAROC) took care of all Buddhist people and events.[21]

After the abolishment of martial law in 1987, in addition to economic growth, the religious market flourished. With the lifting of martial law, the Taiwanese religious market changed from heavily regulated to deregulation of religion. According to the religious market theory, this transition will start the battle for prospective adherents, as Hu and Leamaster argue.[22] Religious charity groups

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[13] Stratos Patrikios and Georgios Xezonakis, "Religious Market Structure and Democratic Performance: Clientelism," *Electoral Studies* 61 (October 1, 2019): 102073, 2. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2019.102073.

[14] Magnus Hagevi, "Religious Change over the Generations in an Extremely Secular Society: The Case of Sweden," *Review of Religious Research* 59, no. 4 (May 11, 2017): 501, https://doi.org/10.1007/s13644-017-0294-5.

[15] "Taiwan - United States Department of State," United States Department of State, May 12, 2021, https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/taiwan/.

[16] Maogui Zhang and Benxuan Lin, "The Social Imaginations of Religion: A Problem for the Sociology of Knowledge," *Bulletin of the Institute of Ethnology Academia Sinica* 74 (1992): 102.

[17] Haiyuan Qu, *Taiwan Zongjiao Bianqian de Shehui Zhengzhi Fenxi [A Social-Political Analysis of Religious Transformation in Taiwan]* (Taipei: Guiguan Press., 1997), 241.

[18] "The Global Religious Landscape," Data set, *Pew Research Center*, 2012, 46.

[19] Wen-shan Yang, "2013 年第二次社會意向調查 [2013 Second Social Indication Survey]," Data set, 2013, 16.

[20] Chen, *The Law and Religious Market Theory: China, Taiwan and Hong Kong,* 107.

[21] John F. Copper, *Historical Dictionary of Taiwan*, Asian Historical Dictionaries, No.12 (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1993), xxv, 71.

[22] Anning Hu and Reid J. Leamaster, "Longitudinal Trends of Religious Groups in Deregulated Taiwan: 1990 to 2009," *Sociological Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (May 1, 2013): 254, https://doi.org/10.1111/tsq.12000.

such as Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Association, Buddha's Light Mountain Monastery, and Dharma Drum Mountain grew at a rapid speed.[23] One of the reasons was that the post-1987 government welcomed social groups, including these religious groups, who were willing to provide welfare.[24] Furthermore, the new democratic opportunity of voting instigated the formation of political-religious collaborations as politicians attempted to prove their value to voters.[25] The results were (religious) charities having secure sources of donations due to discretionary expenses and people having free time to volunteer.[26] And along with the economic development came several uncertainties: brand-new political, international, and social issues. This increased the longing for finding one's Chinese or Taiwanese identity. Consequently, religions like Buddhism and folk religion began to provide the desired cultural heritage which allowed them to prosper.[27]

In addition, in 1989 the "Law on the Organization of Civic Groups" permitted more than one religious organization in every religious "niche", resulting in other religious organizations becoming more visible and actively participating in communities and politics.[28] From 1988 till 2004 the number of religious organizations in Taiwan increased, argued by Lu et al.[29] Ultimately, after the lifting of martial law the religious market of Taiwan became more competitive.

## Generational Change

Religious values and commitment within the religious market can easily change throughout generations. According to a report by Pew Research Center[30], the main reason for age gaps in religiosity across the world are the products of economic development. The report states that countries with higher education, higher GDP, and greater income equality will see a decrease in religiosity. All can be considered products of economic development.[31] The report proceeds with the claim that the motive of benefits is another reason for the decline in religiosity. It states that religious commitment tends to decline during early adulthood as the younger generations benefit more from working than committing to a religion. During late adulthood, they will participate in religion as it can benefit them during their older ages and even after death.[32]

One's religious commitment can also depend on one's younger years. Hagevi argues that the developmental period of an individual is crucial to religious interest. For instance, if this period occurs during the time of a religious monopoly, this individual will likely continue to have religious interests which is consistent with that religious monopoly. This will continue even if the religious market transitions from regulated to deregulated. Would this developmental period coincide with more individualized generations, then one tends to lose religious interest compared to previous generations.[33] He further points out that there is the possibility of a change in religious behavior as well as a possible increment of the general interest in religion during the transition of a religious

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[23] Jiexia Elisa Zhai, "Contrasting Trends of Religious Markets in Contemporary Mainland China and in Taiwan," *Journal of Church and State* 52, no. 1 (January 1, 2010): 95, https://doi.org/10.1093/jcs/csq028.
[24] Robert P. Weller et al., *Religion and Charity: The Social Life of Goodness in Chinese Societies* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 45.
[25] Ibid., 45, 72.
[26] Ibid., 8.
[27] Zhai, "Contrasting Trends of Religious Markets in Contemporary Mainland China and in Taiwan," 109-110.
[28] Ibid., 95.
[29] Yunfeng Lu, Byron R. Johnson, and Rodney Stark, "Deregulation and The Religious Market in Taiwan: A Research Note," *Sociological Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (February 1, 2008): 145, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.2007.00109.x.
[30] "The Age Gap in Religion Around the World."
[31] Ibid., 13, 18.
[32] Ibid., 24-5.
[33] Hagevi, "Religious Change over the Generations in an Extremely Secular Society: The Case of Sweden", 503.

market from a religious monopoly to a deregulated competitive religious market.[34] Finally, he argued that each generation has "the potential to develop its special characteristics," and these can cause a change in the religious market. With each passing generation, societies become more individualized.[35] As mentioned previously, this would mean an increasing decline in religiosity.

An example is generational differences in religiosity in the country of Bhutan, a small country located between China and India, where (Vajrayana and Mahayana) Buddhism is the state religion. It is a young country with over 50 percent of the population's age below 25 years old. Due to the influence of globalization and the rise of urbanization, there is concern about the preservation of Buddhist ethical values.[36] William J. Long researched the intergenerational transmission of values. In the data of the Gross National Happiness (GNH) Survey of Bhutan, various age groups are questioned about the justifiability of the Five Lay Precepts.[37] These are the foundation vows of Buddhism and consist of five actions: abstaining from killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and alcohol.[38] According to Long's research, most people thirty years and below are under the impression that the "sometimes" carrying out of the Five Lay Precepts is "justified". In comparison, the older generations of thirty years and above disagree and regard performing one of the Five Lay Precepts as "unjustified".[39] Similarly to Bhutan, Taiwan underwent major changes regarding globalization and urbanization in the last decades. However, it is not plausible to compare the Buddhist scene of Taiwan with Bhutan as Buddhism is not the state religion of Taiwan. As previously said, the Taiwanese often practice more than one religion during their life, so it is not acceptable to argue that the Bhutanese situation could also have happened in Taiwan.

## Conclusion

This chapter addressed the concept of the religious market. According to its theory, the religious market model is similar to the economic model of supply and demand, presenting religion as a commodity and the devotee as the consumer. The attractiveness of a religion or religious group is important as this secures new adherents and prior adherents. Religious organizations continuously need to keep providing this "attractiveness", otherwise adherents could deviate to other, more "attractive" religions (or religious organizations). This is the competition within the religious market of a country.

In addition, the chapter presented an overview of the Taiwanese religious market's history. After the abolishment of martial law in 1987, the religious market went from regulation to deregulation. The consequence was a growing number of religious organizations. Nowadays, the religious market of Taiwan is most probably low-regulated with little state involvement.

Lastly, it discussed how generational differences could affect the competition in a religious market. Due to processes like globalization can the transmission of generational values change throughout the years. The result can be an alteration in the "demand" of consumers within the religious market theory, which in turn means that the "supply" of religions and religious groups has to adjust to maintain the balance and keep attracting new adherents.

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[34] Ibid., 502.
[35] Ibid., 503.
[36] William J. Long, *Tantric State: A Buddhist Approach to Democracy and Development in Bhutan* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 152.
[37] Ibid., 152-3.
[38] Hsing Yun, *Humanistic Buddhism: Holding True to the Original Intents of Buddha*, 9-10.
[39] Long, *Tantric State: A Buddhist Approach to Democracy and Development in Bhutan*, 154-6.

# Chapter Two: Humanistic Buddhism

Humanistic Buddhism is a form of Buddhism that has been growing in the Taiwanese religious market since the twentieth century after it was brought by Buddhists of China to Taiwan. In the present day, various Humanistic Buddhist organizations have been founded in Taiwan and spread their teachings across the world: the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation 佛教慈濟慈善事業基金會, Dharma Drum Mountain or Fagushan 法鼓山 and Buddha Light Mountain or Fo Guang Shan 佛光山. These religious groups are built on the ideas of Humanistic Buddhism. Besides spreading the Buddhist Dharma, they provide charity as this is seen as one of the Humanistic Buddhists' means of providing for and improving society.

Besides addressing the core characteristics of Humanistic Buddhism and its origin theories, this chapter will also further introduce one of the Humanistic Buddhist organizations, the Fo Guang Shan International Buddhist Order or in short Fo Guang Shan (hereafter FGS).

## Distinguished Features

The core concepts of Humanistic Buddhism are the "Three Acts of Goodness" and the "Four Givings". The former consists of the performing of three actions: do honorable deeds, which represent virtue; speak good words, the representation of truthfulness; and think good thoughts, to find the beauty in life. The latter symbolizes the Four Immeasurable States of Mind, which are: "Give others faith, give others joys, give others hope, and give others convenience".[40] "That what the Buddha taught, what is essential to human beings, what purifies, and what is virtuous and beautiful" is the essence of the religion and describes the Threefold Training: discipline, concentration, and wisdom. The training has the objective of guiding modern people in finding peace and stability.[41] Hsing Yun, the Venerable Master of Fo Guang Shan, explained that "everything the Buddha ever taught serves the purpose of discovering happiness and peace in *this* world. In his perspective, all practices of Buddhism are Humanistic Buddhism": the original intents of the Buddha's birth into this world and the reason for sharing his teachings.[42]

Religious groups that built on the ideas of Humanistic Buddhism have been engaged in Taiwanese society by providing charity and disaster relief. As Madsen argues in his book *Democracy's Dharma* (2007), the major groups of Taiwanese Humanistic Buddhism did play a significant role in the strengthening of Taiwanese democracy. The main reason was the presence of a sense of community and the essence of providing care to the people within these groups.[43] As mentioned in the previous chapter, Buddhist religious groups were allowed to provide welfare by the new government after the lifting of martial law. According to Madsen, the above actions helped the Taiwanese society to stabilize after the change of political regimes in the 1990s and early 2000s, especially when martial law ended in 1987.[44] Moreover, Schak and Hsiao agree that "socially engaged Buddhism" raised the general morality in Taiwan, especially by providing care to the unfortunate. This gave those in need the feeling of inclusion in the wider society, which helped improve the civic nature of Taiwanese society.[45]

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[40] Hsing Yun, *Humanistic Buddhism: Holding True to the Original Intents of Buddha*, 15-16.
[41] Ibid., vi.
[42] Ibid., 5.
[43] Richard Madsen, "Controversies about Religious Organisations within an Evolving Taiwan Civil Society," *International Journal of Taiwan Studies* 4, no. 2 (July 9, 2021): 248, https://doi-org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/10.1163/24688800-20211144.
[44] Ibid., 248.
[45] David Carl Schak and Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao, "Taiwan's Socially Engaged Buddhist Groups," *China Perspectives* 2005, no. 3 (June 1, 2005), 14, https://doi.org/10.4000/chinaperspectives.2803.

## The monk Taixu

It was in the last century that the practice of Humanistic Buddhism flourished. According to Pittman, it could have happened earlier as some well-educated people of the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) hoped to reform and revitalize institutional Buddhism. Sadly, there were not enough Chinese Buddhist experts who might had the ability to pull such a transition off.[46] Amongst the well-educated people of the late Qing was the monk Taixu 太虛 (1890-1947). He was known for being a radical teacher who was far too assertive in advocating the need for religious reform of Buddhism. This made most of the Chinese monastic community criticize him. If it was up to Taixu, he would have enforced stages of institutional reorganization, charitable social action, modern education, and general cooperation and aid on the global level.[47]

In his earlier years, Taixu had already proposed a plan to adopt a three-tiered strategy against anti-Buddhist rules in China, which included land confiscations, giving up temples for other purposes, and more. Using Taixu's plan, Buddhist followers tried to create different associations with different purposes: having a lobby for the sangha; attempting to establish a reliable lay movement for the sangha; and starting the assembly of an education system to train monks in spreading the Buddha's teachings.[48]

Afterward, Taixu decided that Buddhism as a whole should reform. He intended to promote a transition towards a modern form of Chinese Buddhism and beyond. For instance, it was necessary to improve the role of the Buddhist laity as they played an important part within the Buddhist community.[49] Taixu wanted his teachings to directly address the spiritual and social problems of the twentieth century by keeping to the ultimate goals of institutional Buddhism.[50] In short, Taixu wanted to bring back the social aspects of Buddhism, to make it more relevant in social life.[51]

### *Taixu's Reforms*

Taixu's reformist ideas can be considered the founding concepts of Humanistic Buddhism. He called this new form of Buddhism "Buddhism of Human Life", *rensheng fojiao* 人生佛教, which laid focus on the improvement of human actions and the accumulation of merit in *this* world.[52] Schak and Hsiao further clarify the mission of Humanistic Buddhists: purify *this* Earth and prepare the world and its people to realize that the "Pure Land" is on *this* Earth.[53] According to Charles. B. Jones, Taixu argued that Buddhism (during his life) was too concentrated on death: Buddhists were solely managing funerals and reconciling with spirits. He wanted it to be more involved in the affairs of the living. Consequently, the concept of "Life Buddhism" was brought into existence.[54] It was based on two rules. First, the practice of Buddhism occurred mostly during a human's life and not after death. Second, religious life should therefore emphasize the affairs and morals of the living, not of the

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[46] Don A. Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu's Reforms*, *University of Hawaii Press EBooks* (University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 28, https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824865269.
[47] Ibid., 2.
[48] Holmes Welch, *The Buddhist Revival in China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 28-29.
[49] André Laliberté, "Religious Change and Democratization in Postwar Taiwan: Mainstream Buddhist Organizations and the Kuomintang, 1947-1996," in *Religion in Modern Taiwan: Tradition and Innovation in a Changing Society*, ed. Philip Clart and Charles B. Jones, 2003, 160.
[50] Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu's Reforms*, 3.
[51] Fenggang Yang and Dedong Wei, "The Bailin Buddhist Temple: Thriving under Communism," in *State, Market, and Religions in Chinese Societies*, ed. Fenggang Yang and Joseph B Tamney (Brill, 2005), 69, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047408192_006.
[52] Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu's Reforms*, 164.
[53] Schak and Hsiao, "Taiwan's Socially Engaged Buddhist Groups," 1-2.
[54] Charles B. Jones, *Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State, 1660-1990* (University of Hawaii Press, 1999), 134.

dead.[55]

The teaching of Taixu explicitly gave priority to selfless modes of action that both expressed and produced deep insight into emptiness, explained by Pittman. For instance, walking the path of bodhisattva toward the stage of full enlightenment is difficult. For those who struggled, Taixu accentuated that without performing compassionate actions in society, the wisdom one needed for full enlightenment could not be acquired. According to him, this seemed to be forgotten by many practitioners of Mahayana Buddhism.[56]

## Venerable Yinshun

Venerable Yinshun 印順 (1906-2005) was a disciple of Taixu who spread Taixu's reformist teachings in Taiwan.[57] Yinshun got influenced by his master's ideas to reformulate Buddhist ideals. The most successful modification of Taixu's ideas was "Buddhism of Human Life" (*rensheng fojiao*). Yinshun choose to further modify it and turned *rensheng fojiao* into *renjian fojiao* 人間佛教: "Buddhism in the Human Realm". He promoted the teachings of the early Mahayana Buddhist school because these empowered the tradition of *renjian fojiao* the best. As Yinshun intended to return to the fundamentals of Buddhist teachings, his reformist ideas were more conservative.[58]

It is the field of the relationship between Buddhism and modern society in which lies one of the differences between Taixu's and Yinshun's reform ideas.[59] Whereas Taixu was willing to engage in politics, Yinshun choose to avoid this. He rather promoted Buddhism as "a return to appropriate religious practice and charity activity on the part of lay Buddhists". It was allowed for lay people to participate in politics, but Yinshun did emphasize that political involvement could prevent spiritual growth.[60] In addition, he was against visiting places such as brothels, bars, and political organizations because these places could arouse "defiled thoughts and deeds". [61] Another dissimilarity was Taixu's issue regarding Buddhism being too focused on 'death'. In Yinshun's eyes, the problem was something else: Buddhism had grown too "theistic" during the period of early Indian Buddhism.[62] This clashed with the belief that Shakyamuni Buddha began his life as a human. "All buddhas and world-honored ones arise from the human realms and not from the gods," as explained by Yang.[63] According to Laliberté, Yinshun regarded some of Taixu's reform ideas as "too far" as they rather were radical political trends instead of efforts to reform traditional Buddhism.[64]

Both did agree that the newly reformed Buddhist practices should help improve society. Adherents should be engaged in doing good deeds for society because it would help develop a sense

[55] Huinan Yang, *Dangdai Fojiao Sixiang Zhanwang (A Survey of Modern Buddhist Thought)* (Taipei: Dongda Tushu Gongsi, 1991), 92.
[56] Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu's Reforms*, 8.
[57] Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism*, 164.
[58] Laliberté, "Religious Change and Democratization in Postwar Taiwan: Mainstream Buddhist Organizations and the Kuomintang, 1947-1996," 161-2.
[59] Jones, *Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State, 1660-1990*, 133.
[60] Laliberté, "Religious Change and Democratization in Postwar Taiwan: Mainstream Buddhist Organizations and the Kuomintang, 1947-1996," 177-178.
[61] André Laliberté, "The Politics of Buddhist Organizations in Taiwan, 1989-1997," *PhD Dissertation*, 1999, 125, https://doi.org/10.14288/1.0099462.
[62] Yinshun, *Youxin Fahai Liushi Nian (Sixty Years of Roaming the Mind in the Sea of Dharma)* (Taipei: Zhengwen Chubanshe, 1985), 18.
[63] Yang, *Dangdai Fojiao Sixiang Zhanwang (A Survey of Modern Buddhist Thought)*, 115.
[64] Laliberté, "Religious Change and Democratization in Postwar Taiwan: Mainstream Buddhist Organizations and the Kuomintang, 1947-1996," 161-162.

of charity and compassion.[65] This is noticeable in contemporary Taiwanese Humanistic Buddhism organizations: they are less traditional in the way that they put less stress on the traditional Buddhist-embodied practices, such as reciting sutras, and more on personal improvement through joining and funding charities.[66]

## Another reason for the existence Humanistic Buddhism

As mentioned previously, Taixu's reformist ideas can probably be considered the origin of Humanistic Buddhism. Robert Weller, however, suggests that the origin is something else. He argues that it came about after two processes during the Japanese colonial period in the twentieth century: the regionalization and the rationalization of the then-Taiwanese religious associations. Weller argues that the combination of the results of the two processes is the reason that present-day Humanistic Buddhist organizations exist. The first process, "regionalization," was an attempt of the Japanese colonial government in 1923 to restrict the actions of Taiwanese religious associations to the religious sphere and not to be merged with politics, social services, and/or business.[67] These associations fell under the category of "God-worshipping societies" or "god associations" 神明會 *shénmíng huì*. These groups would worship one or more deities and also be involved in social services.[68] Furthermore, they were supported and recognized by the Japanese colonial government.[69] In 1923, however, the Japanese colonial government enforced a census that caused many of these *welfare* organizations to be stripped of their status of God-worshipping associations, making it impossible to provide legal social welfare.[70] The second process, rationalization, included the population questioning the role of religion in their lives and vice versa. According to Weller, rationalization "contributes to the extraction of religious belief from the overall experience of daily life to the change from a taken-for-granted religiosity to a self-conscious and reflective 'religion'".[71] The process of rationalization turned the focus on the theology and the philosophy of the religions, putting more attention on the textual authority and religious self-consciousness instead of the embodied rituals practiced by various religions.[72] Weller's assertion does not fit in the timeline, however. It was during the second decade after the Kuomintang takeover that Humanistic Buddhist organizations such as Fo Guang Shan and Tzu Chi were founded. In this context, these processes can only be the start of change.

## Humanistic Buddhism or socially engaged Buddhism

Both the term 'Humanistic Buddhism' and 'socially engaged Buddhism' are mentioned in various sources. The translation of "Humanistic" (in Humanistic Buddhism) could be "terrestrial" or "this world," whereas another translation is 'engaged' or 'socially engaged'. The former two describe that Humanistic Buddhism should be practiced in this world and the latter describes the way it is

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[65] Schak and Hsiao, "Taiwan's Socially Engaged Buddhist Groups," 4.
Stuart Chandler, "Establishing a Pure Land on Earth: The Fo Guang Buddhist Perspective on Modernization and Globalization," *PhD Dissertation*, 2000, 88-89.
[66] Robert A. Weller, "GLOBAL RELIGIOUS CHANGES AND CIVIL LIFE IN TWO CHINESE SOCIETIES: A COMPARISON OF JIANGSU AND TAIWAN," *Review of Faith & International Affairs* 13, no. 2 (May 28, 2015): 17, https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2015.1039305.
[67] Ibid., 14-15.
[68] Weller et al., *Religion and Charity: The Social Life of Goodness in Chinese Societies*, 41.
[69] Weller, "GLOBAL RELIGIOUS CHANGES AND CIVIL LIFE IN TWO CHINESE SOCIETIES: A COMPARISON OF JIANGSU AND TAIWAN," 13-14.
[70] Xu Xueji 许雪姬, *Lugang Zhenzhi: Zongjiao Pian [鹿港镇志: 宗教篇, Lukang Gazetteer: Religion]* (Lukang: Lukang Township Office, 2000), 211-242.
[71] Weller, "GLOBAL RELIGIOUS CHANGES AND CIVIL LIFE IN TWO CHINESE SOCIETIES: A COMPARISON OF JIANGSU AND TAIWAN," 16.
[72] Ibid., 13.

practiced, by being socially engaged.[73]

The second translation of "Humanistic," 'socially engaged' is also brought up by Ken Jones. According to him, this term's definition represents a religion that "extends across public engagement in caring and service, social and environmental protest and analysis, nonviolence as a creative way of overcoming conflict, and the "right livelihood" and similar initiatives towards a socially just and ecologically sustainable society". [74] The objective of "socially engaged Buddhism" is to combine the cultivation of one's inner peace with active social compassion in practice and lifestyle that support and enrich both oneself and others.

According to the above translations, it can be argued that Humanistic Buddhism and socially engaged Buddhism are identical. Ken Jones has an unclear opinion about this, however. At first, he insists that in terms of religion, they are not identical, followed by stating that the two could be the same (religion) as they share one distinguished main characteristic which is "humanism". This (Buddhist) humanism refers to the Buddha nature that validates every human being and yet at the same time exists only in the mutuality of all humanity.[75] Schak and Hsiao further mention another characteristic both have in common: the emphasis on compassion.[76]

## Fo Guang Shan

As mentioned previously, Buddha's Light Mountain or Fo Guang Shan (hereafter FGS) is one of the Taiwanese religious groups that build on the ideas of Humanistic Buddhism. The organization was founded on May 16th, 1967, by the Venerable Master Hsing Yun as he felt the necessity for a "true public monastery" in Taiwan.[77] In the 1980s, FGS was one of the leading socially engaged Buddhist groups in Taiwan. The two main reasons for this popularity were the reputation of Venerable Master Hsing Yun and the massive FGS Monastery complex, as explained by Schak and Hsiao. After completing the FGS complex in 1991, Hsing Yun founded the "Buddha Light International Association" (hereafter BLIA) on February 3rd, 1991. It had four objectives: to advocate Humanistic Buddhism; to establish a Pure land in *this* world; to purify the minds of people in this world; and to be dedicated to world peace.[78] The BLIA allowed monastics to concentrate on their assignments as the laypeople of the BLIA took over posts previously occupied by FGS monastics.[79] For example, lay people became responsible for the distribution of the Dharma. The BLIA did not only fulfill the concept of equality within Buddhism but also allowed the influence of Humanistic Buddhism to grow. By the year 2005, it was claimed that the FGS organization had over one million memberships across the world. [80]

## The Founder

Venerable Master Hsing Yun can be regarded as the parent of the Fo Guang Shan organization. He was praised by many throughout his life. Charles B. Jones himself writes, "Venerable Master is a monk of extraordinary fame and popularity under whose leadership a single temple in the southern part of Taiwan developed into a worldwide network of sub-temples, foundations, social welfare agencies, and other auxiliary organizations."[81]

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[73] Schak and Hsiao, "Taiwan's Socially Engaged Buddhist Groups," 1-2.
[74] Ken Jones, *The New Social Face of Buddhism: An Alternative Sociopolitical Perspective* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2003), 173.
[75] Ibid., 181.
[76] Schak and Hsiao, "Taiwan's Socially Engaged Buddhist Groups," 4.
[77] Jones, *Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State, 1660-1990*, 187.
[78] Hsing Yun, *Humanistic Buddhism: Holding True to the Original Intents of Buddha*, 304.
[79] Chandler, "Establishing a Pure Land on Earth: The Fo Guang Buddhist Perspective on Modernization and Globalization," 92.
[80] Schak and Hsiao, "Taiwan's Socially Engaged Buddhist Groups," 3.
[81] Jones, *Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State, 1660-1990*, 185.

The ideas of monk Taixu are considered the basis of Hsing Yun's ideology. He and Hsing Yun both viewed Earth as the "Pure Land" in which Buddhists are reborn. As previously stated, Taixu was a reformist Buddhist monk and Hsing Yun embraced his reformist ideas. Hsing Yun too pushed for greater responsibility amongst the lay people and the legitimacy of political participation for Buddhists.[82] He decided to use Yinshun's "Buddhism in the Human Realms" (*renjian fojiao*) as the slogan and guiding principles of FGS.[83] According to Hsing Yun, the name "Humanistic Buddhism" or *renjian fojiao* originates from the belief that the founder of Buddhism, Shakyamuni Buddha, began their life as a human being. This is what makes (Humanistic) Buddhism unique: the religion began in the human world and was educated to humankind. This makes the religion deserve the name "Humanistic Buddhism".[84]

Although, is there a need for yet another form of Buddhism? Hsing Yun argued there is. He claimed that traditional Buddhism has been contaminated through the years by superstitious beliefs such as divination by time, fengshui, fortune telling, and picking sticks. The reason for this might be the long periods of Buddhist dissemination in Chinese history which made it possible for other teachings and practices to infiltrate the practices of traditional Buddhism and thus, changing the original humanistic intents of the Buddha.[85] Another reason was the change in geography. Many Buddhist communities throughout Chinese history have been forced to live in the mountains and forests, hiding them from the public. According to Hsing Yun, this process assisted in the decline of the Buddhist faith within families; the decline of awareness for those in need; and the disappearance of the concept of contributing to the purification of the society. This type of Buddhism did not help enrich the world.[86]

Regarding the charity aspect within Humanistic Buddhism, FGS promotes the concept of charitable social work as one of the means of creating a "Pure Land on Earth". The organization further emphasizes the idea of concrete action in society as one of the ways of exercising the bodhisattva's compassion.[87] Nonetheless, the FGS nun Manho Shih states in a news article by *Taiwan Today* that the spread of culture and education is the main priority of FGS as these are more influential than any charity program. She states, "The goal is to learn the Dharma and then apply those teachings in daily life."[88]

## Controversies

The FGS organization has been involved in several controversies. The following section will discuss a few. A small commotion involved the use of contemporary elements such as dry ice and light shows to exaggerate activities at the FGS complex in Taiwan. These elements made the activity "vulgar", as described by Chandler.[89] In addition, the organization has been criticized for being too absorbed in commercialism.[90] Adams argues that the organization utilizes "unconventional public methods" such as "radio broadcasts, comic books, megaphones, and theme-park-like monastery outside Kaohsiung"

[82] Laliberté, "Religious Change and Democratization in Postwar Taiwan: Mainstream Buddhist Organizations and the Kuomintang, 1947-1996," 169.
[83] Jones, *Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State, 1660-1990*, 205.
[84] Hsing Yun, *Humanistic Buddhism: Holding True to the Original Intents of Buddha*, ii, vi.
[85] Ibid., ii.
[86] Ibid., v.
[87] Jones, *Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State, 1660-1990*, 224.
[88] Jonathan Adams, "Out of the Monastery, Into the Crowds," *Taiwan Today*, December 1, 2008, accessed June 23, 2023, https://taiwantoday.tw/news.php?unit=12%2C29%2C33%2C45&post=22223.
[89] Chandler, "Establishing a Pure Land on Earth: The Fo Guang Buddhist Perspective on Modernization and Globalization," 77-78.
[90] Schak and Hsiao, "Taiwan's Socially Engaged Buddhist Groups," 6.

to attract converts.[91] Continuing on this area of commercialism, Scott believes that one problem of FGS is not having a "clear selling point". One may think this argument is not important as there is no need for a selling point within a religious organization. However, FGS cannot compare to Dharma Drum Mountain's specialized meditative techniques or the massive and highly visible social service activities of the Tzu Chi Foundation.[92] Moreover, with the success of organizations such as FGS in mind, Taiwanese citizens have expressed their concern about elitist control of their society, as argued by Madsen.[93] An international scandal in 1996 involved the FGS branch temple of the Hsi Lai Temple near Los Angeles, United States. A Buddhist temple luncheon with Vice President Al Gore turned out to be a fundraising event where tens of thousands of American Dollars were laundered.[94]

As for the consequences of these controversies, these may have caused a decline in FGS membership. Nonetheless, from the perspective of the competitive religious market discussed in the first chapter, this can be regarded as public advertisement for FGS. Regardless, no data to prove this decline or increase in adherents after one of the above-mentioned controversies.

### *Political monk*

These controversies often concern actions done by Hsing Yun. During his life, he has been criticized for being rather political. Hsing Yun being a member of the central committee of the Kuomintang in his later years even got him the nickname of "political monk".[95] It was claimed that he used his "connections" with the powerful to obtain support for his religious agenda.[96] Hsing Yun also lived up to his nickname during the presidential election of 1996 in Taiwan when he openly supported the Kuomintang candidate Chen Lu-an.[97] Johnson also mentions that Hsing Yun had been involved in informal negotiations with Mainland China since the 1990s. This included him having get-togethers with high officials and even meeting Xi Jinping four times since 2012.[98] Schak and Hsiao also point out the political side of Hsing Yun. Normally, Taiwanese Buddhist groups will formally reject any kind of direct participation in politics.[99] Hsing Yun's participation in politics has brought about some criticism of himself as the public has accused him of providing spiritual support to the Kuomintang government during the period of martial law in Taiwan.[100]

### *Reason politically involvement*

One would think that having these kinds of controversies would be damaging to the organization's image. Madsen however argues that some actions of Hsing Yun saved FGS from the burden of maintaining a perfect image. This allowed the existence of mistakes.[101] According to Laliberté, Hsing Yun's political participation supported the distribution of *renjian fojiao* and the building of a Pure

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[91] Adams, "Out of the Monastery, Into the Crowds."
[92] Pacey Scott, "Overturning the Traditional Order: Tzu Chi and the Status of Women in Contemporary Taiwan" (Honours Thesis, Australian National University, 2003), 118.
[93] Madsen, "Controversies about Religious Organisations within an Evolving Taiwan Civil Society," 249.
[94] Christopher Drew, "Early Warnings on Gore's Temple Visit," *The New York Times*, June 12, 1997, https://www.nytimes.com/1997/06/12/us/early-warnings-on-gore-s-temple-visit.html.
[95] Madsen, "Controversies about Religious Organisations within an Evolving Taiwan Civil Society," 250.
[96] Richard Madsen, *Democracy's Dharma: Religious Renaissance and Political Development in Taiwan* (Univ of California Press, 2007), 51-55.
[97] André Laliberté, *The Politics of Buddhist Organizations in Taiwan, 1989-2003: Safeguard the Faith, Build a Pure Land, Help the Poor*, 2004, 79.
[98] Ian Johnson, "Is a Buddhist Group Changing China? Or Is China Changing It," *New York Times*, June 24, 2017, accessed February 2, 2023, https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/2017/06/24/world/asia/china-buddhism-fo-guang-shan.html.
[99] Schak and Hsiao, "Taiwan's Socially Engaged Buddhist Groups," 4.
[100] Laliberté, "Religious Change and Democratization in Postwar Taiwan: Mainstream Buddhist Organizations and the Kuomintang, 1947-1996," 169.
[101] Madsen, "Controversies about Religious Organisations within an Evolving Taiwan Civil Society," 253.

Land on Earth".[102]

Consider one of the objectives of FGS, for example, the purification of minds 心靈淨化 *xīnlíng jìnghuà*. Laliberté argues that this "purification" could be completely religious, but also something that holds conservative political implications. FGS adherents argue that modern society is corrupt and the source lies in the individual, not in politics. Thus, to battle corruption and improve society, "purification" of individual behavior is needed.[103] Fu gives us another reason for Hsing Yun's political involvement. He argues that Hsing Yun was politically involved to ensure the survival of the FGS organization. He already had his share of confrontations in both China and Taiwan, like having trouble with reigning governments. Fu argues that this made Hsing Yun to be more politically involved than other Buddhist monks as the survival of FGS depended on the relationship with the authorities.[104] Laliberté mentions that FGS adherents have used this counterargument when questioned about Hsing Yun's political involvement.[105]

### Conclusion

This chapter introduced Humanistic Buddhism, a religion with its roots in Taiwan. Even though it is considered a religion, Humanistic Buddhism is rather a practice about conducting (or not) a certain set of actions. Executing these actions will improve the individual's life and in this way society. Different theories are provided about the origin of Humanistic Buddhism and the differences and similarities between Humanistic Buddhism and socially engaged Buddhism are discussed. …

In addition, the chapter proceeded with the introduction of one of the Humanistic Buddhist organizations in Taiwan, the Fo Guang Shan International Buddhist Order. Hsing Yun, the founder of FGS, nurtured the organization to be one of the biggest Humanistic Buddhist groups in Taiwan with branch temples in the rest of the world. Besides investing in charity and providing disaster relief, the organization's objective is to spread the Dharma of the Buddha. Furthermore, FGS did have its share of controversies. Although these were not always wanted, they can be considered public advertisements of FGS.

## Chapter Three: Research

This chapter will present and discuss the results of the interviews about generational differences among members of the FGS organization in Taiwan. The interviews have taken place at the FGS Monastery and the FGS Buddha Museum in Taiwan.

### Methodology

The conducted research for this thesis consists of semi-structured interviews. The interview questions are included in the Appendix. The main question is whether generational differences affect the religious market of Taiwan. To answer this, people of different age groups were interviewed. Twelve randomly encountered people with age differences from twenty to seventy-five years old participated in the interview. They were encountered at the FGS Monastery and the FGS Buddha Museum. Amongst the participants are volunteers, monastic people, and visitors.

The conductor of the interview only has access to the results of the interviews to protect the privacy of the interviewees. Every participant will be addressed with a number (for example

[102] Laliberté, "Religious Change and Democratization in Postwar Taiwan: Mainstream Buddhist Organizations and the Kuomintang, 1947-1996," 172.
[103] Ibid., 172-3.
[104] Chu-ying Fu, *Handing Down the Light: The Biography of Venerable Master Hsing Yun*, trans. Amy Lui-ma (Los Angeles: Hsi Lai University Press, 1996), 82-84.
[105] Laliberté, "Religious Change and Democratization in Postwar Taiwan: Mainstream Buddhist Organizations and the Kuomintang, 1947-1996," 174.

interviewee #1) to anonymize them. The reason for conducting the interview was explained beforehand and participants were asked about their willingness to provide answers to the questions.

## Observations

The interviews were held on Friday 28th of August and Saturday 29th of August 2022, hoping to witness a different crowd on Friday (weekday) and Saturday (weekend day). This was not the case, however. The inside of the FGS complex was relatively quiet on both days. The number of visitors was less than those of the volunteers and monastic people together. Besides the lack of visitors, it was also noticeable that most volunteers and all monastic people were elderly women. According to a FGS monastic nun, the reason was the aftermath of the COVID-19 epidemic. During the period of visits, wearing mouth masks and keeping distance were still mandatory. Public places, such as the FGS monastery and Buddha Museum, were less frequently visited due to fear of contamination by the coronavirus.

### *Days of visits*

The whole Friday was spent exploring the FGS Buddha Museum. It was noticeable that other passengers on the bus to the complex were mostly elderly and a few foreigners. The first building to enter is the Front Hall which houses various vegetarian restaurants, the visitor center, the post office, and several souvenir and gift shops. Behind the Front Hall, one is met with the view of eight identical Chinese-style pagodas, an uphill wide road ending with the Main Hall which is overlooked by the 108-meter-high Fo Guang Big Buddha Statue. Each pagoda's bottom floor has a volunteer who was easily distinguished by wearing a red shirt with the words "義工" *yigong* (volunteer). Monastic people could be recognized by their colored (mostly brown) robes and their shaved heads. Turning to the Main Hall, it is an interesting place as it functions as a museum as well as a temple. It houses multiple exhibitions and three shrines: the "Avalokitesvara Shrine", the "Golden Buddha Shrine", and the "Jade Buddha Shrine". Many people were seen kneeling and praying in the "Jade Buddha Shrine". Again, it was clear that a few visitors were inside. The rooftop was crowded, there were visitors, volunteers, and monastic nuns present. In the garden next to the Main Hall are a few teahouses located with not many visitors.

Saturday was a combination of visiting the FGS Monastery followed by FGS Buddha Museum. Near the entrance of the monastery, an elder monastic monk was waiting for a golf cart. This is understandable as a map showed the enormousness of the monastery and the temperature that day was very high. Similar to the previous day, not a lot of visitors were seen. During lunchtime, this changed as monastic people began to emerge from their working places to eat. Following them to a buffet, one could grab a bite for a small donation. Invited by an elder man whom I had met at the Main Shrine entrance, I had lunch there. Other consumers were mostly elderly couples and monastic people. Afterward, one is asked to take off their shoes to enter the Main Shrine. Within are three golden Buddha statues, surrounded by thousands of smaller Buddha figurines inside the walls. Two to three monastic nuns were inside, seated behind a table full of pamphlets. One can ask for a flower to offer to one of the statues. In my case, a volunteer showed how to "offer" this flower as it should be held a certain way. Behind the Main Shrine an elder monk, dressed in black, was walking in front of a group of younger monastic people. They were walking in two lines and dressed in brown robes. This seemed a monastic activity, so I did not disturb them. However, the different colored robes show the presence of a rank system amongst monastics. Previously encountered monastic people all wore brown robes.

## Limitations

There are a few limitations to this research. First, as mentioned before, the participants of the interviews were random people encountered in the FGS Monastery and the FGS Buddha Museum.

For the benefit of the interview, it would have been better to beforehand discuss it with the FGS organization. Then it might have been possible to have more participants from different age groups and occupations. Second, as these interviews were conducted in the language of Mandarin Chinese, sometimes difficulties in translation occurred. Third, it happened that some interviewees did not answer the question asked. This occurred during the interview question of "Possible age differences amongst members" by participants #3, #6, #10, and #11. In their case, they did not answer the question. This limits the validity of this research.

## Results

The following sections will show the results of the interviews. As the topic of this thesis is the possibility of having generational differences regarding religiosity amongst believers and/or practitioners of Humanistic Buddhism of FGS, the interview included questions related to peoples' age; how/when they entered the FGS community; what they do within the community; and their opinion about the possibility of an age difference among FGS members.

### *Age and Activities*

The first results to discuss are those from the question regarding their age. This question was asked because it could provide a possible explanation for the question of whether (or not) there is an "age gap" within the FGS organization. If there is, this could mean the existence of generational differences within the religious group. The age of the interviewees will provide data on the religious period these people grew up in. As mentioned in the first chapter Hagevi insists that this period of fundamental years does influence one's religiosity in the future.[106] In addition, the question about FGS's activities participation or one's role in the FGS community provides data on the peoples' involvement within FGS. The results can be found in the table below.

| Interviewees (#) | Age (& Gender) | Occupation/activity at FGS |
|---|---|---|
| **1 (F)** | 60 (F) | Monastic nun |
| **2 (F)** | 70 (F) | Volunteer, joins activities |
| **3 (F)** | 70 (F) | Monastic nun |
| **4 (F)** | 75 (F) | Volunteer |
| **5 (F)** | 64 (F) | Volunteer |
| **6 (F)** | 53 (F) | Volunteered as a nurse, preacher of Humanistic Buddhism, and secretary of conferences |
| **7 (F)** | 20 (F) | Volunteer during the summer |
| **8 (F)** | 31 (F) | Works at FGS Buddha Museum as a guide |
| **9 (F)** | 60 (F) | Monastic nun |
| **10 (S)** | >70 (M) | Main Shrine visitor |
| **11 (S)** | 60 (F) | Volunteer |
| **12 (S)** | 70 (F) | Practitioner, doesn't join activities of FGS |

Figure 1: Interviewees' ages, gender, and occupations/activities at FGS

1st column: F = Friday S = Saturday

* Mainly all the volunteers were encountered in the FGS Buddha Museum and some in the area of the FGS Main Shrine.

[106] Hagevi, "Religious Change over the Generations in an Extremely Secular Society: The Case of Sweden," 503.

### *Why Fo Guang Shan*

The question of the reason for joining the FGS organization, whether as a monastic person, layperson, volunteer, or other, gives further explanation of one's motivation to join FGS. After processing the date of the interviews, it is possible to classify the participants into different groups. For the following section, these three groups will be monastic, familial relations, and other.

#### *Monastic*

Amongst the twelve interviewees were three monastic nuns who joined the FGS Monastery in their younger years and are now older: interviewees #1 (60 years), #3 (70 years), and #9 (60 years). Interviewee #9's reason for joining FGS was very clear: "Humanistic Buddhism is a *way of life*. This *way of life* is different from other forms of Buddhism as "Humanistic Buddhism embraces itself and all other religions in the world."

#### *Familial relations*

Half of the interviewees were motivated by their family relations to join the Fo Guang Shan organization: interviewees #2 (70 years), #4 (75 years), #7 (20 years), #8 (31 years), #10 (>70 years), #11 (60 years), and #12 (70 years). Out of these interviews mostly all can be considered to be from the older generation but one, interviewee #7 who is born after the year 2000.

Interviewees #2, #4, #8, and #10 joined FGS as their families have been members throughout their generations. This is the case for interviewee #8 who began to participate in Humanistic Buddhism at FGS after graduation because her grandparent were also adherents of Buddhism. "It (the religion) is easy to apply it to one's daily life," as she described it. According to her, it was Hsing Yun who made Humanistic Buddhism this way.

This case of joining FGS because of "generational membership" is not the reason for interviewees #7 and #11. The former is an Indonesian girl who was volunteering at the FGS Buddha Museum for the summer period. She chose to join the Indonesian Fo Guang Shan Youth Association Group at age fifteen, but only after first exploring different religious groups. The continuous pestering of her mother from the age of twelve years pushed the girl over the edge to join the religious organization. As for interviewee #11, her reason to join FGS six years ago was because of her daughter. In the past, this daughter's life had not been going so well. Then, the philosophy of Humanistic Buddhism spoke to her persuading her to join FGS. Although interviewee #11 did not say so directly, she gave the impression that it was the practice of Humanistic Buddhism that helped her daughter get her life back in order. The daughter spoke about her relationship with FGS as "destiny" 因缘 *yīngyuán*. As she saw her daughter changing for the better, interviewee #11 decided to participate in Humanistic Buddhism at FGS.

#### *Other*

The last two interviewees (#5 (64 years) and #6 (53 years)) do not belong to the group of participants influenced by familial relationships to join FGS. During her younger years, interviewee #5 was a follower of both Humanistic Buddhism and the Catholic Church 天主教 Tiānzhǔjiào, the latter was passed to her by her parents. However, her parents made her choose only one religion with result of her giving up Humanistic Buddhism. Still, she continues to volunteer at the FGS Monastery and the Buddha Museum.

Interviewee #6 was motivated by the actions and words of Venerable Master Hsing Yun in her decision to become a part of FGS. The Humanistic Buddhist view of embracing other religions, making other religions and their followers equal, made her even more invested in the religion itself. Becoming a follower in 2015, she volunteered as a nurse, assisting in withdrawing blood in the countryside as an operation of FGS.

### *Age difference*

The last question that will be discussed in this section is the one whether (or not) members think there is a big age difference among the members of the FGS organization. Asking the participants' opinions could maybe bring some light to this issue as they visit the site more often, participate in activities of FGS, and know people within the community.

The most shared answer is the assumption that nowadays younger generations do not have as much time as older generations and this shows in their religious commitment. As stated by interviewee #12: "Older people have more free time to practice Humanistic Buddhism." Interviewee #2 agrees that younger people have much to do in life. Interviewee #4 agrees as she follows that this can cause the younger generations to be less invested in practicing Humanistic Buddhism.

Interviewee #8 argues that it is a matter of interest. In the present day, it is possible for the youth to not comprehend Humanistic Buddhism which in turn makes them less interested in the religion or even in FGS. She described that in the past she encountered three college students in FGS Buddha Museum who did not know anything about Humanistic Buddhism and FGS. They became interested in Humanistic Buddhism and FGS only after getting a tour by a FGS monk. Interviewee #8 herself states, "The younger generation nowadays prefers to see first and then believe."

Discussing the decision of becoming a monastic nun at FGS is how interviewee #1 answered the question. She agreed with both the arguments of elder generations having more time and that it is a matter of interest, like interviewee #8. For instance, she explained that people of older generations have already experienced the good and worse in life which in itself could already make it interesting for them to join FGS. Or they want to achieve some sense of fulfillment. Contrary to them, the younger generations have yet to live their lives. During one's younger years, one is presented with many choices. Interviewee #1 mentions that youngsters nowadays have many options to choose from. They will first go through all these options before considering monastic life at FGS.

Participants who strongly disagreed when mentioning the possibility of generational differences were interviewees #5, #7, and #9. They all stated that among adherents of FGS, there are many youngsters. Only, they are often not visible because they have school or work during the day. Interviewee #7 who herself belongs to the younger generation joined the Indonesian FGS Youth Association Group at age fifteen. According to her, such Youth Associations Groups are often not that noted, but many youngsters are members of such groups. Interviewee #9 even called my question absurd as young and old are found within FGS. Interviewee #2 further mentions that a building within the monastery complex is especially for monastic people under the age of thirty. Nonetheless, they are mostly inside during the daytime as they are busy with their studies and chores.

## Discussion

In this section, the data from the interviews will be discussed. Based on observations alone, I claim that not many young people commit themselves to FGS. During the visits to the FGS Monastery and the FGS Buddha Museum, nine out of the ten people were of elderly age. Although this was the case, the results from the interviews say otherwise as they all argue that there are young and old in the FGS community.

The first point of discussion is how some interpret Humanistic Buddhism and their motivation for becoming a member of the FGS organization. Several interviewees have emphasized that embracing Humanistic Buddhism (and FGS) is "a way of life". As mentioned before in the second chapter, committing to the "Three Acts of Goodness" and the "Four Givings" of Humanistic Buddhism should grant someone improvement in their life and of those around them. In this context, practicing Humanistic Buddhism *is* a way of life because these principles are behavioral guidelines for one's life. Nonetheless, the term "Buddhism" belongs to the category of religions which makes it a complicated concept. Here many people would probably object to this description of Humanistic Buddhism being

*a way of life* because of the religious tag attached to "Buddhism". In the case of interviewee #11, Humanistic Buddhism *is* a way of life as it helped change the lifestyle of her daughter. This gave her the motivation to become a member of FGS. Some other interviewees insist that Hsing Yun is their reason for being part of FGS. Hsing Yun did turn FGS into a prominent organization and reshaped the core characteristics of Humanistic Buddhism to be easily carried out in daily life. Does this mean that Hsing Yun's reputation and actions could be one of the motivations for people to join FGS? Although I agree that he was a very public figure and the face of FGS, this still cannot be the only reason for people to become adherents of FGS.

The second point to discuss is the case of generational differences in religiosity amongst members of FGS according to the members themselves. Concerning this point, the majority of the interviewees have suggested that this is an issue of time and appeal. Indeed, it is highly likely that younger generations today have less time to spend on religious commitment than people of elder age. I wholeheartedly support this as especially in Asian societies there is much pressure on keeping up one's performance. That is, young people are often occupied with school and work. Most people of older ages already have done this, establishing themselves with a stable job or even retirement. This allows them to have more free time on their hands which can be spent by being active in a religious organization. However, it is simply not accurate that someone's religious commitment only depends on their schedule, it is also a matter of both sides' attraction. According to the religious market, theory explained in the first chapter, if the *supply* provided by religious organizations is not adequate and compatible with the *demand* of the younger consumers, then there is the possibility that these consumers will look elsewhere. Also addressed in chapter one, people often choose the most beneficial options which is another point of attractiveness religions and religious groups should focus on achieving. In other words, the religion or religious group should be attractive or beneficial enough for consumers to be allured to it. Otherwise, the consumer will not join. And lastly, the report on age gaps in religiosity across the world by Pew Research Center also mentioned in the first chapter claims that economic development is the reason for a decline in religious commitment among younger generations. As is the case, economic development often opens a lot of doors to individuals. This brings the discussion back to chapter one again where Hagevi argued that the fundamental years of the individual greatly affect the individual's religiosity in the future. The younger generations grew up in a developing economy, giving them more opportunities in many areas. Opportunities older generations may not have had during their younger years. This can compel the competition in the religious market to change as it is also fighting economic development. Religions and religious groups have to adjust their tactics to guarantee new adherents. The reasonings shown above allow us to see that the decision to join a religion or a religious group is also a matter of appeal.

## Conclusion

This chapter addressed the results of the interviews regarding generational differences in religiosity conducted on the dates of the 28th and 29th of August, 2022. The research site was the FGS temple complex in Taiwan which consist of the FGS Monastery and the FGS Buddha Museum, making the interviewees members of FGS. Many of these people were above the age of fifty, in other words, they are part of older generations. They were monastics, volunteers, and visitors.

The most shared opinion about generational differences is that there is no such phenomenon. The interviewees agree that FGS has members who are part of the younger generations and older generations. The former is not often present as they are occupied with school and work, however. People of older age have a more stable life or are even retired, allowing them to have time to practice the religion at the FGS complex, in contrary to the younger people. In addition, the age gap in religiosity also depends on the appeal of the religion or religious groups and the attraction the individual has to a religion or religious group. Consequences of economic development

can force religion and religious markets to change their approach to securing adherents as the economic developments open many opportunities which individuals first will try out before turning to religious options.

## Conclusion

Every chapter in this thesis presented a stepping stone to provide an answer to the research question. The first chapter addressed the concept of the religious market and presented the religious market of Taiwan. The second chapter introduced the religious movement of Humanistic Buddhism and the Humanistic Buddhist group the Fo Guang Shan International Buddhist Order from Taiwan. The third and final chapter provided the results of and discussion on the interviews conducted with FGS members at the FGS Monastery and the FGS Buddha Museum near Kaohsiung City, Taiwan.

The objective of this thesis is to clarify the influence of generational differences in religiosity on the competition in the religious market in Taiwan. To provide this clarification, a case study was conducted among adherents of Humanistic Buddhism of the Fo Guang Shan organization in Taiwan. First of all, from the perspective of observation only, most of the people at the FGS Monastery and FGS Buddha Museum were part of the older generations. However, the interviewees all agreed that the FGS community consists of young people as well as older people. Their reasoning for not witnessing any young people is that the younger generations of today have more on their minds than practicing a religion. Most of the time, they will be occupied with school and work during the day, leaving them with little time to visit the FGS temple complex.

One generational difference to mention is the aftermath of the transition from a regulated to a deregulated religious market after the lifting of martial law. Agued by Hagevi, people are sensitive towards concepts like religion in their developmental years as this will show in their older ages. Since most of the older generations lived these years in a regulated religious market during the period of martial law, they could have been easily influenced by the religious beliefs of their loved ones from a young age. According to Hagevi, this influence will stay with these people to their old age. The younger generations of today live in a deregulated religious market which gives them many choices of religion. Still, they can be influenced by their loved ones in the area of religious choice, but other factors now also play a role in the choice.

The stability of economic development after the abolishment of martial law in 1987 could also have played a role. Taiwan was faced with both democratization and economic development which gave rise to many opportunities for the years to come. For some, this meant a better income and more time to spend on one's interests. Younger generations now can choose from various opportunities throughout their lives whereas the older generations during their younger years did not have this. This brings it back to the religious market model with its supply and demand. Nowadays, as people have various options to choose from, their *demands* regarding religions can also have changed. In response, religion, and religious organizations may have to alter their *supply* to keep securing new adherents and also to maintain their prior adherents. The one religion or religious group with the best offer will be the most attractive to people, this way probably securing more adherents.

The effects of generational differences can further push religion and religious organizations to alter their approach in the religious market to secure new adherents and maintain prior adherents. With the rise of economic development comes along other means of propaganda. Nowadays, tools such as the Internet, television stations, and magazines can be used to promote one's religious beliefs. Past generations have partly or almost not experienced this, but the ways of advertising have transitioned to digital forms as the present generation lives in the digital world. Where one does it, others will follow.

In conclusion, generational differences can affect competition in the religious market in

Taiwan. However, as the interviews are solely conducted within the domain of FGS and with adherents of Humanistic Buddhism, it is unjust to argue that the results can also apply to other religions and religious groups in the Taiwanese religious market.

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## Appendix: Interview Questions

| | Interview questions regarding Humanistic Buddhism. | |
|---|---|---|
| | English | Standard Mandarin (Traditional) |
| 1. | How old are you? | 您幾歲? |
| 2. | Where are you from? | 您是哪裡的人？ / 您來自哪裡? |
| 3. | Do you know what the biggest religion is here in Taiwan? | 您知道在台灣里大的宗教是什麼? |
| 4. | Are you involved in any kind of religion? | 您參與任何宗教嗎? |
| 5. | Where is your go-to temple if you go to any temple? | 如果您去過寺廟，您要去的寺廟在哪裡? |
| 6. | Are you active in any form of Buddhism? | 您是否積極參與任何形式的佛教活動? |
| 7. | Have you heard of Humanist Buddhism before? | 您以前聽說過人間佛教嗎? |
| 8. | Do you know what Humanist Buddhism means? | 您知道人間佛教是什麼? |
| 9. | From whom did you hear about it? | 誰給您介紹人間佛教是什麼? |
| 10. | Do you have other people around you who engage in Humanist Buddhism? | 在您周邊裡有沒有別人參與人間佛教? |
| 11. | Are these people old or young? | 他們年紀大還是少? /老人還是年輕人? |
| 12. | Do you think that Buddhism/Humanistic Buddhism is more attractive for people of older age or does age not matter? | 您認為佛教/人間佛教對老年人更有吸引力還是年齡無關緊要? |
| 13. | Have you ever been active in Humanist Buddhism? | 您自己曾經參與過人間佛教活動嗎? |
| 13a. | If yes, how are you involved? Lay people/to volunteer/to donate? | 如果是的話，您是如何參與的? 俗家，義務工作者，捐助的人等等 |
| 13b. | - For how long/time period/when in your life? | 在您的輩子裡，從什麼時候到什麼時候? |
| 13c. | - What kind of activities did/do you do? | 您參與什麼樣的活動/行動? |
| 14. | What does it mean to you to be a Humanist Buddhist? | 當人間佛教的人對您有什麼意思? |
| 15. | If you engage in Humanist Buddhism, what made you choose to do this? | 如果您參與人間佛教的話，您為什麼選參與這個宗教流派? |
| 15a. | Do you like being part of the group? | 您喜歡嗎? |
| 16. | Have you heard of Fo Guang Shan? | 您是否曾經聽說過佛光山組織? |
| 17. | Do you know the connection between Fo Guang Shan and Humanist Buddhism? | 您知道人間佛教跟佛光山組織有什麼關係? |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 18. | Have you ever visited the Fo Guang Shan Buddha Museum near Kaohsiung City? | 您曾經去過在高雄市附近的佛光山佛博物館嗎? |
| 19. | Have you heard about actions/activities of the Fo Guang Shan (group) before? If yes, what kind of actions/activities did the group hold? | 您聽過佛光山組織的活動和行動? 若是，是什麼樣的活動和行動? |
| 20. | Do you consider yourself a believer of Humanistic Buddhism OR someone being active in Humanistic Buddhism? | 您認為自己是一個信仰人間佛教的人還是一個參與人間佛教有關的活動的人? |