

Genealogy and Taxonomy of the “Twentieth-century *Renjian Fojiao* 人間佛教” Mapping a *famen* 法門 from Mainland China and Taiwan to Europe

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I. Introduction: a Socially Engaged Religion from Modern China

Since the late Qing, Chinese Buddhists had been rethinking and restructuring Buddhist institutions and practices in order to fit a new historical period, the challenges posed in 1898 by the Hundred Days Reform and the movement (Goossaert 2006)¹, and the framework created by the recent new phase of globalization (which includes, first of all, the successful spread of Christianity in Asia) (Tze Ming Ng 2012)².

Rensheng fojiao 人生佛教 (“Buddhism for the Human Life”)³ was one of the concepts and narratives that took shape in the late Qing and eventually emerged in the early years of the Republic of China as label for a “new” Buddhism that could successfully face the new China. This concept then evolved and became reworded later as *renjian fojiao* 人間佛教 (“Buddhism for the

1. Goossaert, Vincent. 2006. “1898: The Beginning of the End for Chinese Religion? The Journal of Asian Studies, 65(2): 307-335.
2. Tze Ming Ng, Peter. 2012. Chinese Christianity: An Interplay between Global and Local Perspectives. Leiden: Brill
3. The conventional English translation of *rensheng fojiao* is “Buddhism for the Human Life”, to underline the emphasis on the practice in the daily life and for the daily life, in opposition to an alternative form of Buddhism that focused on funerary rituals and dedication to the after-life.

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Human World” or “Humanistic Buddhism”)⁴. This renewed form of Buddhism was characterized by a transformation of key features in practice and outreach, and especially by being engaged – on several levels – in society. Throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, *renjian fojiao* developed and adapted to different local and historical contexts, and thus created a net of various practices all united under a common umbrella term. Of course, there had been Buddhist communities involved in humanitarian activities – and that therefore could have been defined as *renjian* – even before the twentieth century; and in fact, as I will argue below, *renjian fojiao* is not an invention of the modern China but just the revival and reshaping of pre-modern Buddhism. For this reason, I will not just discuss *renjian fojiao* but, more specifically, the “twentieth-century *renjian fojiao*” (*ershi shiji zhi renjian fojiao* 二十世紀之人間佛教).

The first part of this paper will discuss concepts and practice of “twentieth-century *renjian fojiao*”; it will start analyzing theoretical meanings and doctrinal implications of *renjian fojiao* in modern and contemporary mainland China and Taiwan, and assess various case studies of “*renjian fojiao* in practice” among Buddhist communities since the Republican period onwards and also from the pre-modern Imperial time. I will attempt a taxonomy of these principles and practices, and then ponder whether this *renjian fojiao* should not be classified as an overall “school” (*zongpai* 宗派) but considered rather as a “Dharma gate” (*famen* 法門). Secondly, I will consider the transmission of *renjian fojiao* to Europe, more precisely the Netherlands, in particular I will look at how Fo Guang Shan He Hua Temple (*hehua si* 荷華寺) in Amsterdam and Longquan Dabei Temple (*longquan dabei si* 龍泉大悲寺) in Utrecht are adopting and adapting “twentieth-century *renjian fojiao*” in the Netherlands. Finally,

4. *Renjian fojiao* has been translated into English in several ways, the most popular being “Buddhism for the Human Realm”, “Humanistic Buddhism” and “Engaged Buddhism”. The first translation is the most literal, it highlights the practice of Buddhism for/towards the human world; the second one has been used mostly by Fo Guang Shan and the Buddhist Association of China in the mainland, but unfortunately tends to sound confusing in Europe due to the philosophical and cultural movement of Humanism (see also the paper delivered by Michael Zimmermann at *The 4th Symposium on Humanistic Buddhism*, 16-18 December 2016); the third one stresses the importance of being concretely involved in humanitarian action, and more in general in the public domain. Each of these translations can be helpful but also partial and misleading, this is why, unless necessary, I will use the Chinese original term in this paper.

this paper will conclude by questioning how “twentieth-century *renjian fojiao*” could be more present in international platforms that are working towards conflict resolutions and peace building, and therefore could intervene and facilitate dialogue and constructive interaction among different cultures and religions in today globalized and pluralistic society.

II. “Twentieth-century *Renjian Fojiao*”: Foundational Principles in a Nutshell

This and the following sections will offer a survey of the major features of the overall phenomenon known as “twentieth-century *renjian fojiao*”, in theory and practice, with also an overview of major figures and accomplishments. This is a diachronic and synchronic study, concerning both mainland China and Taiwan, female and male Sangha, and based on years of field research that I have been conducted since 1999. Most importantly, I will refer to case studies of *renjian fojiao* from early twentieth century onwards, understand them within their local social and political history, with the important caveat that similar phenomena had also appeared in pre-modern Chinese (and overall East Asian history). I do refer to this “twentieth-century *renjian fojiao*” as an expression of Buddhist modernity, but also as a return of a Buddhist practice that had been present centuries earlier.

What is this “twentieth-century *renjian fojiao*” in a nutshell? As the expression say, it is a practice and manifestation of Buddhism (*fojiao* 佛教) within the human world (*renjian* 人間), which is defined as the only correct Buddhadharma (*zhengquede fofa* 正確的佛法); it started as a reaction to the mainly liturgical Buddhism from the late Qing period, a reaction also inspired by the Christian groups that were more and more present in China during those decades.

“Twentieth-century *renjian fojiao*” aimed to maintain a *chushi* 出世 attitude (a spiritual and over-worldly approach) in anyway a *rushi* 入世 practice (a practice focused on problems and questions of the contemporary and actual human world), and thus shifting the attention from the post-mortem to the in-life. But how to change Buddhism in that direction? First of all, monks and nuns needed to go through a different kind of education, which took form in the establishment of the new Buddhist Academies (*foxueyuan* 佛學院). Secondly,

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the connection and exchange between Buddhist monastics and Buddhist laity had to be renewed and revisited, and finally had to include more involvement of Buddhists in the public sphere, more engagement in various sectors of society (for instance, the cultural, educational, and humanitarian fields), and more adaptation to the “here and now”: this Buddhism is often defined as transforming according to the situation (*qiji* 契機) while still preserving its core principles (*qili* 契理). Among the innovations we count a more consistent adoption of contemporary new systems of communication and expression, from radio broadcasting to television and, today, the Internet. Other features of “twentieth-century *renjian fojiao*” include a reevaluation of the position of women within the Sangha, and the emphasis on the Mahayana Bodhisattva practice that did not preclude a “pan-Buddhist” theology: *renjian fojiao* does not seem to be confined to one specific school or tradition, but seems to include, harmoniously, all of them. This pan-Buddhist perspective became integrated also by attempts of interfaith dialogue and therefore the target to work, collaboratively and constructively, with other non-Buddhist communities. Another feature, linked to the “pan-Buddhist” and “pan-religion” standpoint, was becoming “transnational”: the inclusiveness shown by this “twentieth-century *renjian fojiao*” turned a Chinese movement into a global enterprise. Last, but not least, this “twentieth-century *renjian fojiao*” became accompanied by the notion of *renjian jingtu* 人間淨土, usually translated as “Pure Land on Earth”: this is seen as the goal of the practice of *renjian fojiao*, and it is interpreted as the final outcome of its collective cultivation, in other words, we can build a “Pure Land” here and now, without waiting for the after death.

These features have been articulated in the works and activities of several monastics and lay Buddhists, and some of them will be analyzed briefly in the section below.

III. “Twentieth-century *Renjian Fojiao*”: History, Figures and Patterns of Practice

The reformist monk Taixu 太虛 (1890-1947) is usually defined as the founder of the modern *renjian fojiao* given his theorizing and writings about *rensheng fojiao*. Current scholarship on modern and contemporary Chinese Buddhism

has indeed taken Taixu as the paradigm figure of a new era, an assumption that could be problematic for the study of the situation of religion in those decades⁵. Noticing the decay of the image of Buddhism within the public sphere, also understanding the relation between that decline and the current conditions of Sangha education, Taixu proposed a “Buddhism for the human life”(rensheng fojiao) that was rooted on reforming Sangha’s education and the position of Buddhism and Buddhists in society. Taixu discussed Buddhism through reference to Confucian ideals (like the ideal of Great Unity, *da tong* 大同)⁶, the Three Principles of the People (*sanmin zhuyi* 三民主義)⁷, and Marxist ideologies. Taixu’s plan of reforms, his interaction with the political power, the process of secularization (*shisuhua* 世俗化) within, but not only, Sangha education, and humanization (*renshenghua* 人生化) that he had put forward were received with appreciation but also opposition by the more conservative side of the Sangha.

A Buddhist monk contemporary to Taixu and worth mentioning here is Yuanying 圓瑛 (1878-1953). Often labelled as a “conservative”, Yuanying was actually proposing more involvement of the Sangha in society and clear plans to reform Sangha’s education, a push to modernization that does not seem to contradict at least some of Taixu’s ideals.

In the same years Taixu was expounding his ideas, another monk in Taiwan, Zhengfeng 證峰 (1903-1934), quite controversial among the local Sangha and better known with his lay name Lin Qiuwu 林秋梧, emphasized humanization and secularization of Buddhism, and this made him, according to scholars in the field, as one of the earliest proponents of *renjian fojiao* in Taiwan. Lin Qiuwu did not refer to either *rensheng fojiao* or *renjian fojiao*, and instead of *renjian jingtu* he was calling for the creation of a Pure Land on this contemporary world (*xianshi jingtu* 現世淨土) and Western Paradise on this Earth (*citu*

5. Recently, scholars have revised this attitude and tried to move beyond the “Taixu paradigm”, so to shed lights to other figures and networks so far neglected yet foundational for structuring modern Chinese Buddhism.

6. For the Buddhist reception and adoption of the Confucian *datong* discourse in the first half of the twentieth century, see Taixu 1928 and 1945; Fafang 1948a and 1948b.

7. Taixu even theorized the Three Principles of the Buddha (*sanfo zhuyi* 三佛主義), who represented the Three Principles of the People from a Buddhist perspective: (1) *foseng zhuyi* 佛僧主義; (2) *fohua zhuyi* 佛化主義; (3) *foguo zhuyi* 佛國主義.

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de xifang 此土的西方). Most importantly, Lin Qiuwu was a socialist activist during the Japanese occupation in Taiwan, who turned to Buddhism as a way to filter his Marxist plans in a (religious) way that would have attracted a wider group of people. This is far from the common trends of “twentieth century *renjian fojiao*”, however we detect elements that recur in the Marxist phase of Taixu (see the equivalence between Pure Land and the Marxist classless society)⁸, the idea that the real Pure Land is not necessarily on the Western Paradise but can be everywhere, and it is the human society to establish it. Similarly to Taixu, and pretty much in these same years, Lin Qiuwu made a connection also between this Pure Land on earth and the Confucian Great Unity. Lin Qiuwu articulated his plan of religious and social reform into six points, and most of them remind us of *renjian fojiao*'s key tenets, like the emphasis on improving educational structures for the Sangha, cleansing religion from superstition and theism (which did not belong to “correct Buddhadharma” in the first instance), making monastics more involved in the social sphere and social welfare (and therefore highlighting a *rushi* practice), reevaluating the role of women in Buddhism and society at large.

Clearly, from 1910s to 1940s we see a number of Buddhists, either in the mainland or in Taiwan, who, as part of a common intellectual atmosphere, pushed for reforms, humanization of religion, and connected their plains with the current political ideologies.

Since the 1950s, Taiwan has seen the blooming of different explanations and interpretations of *renjian fojiao*, some authored by mainland monastics, some others elaborated by native Taiwanese.

The monk Cihang 慈航 (1893-1954) claimed to have coined the term *renjian fojiao*, and to be the first real promoter of this new Buddhism. Before moving to Taiwan, Cihang's efforts in propagating *renjian fojiao* included the founding of the *Buddhism for the Human Realm Monthly Magazine (renjian fojiao yuekan 人間佛教月刊)* in 1943. The six years that he spent in Taiwan were fundamental for the development of Taiwanese Buddhism. His understanding of

8. Several monks in those decades wrote about the connections between Buddhism, especially Mahayana, and Socialism/Marxism.



Ven. Tzu Hang and the young monks from mainland China.

renjian fojiao, the support of nuns' education, and the efforts in promoting the three missions of education (*jiaoyu* 教育), culture (*wenhua* 文化), and charity (*cishan* 慈善), attracted a large number of followers at that time and are still carried out today. His oeuvre includes several writings on the relations between Buddhism and society, the establishment of a Pure Land on earth, the *chushi* (出世) and (*rushi* 入世) tendencies.⁹

The monk Yinshun 印順 (1906-2005) has been recognized as one of the major theorizers of *renjian fojiao* 人間佛教. In line with this, after Yinshun's passing, Taiwanese newspapers discussed the association between Yinshun and *renjian fojiao* in terms of a possible "lineage transmission" (*yimo chuancheng* 一脈傳承). This lineage transmission started with the reformer monk Taixu, has Tzu Chi's Zhengyan as current major representative, and includes Yinshun in the intermediate (and bridging) position. In my previous work I have tried to defy such a "lineage transmission", and instead proposed a different reading of Yinshun's *renjian fojiao*, which is still rooted in some of Taixu's arguments, but that also takes distance from it and from Zhengyan's work as well. A few quotations from Yinshun's works can prove it easily:

The *renjian fojiao* that I am promoting has been certainly influenced by

9. Just to mention a few titles: "Rensheng wenti" 人生問題; "Foxue yu rensheng zhi guanxi" 佛學與人生之關係; "Jianshe renjian jingtu" 建設人間淨土; "Fojiao yu shehui zhi guanxi" 佛教與社會之關係; "Chushi rushi yu jiushi" 出世入世與救世. See Cihang 1981.

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Master Taixu, but is also quite different.¹⁰

As I started studying the Buddhadharma (San-lun and Wei-shi schools), I realised the distance between what I was reading and the real Buddhist world around me. This problem, which I kept in my mind, received a first inspiration in reading Taixu’s thought, and a second one in the statement “Buddha manifest in the Human Realm, it is not in the Deva Realm that the Buddhahood is gained.”¹¹

It must be assured that renjian Buddhism is not one of the many charity activities carried out in the secular world.¹²

Yinshun’s *renjian fojiao* has been inspired by Taixu’s thought, but it takes a distance from it, and makes sure that the *renjian* aspect would not secularize – and therefore compromise – too much the *fojiao* part. Yinshun did not put efforts, directly, in humanitarian actions, but was rather concerned with the Sangha’s education: the improvement of monks’ and nuns’ learning and training through the Buddhist academies and other education programs that he established in Taiwan can be seen as his real concrete (*renjian*) contribution. According to Yinshun, *renjian fojiao* is just the “correct Buddhadharma” (*zhengque de fofo* 正確的佛法), an equivalence that pretty much all the proponents of *renjian fojiao* had made, with the difference being in what they have defined as “correct Buddhadharma”. In Yinshun’s literature, *renjian fojiao* is defined as the very true essence of Buddhism, which is rooted in Sakyamuni’s teachings and, most importantly, finds its complete and concrete manifestation in the Mahayana Bodhisattva practice (*pusa xing* 菩薩行); and it is early Mahayana that he defined as the “correct Buddhadharma”.

Yinshun’s appeal to the re-evaluation of what he defined “correct Bud-

10. Yinshun 印順 . 1989. “Qili qiji zhi renjian fojiao” 契理契機之人間佛教 . Later included in Yinshun. 1993. *Huayu ji* 華雨集 , vol. 4, 1-70. Taipei: Zhengwen.

11. Yinshun 印順 . 1989. “Qili qiji zhi renjian fojiao” 契理契機之人間佛教 . Later included in Yinshun. 1993. *Huayu ji* 華雨集 , vol. 4, 1-70. Taipei: Zhengwen.

12. Yinshun, *Fo zai renjian*, 73.

dhadharma”, his promotion of the doctrine of dependent arising and his focus on the Bodhisattva path from an early Nagarjunian perspective brought Yinshun’s career on a different direction from Taixu, and from Taixu’s *rensheng* (or *renjian*) *fojiao*. An initial Taixu’s legacy in Yinshun’s thought is undeniable, so is a background of Yinshun’s legacy in Zhengyan’s ideals. That these three figures are connected and that such association stands under a shared *renjian fojiao* ideology are dictated by a historical moment where the issues of post-colonial nationalism and identity have been, and still are, critical concepts; and the Sangha in Taiwan have planned (and still plan), to root Taiwanese Buddhism into mainland Chinese Buddhism rather than into, for instance, Japanese Buddhism.

At the same time Yinshun’s *renjian fojiao* may be considered as a Madhyamika discourse. As I have explained in my previous research,¹³ Yinshun applied the interaction between Pre-Mahayana and Mahayana Buddhism, and adopted Nagarjuna as the authoritative frame of his *renjian fojiao* as well. In this way *renjian fojiao* is the all-embracing teaching that includes the Madhyamika-Agama doctrinal framework and its practice, which is the cultivation of the Bodhisattva path.¹⁴

Taiwan and the mainland also count many female practitioners of *renjian fojiao*, whom I have called, in my previous works, *renjian biqiuni* 人間比丘

13. The Madhyamika dimension of Yinshun was the subject of my PhD dissertation and some of my recent publications. Travagnin, Stefania. 2009. “The Madhyamika Dimension of Yinshun. A Re-statement of the School of Nagarjuna in Twentieth-Century Chinese Buddhism”. PhD Diss., SOAS University of London. Travagnin, Stefania. 2012. “What is behind Yinshun’s Re-statement of Mūlamadhyamakakarika? Debates on the Creation of a New Mahayana in twentieth-century China”. *Buddhist Studies Review*, 29(2): 251-272. Travagnin, Stefania. 2013. “Yinshun’s Re-Assessment of Shizhu piposha lun 十住毗婆沙論: A Madhyamika-based Pure Land Practice in Twentieth-century Taiwan”. *Contemporary Buddhism*, 14(2): 320-343.

14. The expression *renjian fojiao* occurs more than a hundred times throughout Yinshun’s literature. The main references are the books *Fo zai renjian* 佛在人間 (1971), *Fofa gai lun* 佛法概論 (1950), and the essays “You xin fahai liushi nian” 遊心法海六十年 (1984), “Qili qiji zhi renjian fojiao” 契理契機之人間佛教 (1989), “Tan fojiao zai renjian” 談人間佛教 (1994). These books have been written in different years, a fact that shows Yinshun’s consistent emphasis on the topic. If *Fo zai renjian* includes Yinshun’s first comprehensive exposition of *renjian fojiao*, only later on in “Qili qiji zhi renjian fojiao” we can get the systematisation of its doctrine, later considerations, minor changes and final remarks. For this reason “Qili qiji zhi renjian fojiao” can be seen as the final and more complete reference.

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尼¹⁵. Many of them are not well known, since women have been writing very often only “hidden” histories of Buddhism, and their accomplishments have not been acknowledged sufficiently. Here below are just a few representative figures.

The nun Xiaoyun 曉雲 (1912-2004) was the founder of Huafan University (*Huafan daxue* 華梵大學). Painter and interested in arts since before becoming a nun, Xiaoyun was involved in projects centred on Buddhist arts, Buddhist education and Buddhist culture. Her ideal of Enlightened Education (*jue de jiao yu* 覺的教育), and her attempt to combine science and humanistic thought became symbol of her mission in education¹⁶. She was often defined as “the educator who guides towards the creation of the Pure Land on earth” (*yinzaoren-jian jingtu de jiaoyujia* 引造人間淨土的教育家). Similarly to Taixu, Xiaoyun stressed the importance to connect Confucianism (and so Chinese inner civilization) with Buddhism in order to produce a perfect education and guidance to humanity.¹⁷

Fo Guang Shan’s nuns became prominent in education and inter-cultural dialogue, as part of the cultural and humanitarian programme at Fo Guang Shan that I will discuss later. And certainly the nun Wuyin 悟因 and the establishment

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15. Travagnin, Stefania. 2000. “Le Eredi di Guanyin: Ritratti di Maestre e Praticanti del Nuovo Buddhismo Taiwanese”. MA Diss., Ca’Foscari University in Venice. Travagnin, Stefania. 2004. “Ven. Miaoling and Yuantong Chan Nunnery: A New Beginning for Monastic Women in Taiwan”. In Tsomo, Karma Lekshe ed. *Bridging Worlds: Buddhist Women’s Voices Across Generations*, Taipei: Yuanquan Press, 83-96. Travagnin, Stefania. 2007. “Master Yinshun and Buddhist Nuns in/for the Human Realm: Shift and Continuity From Theory to Practice of renjian fojiao in Contemporary Taiwan”. In Storm, Carsten and Harrison, Mark eds. *The Margins of Becoming. Identity and Culture in Taiwan*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 83-100. Travagnin, Stefania. 2007. “Buddhist Nuns and Female Buddhism in Taiwan. Historical Patterns and Engendered Values”. *World Fellow Buddhist Review*, 44(1): 6-15.
 16. Quoting Xiaoyun, “May humanities and technologies unify and fuse together, and therefore compassion and wisdom form reciprocally” (*renwen yu keji ronghui, cibeiyu zhihui xiangsheng* 人文與科技融匯，慈悲與智慧相生).
 17. Quoting Xiaoyun, “We aim to promote humanistic spirits of Confucianism and Buddhism based on the Chinese ethics and the great compassion in Buddhism. In addition to knowledge, we aim at the accomplishment of a whole man (*quanren* 全人), to achieve wisdom and compassion and to benefit mankind. Only by integration of *hua* 華 (Chinese) and *fan* 梵 (Buddhism) in the education, can this goal be reached”.



The United Association of Humanistic Buddhism, Chunghua holds its 2017 Executive and Supervisory Board Meeting at Xiang Guang Temple, Chiayi.

of the Incense Light Community (*Xiangguang nisengtuan* 香光尼僧團) are other excellent examples on how nuns were not just educated but also involved in the creation and improvement of monastic pedagogy and Buddhist studies.

Buddhist scholar-nun, and firm activist in defense of animals' and women's rights, the nun Zhaohui 昭慧 (b.1957), native from Malaysia but active in Taiwan, outstands for the variety of social engagements that she is carrying on. Founder of the Buddhist Hongshi College (*Fojiao hongshi xueyuan* 佛教弘誓學院) as well as of the Life Conservationist Association of the ROC (*Zhonghua minguo shengming guanhuai xiehui* 中華民國生命關懷協會), Zhaohui has devoted her efforts in both educational and cultural initiatives, and in humanitarian campaigns, showing concern for both scholarly work and social welfare. For a better description of her plans of actions and a clearer understanding of her role in the worldly Buddhist community, the nun Zhaohui herself analyzed the different groups of activities that were promoted by Sangha members with the aim to benefit the society at large, and classified them as either "social activities" (*shehui huodong* 社會活動) or "mission of charity" (*cishan shiye* 慈善事業). Zhaohui listed the Tzu Chi Foundation, founded by the nuns Zhengyan, as an example of the latter category, and the Life Conservationist Association of the ROC, which she herself founded, as a case of the former group. I would add a third category to the list made by Zhaohui, namely the engagement in the education sector, and list Xiaoyun, Fo Guang Shan Sangha, and the following two nuns under it.

The nun Miaoqing 妙清 (1901-1955) is not a well-known figure, however her accomplishments in improving nuns' education and creating the basis of a better trained female Sangha – which she started during the Japanese occupation of the island – could be labelled as a *renjian fojiao* activity, even if she did not

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make explicit reference to it.

Another less known nun, Lianchan 蓮懺, achieved important accomplishments in the spheres of religion, education, culture and humanitarian action. In 1987 she founded the Chinese Buddhist Library Centre for the Blind (*zhongguo fojiao mangren tushu zhongxin* 中國佛教盲人圖書中心), a structure that she enlarged and transformed a few years later into the Chinese Buddhist Cultural Centre for the Blind (*zhongguo fojiao mangren wenhua zhongxin* 中國佛教盲人文化中心). She has been helped by several volunteers who believed in her *renjian fojiao* ideals and in her principle “service is the main goal in human life” (*fuwu shi rensheng de mudi* 服務是人生的目的), and came to be titled as “the guiding master of the blind” (*mangren daoshi* 盲人導師). This involvement in social welfare makes Lianchan closer to the nuns Zhengyan and Zhaohui, although she was the only one to focus on humanitarian help in the education sector.

Master Hsing Yun 星雲 (b.1927), Shengyan 聖嚴 (1930-2009) and the nun Zhengyan 證嚴 (b.1937) have referred to *renjian fojiao* in a very explicit way, making it the leading philosophy of the monasteries and organizations that they founded: Fo Guang Shan 佛光山, Fagushan 法鼓山, and Tzu Chi 慈濟. Fo Guang Shan, given the successful efforts in education, culture and social welfare, appears as the organization with the most comprehensive concrete practice of *renjian fojiao*; let’s see Hsing Yun’s publications on *renjian fojiao*, not to mention the foundation of the Institute of Humanistic Buddhism (*renjian fojiao yanjiuyuan* 人間佛教研究院) and other related centers such as the one in Hong Kong. Fagushan seems to have focused mostly on education, culture and environment protection, and finally Tzu Chi has been devoted almost uniquely to social welfare through the service of medical care and the offering of health resources to the poor. Another factor shared by these three groups is their successful expansion outside Taiwan and Asia: the opening of numerous branch temples and offices in all the continents made these three organizations transnational. The adoption of traditional and new media, to propagate Buddhism and make the Dharma more accessible to both a local and global audience, is another shared feature.

Zhengyan and her Tzu Chi Foundation embed another interesting characteristic: it is not necessary to be Buddhist in order to be a member of their group

and “school”.¹⁸ This is in line with the pan-religion tendency that is reflected in *renjian fojiao*, and goes beyond the pan-Buddhism ideal that Fo Guang Shan and Fagushan have embraced. Fo Guang Shan and Fagushan have been, however, very active in meeting with communities of other beliefs and consequently in inter-faith dialogue.

In the mainland, the Buddhist Association of China has been adopting Taixu’s philosophy as leading concept since 1980s, and emphasizes *renjian fojiao* on their website as well. The former president Zhao Puchu 趙樸初 (1907-2000) drew a clear connection between Taixu’s Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism at the time of Mao and after Mao. Zhao declared that the main spirit of the Buddhist Association of China was rooted into the *renjian fojiao* that is based on – and is a further development and improvement of – Taixu’s *rensheng fojiao*. At the very end, the *aiguo aijiao* 愛國愛教, if intended in the sense of support for the society and respect for the religion (i.e. Buddhism), is not far from Taixu’s *rensheng fojiao* (and later *renjian fojiao*) that had been filtered through the Three Principles of the People. To quote Zhao Puchu:

*In the past twentieth-century, Taixu formulated renjian fojiao, but what he particularly stressed was rensheng fojiao. [...] Taixu claimed that Buddhism must adapt to contemporary society, this is “for the human life” in attitude, and “for the human realm” in scope.*¹⁹

In the last few decades, Buddhist academies (*foxueyuan*) have been established in all Chinese provinces, those are institutes that aim to educate and form Buddhist (citizen) monks; this is perfectly in line with Taixu’s plans, in 1920s,

18. In 2005 Shengyan had declared that Fagushan was a school, the Fagu Chan School (*fagu chan zong* 法鼓禪宗), and only a few years later Zhengyan proclaimed that Tzu Chi was also a school, the Tzu Chi School (*ciji zong* 慈濟宗).

19. Zhu Hong 朱洪 ed. 2009. *Zhao Puchu shuo fo* 趙樸初說佛. Beijing: Dangdai zhongguo chubanshe.

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and his encouragement to nurture special religious citizens, but yet citizens.²⁰
Quoting Zhao Puchu, from 1985, in this regard:

The current priorities of Chinese Buddhism are, first, training talents (peiyang rencai 培養人才); second, training talents; and third, again, training talents.

Humanitarian support for lay society is another achievement of the Buddhism promoted by the Buddhist Association of China that is also rooted in *renjian fojiao*. Several monasteries have developed charities (*cishanhui* 慈善會), exactly the “mission of charity” that Zhaohui mentioned in her classification of activities to benefit society at large.

The recent book *Xinyang yu duihua* 信仰與對話 written by the current President of the Buddhist Association of China, the monk Xuecheng 學誠法師 (b.1966), brings in another channel used by Buddhism in the mainland to serve the public sphere: a serious engagement in cultural pluralism and interfaith dialogue, and this takes Taixu’s ideals from the 1920s and 1930s to a new level, and resembles what is happening in Taiwan with the major organizations like Fo Guang Shan and Tzu Chi Foundation. The very Chinese ideal of “harmony” (*hexie* 和諧), which is the basis of Chinese civilization, has been developed in a particular way within Confucianism, and can be linked to the Confucian ideal of Great Unity mentioned above, is here considered beyond the Chinese borders, and becomes a Chinese (also Buddhist) lesson for the contemporary globalized world. Quoting a few excerpts from the official English translation of Xuecheng’s book:

Harmony of the world begins with harmony among religions. Harmony among religions comes from dialogue and cooperation. Lack of

20. In 1931 Taixu gave the lecture *Seng jiaoyu zhi mudi yu chengxu* 僧教育之目的與程序, where he declared that Sangha education had to follow KMT principles with nevertheless the caveat that monastics were not merely “common citizens” (*putong jumin* 普通居民) but also “religious teachers” (*zongjiao shi* 宗教師) and, as such, they could benefit society in a deeper way than “common citizens.”

*dialogue will result in more misunderstandings and conflicts between religions and their sects, which will increasingly deteriorate in the process of globalization, entailing eventual loss of the original ethical purpose shared by major religions in the world.*²¹

*The profound cultures and successful practices accumulated by Chinese people in their long history may provide important resources of thoughts and practical inspirations for today's religions to transcend the differences in their ultimate beliefs and achieve harmonious coexistence. Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism have been coexisting harmoniously in Chinese society for thousands of years. [...] This phenomenon of Chinese religions also demonstrates that religions can transcend the divergences and distinctions in their ultimate beliefs to realize harmony and mutual accommodation.*²²

Finally, renjian Buddhism needs to adapt to the “here and now”, as it is summed up in the concept *qiji* 契機 mentioned earlier. Part of this strategy was the adoption of new media communication: TV programs and the availability of Internet services for online rituals and prayers were added to, and in certain sense also slowly replaced, the more classical journals and radio programs that were founded at the time of Taixu. Both mainland and Taiwanese Buddhist communities have shared this strategy. In the mainland, Longquan monastery even created a robot monk, with the Dharma name Xian'er 賢二, which, according to the Longquan community, proved that Buddhism and science are not in contradiction, and will certainly help to reach the new digital generation more easily.

IV. The European Challenge: Globalization and Glocalization

The process of globalization involves consideration for glocalization too,

21. The Translation Center of Beijing Longquan Monastery completed the English translation of *Xinyang yu duihua* with the title *Cultural Pluralism and Interfaith Dialogue*. This quotation is on p.110.

22. See the English translation of the book, pp.111-115.

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Chinese New Year Celebration takes place at Fo Guang Shan He Hua Temple, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.(Photo provided by He Hua Temple)

the merging of cultural identities, and the mutual encounter and respect of conflicting views.

How are Chinese Buddhist temples in the Netherlands, especially Fo-Guang Shan He Hua Temple (*hehua si* 荷華寺) in Amsterdam and Longquan Dabei Temple (*longquan dabei si* 龍泉大悲寺) in Utrecht, following that path? An approachable Buddhist education for the laity is certainly a priority, matched with the understanding of key aspects of Chinese culture (like classes or exhibitions of calligraphy, Chinese traditional paintings and music, or a collective celebration of the Chinese New Year). Humanitarian supports to the local community are also carried out, and a good example is the visits of volunteers to nursery homes organized by Fo Guang Shan He Hua Temple. And meetings with representatives of other religions, in the attempt of a constructive local (and then global) dialogue, are in the agenda as well, like for instance the meeting between monastics and laity from Longquan Dabei and members of the Muslim community in Utrecht.

Although the accessibility to local language has been an initial obstacle,

renjian fojiao has created an universal channel of communication, an universal language, a *famen*, which let Buddhism permeates Dutch society, and at the same time allowed Dutch society to understand not only Buddhism but also Chinese civilization, a shared path for common growing. This is a path towards an international and glocal harmony.

V. Final Considerations for Future Developments: Towards a “Twenty-first century *Renjian Fojiao*”

Renjian fojiao claimed to be the correct Buddhadharma and be the real only Dharma that Buddha had referred to. As it has been theorized and practiced in the twentieth and twentieth-first century, *renjian fojiao* reveals to be a multi-faceted and multivocal concrete practice of the Buddhadharma. Nevertheless, a number patterns emerge in the only few case-studies explored above: (1) a renewed education, for the Sangha and the laity, based on the joint learning of humanities, social science and technology; (2) improvement of women’s rights and nuns’ position in the Sangha; (3) humanization and secularization of religion, in contrast to superstitious beliefs and theistic tendencies, and therefore a *rushi* 入世 practice although still guided by a *chushi* 出世 spiritualism; (4) adaptation to the “here and now” while maintaining the core essence of the Dharma (*qili qiji* 契理契機), and this found shape in the following: (a) secularization with political involvement/implications; (b) attempts of globalization and glocalization; (c) modernization and adoption of new media technologies; (5) active participation in social service through social activities and missions of charity; (6) principles of pan-Buddhism (i.e., respect and practice of all the schools) and pan-religion (i.e., efforts in inter-faith dialogue).

As argued above, *renjian fojiao* can be regarded as a Dharma gate (*famen* 法門). In assessing the potential new developments of *renjian fojiao*, and therefore exploring possible structure and functions of a “twenty-first century *renjian fojiao*”, I would see *renjian fojiao* more present in the global arena, and not just mostly limited to a Chinese or Buddhism-only sphere. The key to further promote and integrate *renjian fojiao* in today society, especially outside Taiwan or Asia, and make it an important component in those official public platforms that discuss global issues, is to shift from *renjian fojiao* as Buddhist Dharma gate

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to a *fojiao* as an overall renjian life gate. More integration within the education sector, more cooperation with other religious groups, more engagement in the public domain would make *fojiao* participate in the training of new global citizens. This would be a step forward from what Taixu was planning in 1920s for Chinese Buddhist monks.

The *renjian* tradition of Buddhism is characterized by a potential inclusiveness, which is manifested through the respect and study of all the schools and the opening to dialogue with non-Buddhist faiths. Furthermore, we are also considering a Chinese tradition, rooted in key tenets of the Chinese cultural system, which is inclusive *per se*. The attempt to accept and merge differences in name of an overall harmony is reflected in the *yin* and *yang* dynamics that are explained in the *Yijing* and early Daoist texts like the *Daodejing*; in fact, perfection is not represented by the absence of diversity but, instead, by the balanced merging of differences, which means that diversity is conceived as an added value and not as a problematic factor.²³

The general inclusiveness of Chinese culture, the respect and acceptance for the other that label *renjian fojiao*, not to mention the ideal of emptiness and universal compassion that characterize the original Dharma: here are the elements that can provide today globalized society with structural trajectories to experience constructively and positively religious diversity and cultural pluralism. Here is where *renjian fojiao* is heading to, and the new potential of a “twenty-first century *renjian fojiao*”.



23. Travagnin, Stefania. 2017. “Yin & Yang dynamics and the concept of Kong: Understanding “becoming” and “being” in Chinese philosophy and religions”. In Formica, Giambattista and Cogiunti, Lorella eds. *Oltre l'Individualismo: Relazioni e Relazionalità per Ripensare l'Identità*. Vatican: Urbaniana University Press.