

CONTINUING POLITICAL FORCE OF RELICS IN THE MODERN ASIAN SOCIETY: THE  
BUDDHA'S TOOTH RELIC AT FOGUANGSHAN

Stacy Mann  
11220046  
[stlymann@umich.edu](mailto:stlymann@umich.edu)  
Prof. Benjamin Brose  
Asian 395 – Honors Thesis  
December 5<sup>th</sup> 2011

# CONTINUING POLITICAL FORCE OF RELICS IN THE MODERN ASIAN SOCIETY: THE BUDDHA'S TOOTH RELIC AT FOGUANGSHAN

## Introduction

Some scholars have suggested that as Buddhism moved into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, where there were many international connections and a spread of western ideas and science, it will become more separate from the state. Scholars such as Thomas DuBois, Mayfair Yang, and Vincent Goosaert have all discussed the move toward a more secularized state in Modern China, especially under the rule of the communist party, who viewed religion as an exploitative institution. Even before the period of Communist rule in China, when the nationalist party, the Guomindang (國民黨), controlled China, there was a move away from religions and religious practices that were seen as “superstitious”. After the Guomindang moved to Taiwan, they regulated religion, and tried to eliminate the participation of religion into public arenas, such as politics. These ideas suggest a move away from any “superstitious” practice, and a move toward a secularized state that may seek to control the religious organizations, but will not allow them any part in their government.<sup>1</sup>

Yet while I was studying in the South of Taiwan in 2010 I visited the Foguangshan monastery (佛光山寺) in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. There I was informed of and had the chance to see a tooth relic of the Historical Buddha, the Buddha who lived in India two thousand four hundred years ago. This relic is a rare form, said to be one of four eyeteeth of the Buddha that were found after the Buddha's cremation, one of three still in the human realm. In order to view the tooth I had to ask the nun who was taking us on the tour of the complex if she could take me to

---

<sup>1</sup> Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang, *Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2008), 28-34. DuBois, Thomas David *Religion and the Making of Modern East Asia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 172-9. and in Vincent Goosaert and David Palmer, *Religious Question in Modern China* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 10-11 and 214

see it, as the tooth relic was kept in a separate hall, which was not part of the tour we were given. She agreed to take me, but only if I was willing to bow before the relic. The relic was placed in a room behind a screen and I was only allowed to get a glimpse of it. They also informed me of the grand plans they had to build a large complex to house this relic, from which it would rarely be seen by the public and would be surrounded by other Buddhist items of worship. I was intrigued by the amount of reverence that was given to this Buddhist relic, as there were other bead-like relics of the Historical Buddha in the monastery that did not receive such reverence. When the tooth first came to Taiwan, there was a massive welcoming ceremony attended by thousands of people, including political figures from Taiwan. From the time that this relic entered into Taiwan until the present, it has attracted the interest of the Taiwanese people, the Taiwanese government, and even people from outside Taiwan. I wondered what was so special about this tooth and what it was doing for the people of Taiwan that it would draw so much attention and be treated with so much respect.

As I began to learn more about Foguangshan and the Humanistic form of Buddhism that it practices, I began to wonder why they would place a relic of a Buddha in such a prominent position. Humanistic Buddhism, a relatively modern form of Buddhism, arose in competition with the Protestant Christianity that came into China and Taiwan with many Western missionaries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and has therefore been moving away from “superstition” and an emphasis on gaining salvation for only one’s self in a Pure Land, and instead focusing on compassion and kindness toward others in order to create a Pure Land here on earth. It is paradoxical such a this-worldly religion would not only accept a relic, which is said to hold supernatural powers, but also hold a large national welcoming ceremony for it, and create a magnificent complex to house it.

In this paper I will discuss how the tooth is being used in this modern Buddhist tradition and how that compares to the way that relics have been used in the past. First I will look at the way that relics have functioned and what supernatural powers they are perceived to hold, especially focusing on the way that Empress Wu (623 or 625-705) used them during her reign in China. I then continue by discussing what Humanistic Buddhism is and how it has evolved, so that Foguangshan's use of the relic can be placed in its proper historical context. Finally, I will discuss the welcoming ceremony and plans of Master Hsing Yun, the leader of Foguangshan, to erect a Buddha Tooth Memorial Hall. My goal is to show that the way that Hsing Yun and the Taiwanese government treated the relic greatly mirrors that of the past use by rulers, such as Empress Wu in pre-modern China. As in the past, relics are still being used by governments to show its political power and by people for its supernatural abilities, but there are also some discontinuities. With this new situation, Hsing Yun and Foguangshan used the relic to boost the importance of his individual organization. At the same time, they were also trying to redirect the focus away from the supernatural power of the relics, stating that the relic can inspire compassion and kindness in people who see it.<sup>2</sup>

### **Previous Research on Relics**

Relics in the Buddhist tradition are usually known as *śarīra* or *dhātu*, meaning “the body” or its elements, rather than something that was left behind as the Latin root of the English word *relic* suggests. Instead of being viewed as something that is left behind, the remains of the

---

<sup>2</sup> Foguang Weixing Dianshitai 佛光衛星電視台, prod., *Gongyin Foya Sheli Huigu Guangji* 恭迎佛牙舍利回顧專輯, VHS (Taiwan: 香海文化事業有限公司, 1999).

Buddha are viewed as part of the Buddha, who is not necessarily departed from this world.<sup>3</sup> Such relics can come in several different varieties. Some relics are bits of bone, teeth, hair, or fingernails of the Historical Buddha left during his life and retrieved from his ashes after his cremation. Others are small bead-like gems that are produced from the cremation of the Buddha.<sup>4</sup> The relics that I will primarily deal with in this paper are these two types of relics that come from the Historical Buddha. Hsing Yun has remarked that the first types of these relics, especially those made of actual bone, like the tooth relic that he has received, are rarer than others and hold more prestige, so they are treated with greater admiration.<sup>5</sup> There are also relics of past Buddhas, such as the relic of the previous Buddha Kāśyapa in the Toyika stūpa, a dome-like structure that houses relics, in India, which was a stūpa said to be reconstructed during the time of the Historical Buddha over the bones of this past Buddha. In addition to this, there are also relics of the Historical Buddha's previous lives as a bodhisattava, a being on the path to becoming a Buddha.<sup>6</sup> All of these relics are said to have the presence of the Buddha or be a continuation of the Buddha's life, but this idea of presence of the Buddha is contested by scholar and will be discussed later in this paper. Some relics are relics of use or contact relics rather than actual remains of the body. This category includes staves, robes and even footprints that Buddhas have touched or left behind. In one case, the bowl that was used to divide up relics

---

<sup>3</sup> Gregory Schopen, "Relics," in *Critical Terms for Religious Study* (Chicago, Illinois: Chicago University Press, 1998), 256

<sup>4</sup> John S Strong, *Relics of the Buddha* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004), 8-36

<sup>5</sup> *Fojiao Jinianguan 佛教纪念馆: Buddha Memorial Center*, Pamphlet (Kaohsiung, Taiwan: 佛光山 出版發行, n.d.), 2

<sup>6</sup> Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, 36-37, 53

became a relic itself.<sup>7</sup> Through the act of coming into contact with a Buddha these mundane objects have become divine relics unto themselves.

Throughout Buddhist history, not only have Buddhas and bodhisattvas produced relics, but prominent leaders of Buddhism have also produced them. Upon the cremation of many Buddhist leaders small, bead-like *śarīra*, are found among their ashes. The production of these *śarīra* became required to prove that a master was truly enlightened and a proper master.<sup>8</sup> Even one of the founders of Humanistic Buddhism left *śarīra* behind after his cremation.

Many Buddhists view relics as being alive, and as such can be killed through desecration. In addition to life, all relics hold power and have a will. In one case, a bowl used by the Buddha was in Western Pakistan when a foreign king came and attempted to steal it, but he was unable to move it even with the use of eight large male elephants.<sup>9</sup> This failure shows the king was not the proper recipient of the relic as it was not willing to go with him. Bead-like relics, *śarīra*, can multiply themselves infinitely, especially if they are under the control of a rightful and just ruler.<sup>10</sup> In late sixth century China, and in Heian-era Japan (794-1185), there are accounts in which relics are innumerable, as they continue to multiply as they are being counted.<sup>11</sup>

The virtues, benevolence, and life of these relics can be passed on by touch or closeness. In the case of Buddhist relic the touch of the shadow of the stūpa where relics reside can be

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 8, 121

<sup>8</sup> Bernard Faure, "Metamorphosis of the Double (I): Relics" in *The Rhetoric of Immediacy: A Cultural Critique of Chan/Zen Buddhism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 137-143

<sup>9</sup> Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, 212 and in Kevin M Trainor, "When is Theft not a Theft? Relic Theft and the Cult of the Buddha's Relics in Sri Lanka," *Numen* 39 (June 1992): 10-12.

<sup>10</sup> Robert H Sharf, "On the Allure of Buddhist Relics," *Representations* 66 (Spring 1999): 78.

<sup>11</sup> David Germano and Kevin Trainor, eds. *Embodying the Dharma: Buddhist Relic Veneration in Asia* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), 39.

enough to transfer this power.<sup>12</sup> They also function as a field of merit a person can sacrifice to in order to grow their good karma. Through this accumulation of karma, better results can be gained in this life or in one's future lives. Such practice as gaining merit from proximity to relics is one of many common practices. People believing in the power of relics wanted to bury their loved ones near them to access the power and be saved from hell or bad rebirths, what Gregory Schopen calls "burial 'ad sanctos,'" calling upon the language from the Catholic tradition. This can be shown in the archeological evidence around stūpas, where many deposits of mortuary layers can be found.<sup>13</sup> Relics can also produce miracles such as emitting multicolored lights or healings.<sup>14</sup> In addition to having power, relics are also portable. This quality allowed for relics' movement into new areas and with the relics also came Buddhism. Robert Sharf, in his article "On the Allure of Relics," suggests the spread of Buddhism throughout Asia should be thought of as a spread of sacred objects, such as relics and texts, rather than a dissemination of the abstract Dharma. Thus one of the ways in which Buddhism moved into China was through relics carried along major trade routes by merchants.<sup>15</sup> This portability also allowed rulers to create a Buddhist landscape by distributing relics, rather than by recreating the landscape of India, as we will see later in this paper.

This movement of relics and discovery of new relics provoked issues of authenticity as relics could be counterfeited for personal gain. Although there have been some cases in which relics have been tested by methods such as flames, the majority of the burden of authenticating relics relied on text, such as chronicles like the *Thūpavaṃsa* and *Dhātuvaṃsa* in Sri Lanka,

---

<sup>12</sup> Schopen, "Relics," 260-262.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>14</sup> Tansen Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, & Trade: The Realignment of Sino-Indian Relations* (Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 59.

<sup>15</sup> Sharf, "On the Allure of Relics," 77-8.

which told stories of how the relic came to reside in its area.<sup>16</sup> In some cases the authenticity of the relics can also be proven through the miracles they produced. Miracles like these were attributed to the relics that King Aśoka distributed in 84,000 stūpas that he erected.<sup>17</sup> There are various tales and stories of how a specific relic ended up in a particular area.

Attracted by the portability of relics and the widespread belief in their power, East Asian rulers collected and used relics to help validate their rule.<sup>18</sup> Also, the fact that relics have a will to be in a place or the will to replicate showed that the ruler, who the relics resolved to stay in the kingdom, was a just and rightful ruler. This propagation of relics also allowed for relics to be manipulated. This power of relics to justify ruler also created a need for relics to be found in areas where Buddhism had never been before. This was done in order to establish a ruler's domain as a new center for Buddhism, such as what Empress Wu did with her relic veneration and relic distribution campaign, as we will see in the next section. In modern day Taiwan, the Buddha's tooth relic at Foguangshan was used in a similar way to justify the rule of the Guomintang, but in addition to supporting a political organization it also had the power to bolster the image of the Buddhist organization that possesses it.

Relics have intrigued scholars for some time. Robert Sharf suggested that this fascination might have come from a sense of voyeurism rather than from a purely intellectual quest. Modern western scholars are intrigued by the bits of dead flesh, but this he suspects will tell us little about what drew Buddhists to relics. He also suggests that many scholars felt disillusioned with the rationalized version of Buddhist that was perpetuated by the western intelligentsia. This idea

---

<sup>16</sup>David Germano and Kevin Trainor, eds. *Embodying the Dharma: Buddhist Relic Veneration in Asia*, 41.

<sup>17</sup> Sen *Buddhism, Diplomacy, & Trade: The Realignment of Sino-Indian Relations*, 59.

<sup>18</sup> John Kieschnick, *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003), 44.



that Buddhism was an atheistic religion that did not rely on gods or the supernatural was proliferated by scholars studying the Buddhist canon without a real experience of Buddhist practices in Asia. Yet fieldwork in Asia has shown this not to be the case.<sup>19</sup> When they first began to be studied these relics were treated as improper form of Buddhism but rather a reduced form of Buddhism that had been corrupted by its practitioners.<sup>20</sup> Relics were often seen as part of a primitive mentality and not a true part of the romanticized rational Buddhism according to Westerners.<sup>21</sup> These practices were explained by there being an instinctive reverence for the dead or as a form of animism that came out of older more “essentially Asian” religions, before the entrance of Buddhism, as such base ideas, westerners thought could not be a part of the “true” Buddhism.<sup>22</sup> Westerners scholars must be careful about assuming the way that Buddhist in Asia understood Buddhist texts. Scholars need to make sure we examine the practices to try and discern how Buddhists in Asia understand them rather than using our assumptions based on doctrine alone. Otherwise, as in the past, scholars may come to incorrect conclusions about how things have been interpreted.

Despite these preconceptions by Westerners, Buddhism in Asia continued the practice of relic worship and did not see it conflicting with other ideas of Buddhism. There is ample evidence in archeology, such as the location of tombs around many *stūpas*, and in modern societies, such as the serious treatment of relics by the Taiwanese and Mainland Chinese governments, so they can no longer be dismissed as a non-Buddhist practice. Recent scholars have treated these practices as a valid part of Buddhism and attempted to discuss the existence of

---

<sup>19</sup> Sharf, “On the Allure of Relics,” 76-80. and in Donald Lopez, *Buddhism and Science: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 153-195.

<sup>20</sup> David Germano and Kevin Trainor, eds. *Embodying the dharma: Buddhist Relic Veneration in Asia*, 8.

<sup>21</sup> Sharf, “On the Allure of Relics,” 76.

<sup>22</sup> Schopen, “Relics,” 258.

relics within the Buddhism belief system.<sup>23</sup> Such scholars as Robert Sharf, Gregory Schopen, Kevin Trainor, and others have begun to look at relics through a different lens. Schopen suggested in his paper “Relic” that relics are endowed with life or a vital force. He described the Buddha as being inside relics, quoting Buddhist sources: “when the relic is present the Buddha is present.”<sup>24</sup> There is often a debate about if or how the Buddha can be present. Sometimes it is discussed as a “presence in absence” or as a representation of the Buddha. Robert Sharf tried to solve this issue. He tried to look at the way the relics presence has been discussed in text, versus how he thought they should be discussed. Sharf ended up proposing that the allure of relics to Buddhism is that they are the corporeal essence of the Buddha, but unlike the Buddha or other living beings, they only hold power and life through being placed in the frame of relics and being worshipped as such.<sup>25</sup>

For this project, I have tried like others, not to let my western biases about Buddhism cloud my judgment. I have looked at the actions of governments, Buddhist organizations, and individuals with regard to the tooth relic that currently resides at Foguangshan. I also reviewed the media that Foguangshan has produced about the relic welcoming ceremony and the Relic Hall that they hope to build. I even looked at an outside source, one Taiwanese Protestant Christian’s view on the tooth relics. These types of sources allowed me to see beyond just what they are saying about the relic, to what they really expected to gain from the relic and to what power they truly viewed it as having. I have sought to understand what they are doing with the

---

<sup>23</sup> Gregory Schopen, *Figments and Fragments of Mahayana Buddhism in India: More Collected Papers* (Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 353-355 and in Schopen, “Relics,” 261-262

<sup>24</sup> Schopen, “Relics,” 261-262.

<sup>25</sup> Sharf, “On the Allure of Relics,” 77-91.

relic even if it might contradict the “official” stand points taken by the Taiwanese government or Humanistic Buddhism.

### **History of the Uses of Relics**

From the time when the first relics were produced, who had the right to own relics of the Buddha has been contested, mostly by kingdoms, countries, or other political units rather than the monastic community. This began in India, where almost immediately after the cremation of the Buddha a war broke out between the kingdoms of India over who should have the right to possess the relics of the Buddha. The Brahmin Droṇa solved this problem by splitting the relics equally between each of the eight kingdoms that came to claim these relics.<sup>26</sup> Later, in the third century BCE India, the King Aśoka recollected the relics and redistributes them throughout his land in 84,000 *stūpas*.<sup>27</sup> This distribution served to mark and connect the land that he had conquered back to his rule. This show of Buddhist loyalty also served to soften the image of the King who had used a great deal of violence to bring this land under his reign. These relics continued to spread throughout the world along with Buddhism, often being used by rulers.

Relics began to be carried into China by the merchants, bringing Buddhism with them, as well as other relics were beginning to be discovered within the boundaries of China. In seventh and early eighth century CE, China’s first and only female Emperor, Wu Zhou 武周 (623 or 625-705), also known as Wu Zetian 武則天, used relics extensively in her reign. Due to her unique circumstance, being a female ruler in China, she had to find new methods to legitimize her rule. In addition to her general support of the Buddhist community, she used relic veneration and

---

<sup>26</sup> Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, 116-121. and in Trainor, “When is Theft not a Theft? Relic Theft and the Cult of Buddha’s Relics in Sri Lanka,” 8-9.

<sup>27</sup> Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, 136-148.

redistribution to justify her rule. Empress Wu ascended to the throne after the death of her husband and after usurping her son's rule in 690 CE. However, she may have had a lot of political power before taking the throne as a co-ruler with her husband, and running the country when her husband became ill. Later, she deposed one son while setting another up as a puppet king for a short period. Shortly before her husband's death, she moved the Buddha's finger bone relic that resided at Famen monastery 法門寺 to the palace to aid her dying husband.<sup>28</sup>

This relic that Empress Wu choose to venerate was said to had been discovered in China in a temple called Qishan, 岐山, which according to legend was one of the eighty four thousand *stupas* that Aśoka created during his distribution campaign. It was moved to Famen and placed in a temple known as 阿育王寺 (*Ayuwangsi*), King Aśoka Monastery. This temple was renovated by rulers of the Sui Dynasty the ancestral clan of Empress Wu, strengthening her connection to the rulers of the Sui dynasty.<sup>29</sup> Her reign interrupted the Tang Dynasty, so she also tried to support her familial connection with the rulers of the Sui Dynasty through this relic, as well as a later relic distribution campaign as Emperor Wen (541-604) had done, in order to legitimize her rule. This story established relics of the Buddha as native to the Chinese landscape, as well as served to connect Empress Wu's veneration of the relic at Famen to the veneration of King Aśoka, viewed as a great Buddhist King. Despite her early focus on the relic at Famen Monastery, the Empress did not bring the relic out thirty years later when it was next expected to be viewed, because by then she had begun a larger relic distribution campaign. Another way that Wu Zetian tried to build her image as related to the Sui dynasty, thus making

---

<sup>28</sup> Jinhua Chen, "Sarira and Scepter: Empress Wu's Political Use of Buddhist Relics," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 25, no. 1-2 (2002): 60-1, and 48.

<sup>29</sup> T. H. Barrett, "Was There an Imperial Distribution of Buddha Relics in Ninth-Century China?" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 68, no. 3 (2005): 451. and Chen "Sarira and Scepter: Empress Wu's Political Use of Buddhist Relics," 38-9.

her a legitimate ruler, was to follow in the footsteps of Emperor Wen of the Sui Dynasty in distributing relics throughout China. Although Empress Wu did not start an impressive building project for all of the relics that she distributed like Emperor Wen (541-604), she did distribute many relics to existing temples throughout China.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to the Sui rulers, Empress Wu was also trying to draw parallels between herself and the Indian ruler Aśoka's relic distribution campaign. For one, the Famen Temple claimed to hold the relics that were distributed by Aśoka, which monks had discovered in China. According to legend, Empress Wu distributed a hundred times the number of relics that Aśoka distributed. This connection helped to set her up as a *cakravartin*, a wheel-turning king, a proper ruler by Buddhist standards, who help to promulgate the dharma. This served to legitimize her as a good ruler in Buddhism, as she preformed the same process of distribution as Aśoka who himself was said to be a *cakravartin*.<sup>31</sup> In his article, "Sarīra and Scepter: Empress Wu's Political use of the Buddhist relics," Jinhua Chen suggests that this relic distribution campaign might have been set up by a monk and a politician named Wang Shoushen (??? n.d.). Chen also goes on to suggest that he might have become a monk for the purpose of supervising this relic distribution; however, he does not have evidence to support this claim.<sup>32</sup> This participation of the monk, Wang Shoushen, goes to show it is not only the rulers that have plans for the relics, but they also collaborate with the *sangha*.

However, political gain was not the only reason Wu Zetian had for relic veneration; at the end of her life she turned to the finger bone relic from Famen monetary once again in hope that it

---

<sup>30</sup> Chen, "Sarira and Scepter: Empress Wu's Political Use of Buddhist Relics," 37-56, 80, 129.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 38, 62.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 130.

might have some regenerative power to aid her ailing health.<sup>33</sup> This was the same relic Empress Wu used to strengthen the connection to past Chinese rulers. Because the use of this relic and the distribution of the relics to establish connections with rulers of the past, after the end of Empress Wu's reign, and with the reappearance of the Tang Dynasty, there had to be a substantial rewriting of this history to support the Tang Dynasty once again.<sup>34</sup> This showed how relics always worked to support the ruler in power even if the past had to be rewritten after a shift in power.

In addition to the Famen monastery's finger bone relic having been used by Empress Wu, during her reign the monks and other Buddhists also used it to gain merit or transform themselves into purer beings, or even bodhisattvas. When the relic was displayed in 631 CE, reports say that several people in the audience burned off fingers in an act of self-mutilation.<sup>35</sup> It is often suggested that this was done in an attempt to gain good merit through sacrificing to the Buddha. This idea comes from the story of the Bodhisattva Medicine King found in the *Lotus Sutra*, where the bodhisattva immolated himself in order to sacrifice himself to a Buddha. Through this he was able to reach enlightenment.<sup>36</sup> The merit gained through such action can help the person's circumstance in this life or the next. However, John Kieschnick suggests that this act served to purify the body and transform it.<sup>37</sup> In actuality, other less extreme tributes were more commonly made to the tooth relic, such as food or money, rather than body parts.

These relics' capacity to be transported, possessed, and easily manipulated, as well as the relics' will to stay and reproduce under the reign of a specific ruler, made them an effective tool

---

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>34</sup> Barrett, "Was There an Imperial Distribution of Buddha Relics in Ninth-Century China?," 453.

<sup>35</sup> Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, & Trade: The Realignment of Sino-Indian Relations*, 70.

<sup>36</sup> "Chapter Twenty-three: The Former Deeds of Bodhisattva Medicine King," in *The Lotus Sutra*, comp. Burton Watson.

<sup>37</sup> Sen *Buddhism, Diplomacy, & Trade: The Realignment of Sino-Indian Relations*, 70.

to prove the legitimacy of a ruler. First, with the discovery of the Aśokan relic, there is an attempt to recreate China as a center of Buddhism by locating one of the relics from Aśoka's distribution campaign in China. This legitimized Empresses Wu's rule, not only through the presence of the Famen monastery's relic at the temple and the relic distributions campaign, but also through connecting her to past rulers, like Aśoka and the Sui dynasty's Emperor Wen. The *sangha* allowed for and even aided in this form of relic use, as in the case of Wang Shoushen. For the finger bone relic at Famen temple in pre-modern China, many people attributed supernatural powers to this relic, including Empress Wu, who tried to use it to heal her husband and later herself. Others used its properties as a field of merit using the offerings to gain merit from the relic.

### **Humanistic Buddhism**

These examples are from China's Imperial Period, but one might wonder how the use of these relics might change in today's society with modern democracy and science, in which one ruler can only hold power for a shorter period of time and science can contradict what religion states as a fact. Taiwanese Buddhists have developed a new form of Buddhism called Humanistic Buddhism (*Renjian Fojiao* 人間佛教) that has been greatly affected by Western influence in this new globalized world. In 1998, a Tibetan lama named Kunga Dorje Rinpoche gave a relic to Foguangshan, an organization that practices Humanistic Buddhism. This section will look at the way that this new form of Buddhism developed and what are its beliefs, so we might better understand the issues that arise from introducing a relic into this tradition.

During Republican Period China (1912-1949), the country was in great turmoil, ripped apart by different nations; the Qing monarchy had recently been taken down by the Nationalist

revolt. The Guomindang (KMT), the Chinese nationalist party who later fought a civil war with the Communist Party, took over at this time. There had also been a slow influx of Christian missionaries preaching in China, and scholars were dealing with the new scientific revelations and technology that were coming in from the west.<sup>38</sup> Many monks at this time were tonsured at hereditary monasteries where they could learn only the teachings of a single master. As a result many monks at this time moved around to other temples to learn from a variety of masters, using public monasteries along the way, which would shelter and feed them. This allowed for many students to follow more than one school of Buddhism.<sup>39</sup> These schools had doctrines and philosophies that vary from each other; nevertheless, the divisions were relatively modern. China had traditionally viewed these schools as forms of a single Buddhism, as all paths to the same end, of which any or multiple could be followed.

Monasteries were economically failing like much of the rest of the country. They relied on donations of the laity to continue running, as they did not bring in enough money from other sources of income, such as leasing land and performing rituals for the laity. Despite a program that had been instituted to build new temples, many monasteries in China were falling into disrepair. Later in this period, Christian generals in the army were attacking many monasteries. Other monasteries that were not attacked and destroyed were used as barracks for soldiers.<sup>40</sup> Other temples were deemed useless and were converted into schools during both the late Qing and early Republican Era.<sup>41</sup> At this time, reformists, who believed that changes needed to be

---

<sup>38</sup> Don A Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu's Reform* (Honolulu, Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 18-32.

<sup>39</sup> Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu's Reforms*, 55.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-59.

<sup>41</sup> Vincent Goosaert, "1898: The Beginning of the End for Chinese Religion?" *Journal of Asian Studies* 65, no. 2 (2006): 307-336.



made to keep Buddhism alive, began to appear. There were some attempts at this time to organize the divided Buddhist community into organizations, or to modernize monastic schools, but most attempts were short-lived, as monks viewed modern education as superfluous for spiritual attainment. Some Christians claimed that Buddhism was not doing as much for society as the Christians were doing with their humanitarian programs. Unlike Daoism and Confucianism, Christianity required its followers only believe in their religion and god, so Buddhism was unable to be synthesized and coexist with Christianity. Some officials in the Chinese government had converted to Christianity, and this new presence of Christian officials who were unsympathetic to the Buddhist plight proved a greater hindrance.<sup>42</sup> In this environment, Taixu took tonsure and began to rise in the ranks of Buddhism.

Don Pittman has studied the life and teachings of Taixu and the following section draws from his work. Taixu 太虛 (1890-1947), the founder of Humanistic Buddhism, was born in Zhejiang province in 1890 under the name Lü Peilin 呂沛林. His grandmother started him on his path to Buddhism, often taking him to shrines when he was a child. Taixu was tonsured in 1904 at Yuhuang temple in Ningbo, where he was given the Dharma name Taixu. During his early religious life he was introduced to many revolutionary monks, such as Yuanying (圓瑛), Huashan (華山), and Qiyun (棲雲), as well as political radicals who would have some impact on his vision for Buddhism. He was introduced to the possibility of education reform in Buddhism at Ningbo Sangha Educational Association (*Ningbo Seng Jioayu Hui* 寧波僧教育會) and at Jetavana Hermitage (*Zhihuan Jingshe* 祇洹精舍), as these institutions, at which he studied, had initiated education reforms and taught a wide variety of subjects. Through exposure to reform,

---

<sup>42</sup> Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu's Reform*, 18-40, 50-59.

he realized that they had entered a new age and that Buddhism would have to adapt in order to survive.<sup>43</sup>

Taixu saw Buddhism as the answer to the problems that modern materialism had brought into this world, but realized that some reforms needed to be instituted to allow for its continued existence in the changing environment. Taixu wanted to spread Buddhism to more countries, especially western nations. Making it a point that he wished to spread Buddhism to westerners and not Chinese living in the western world as was already being done at the time. To attempt to accomplish this, Taixu created groups like World Buddhist Federation (*Shijie Fojiao Lianhehui* 世界佛教聯合會) in 1924, which only lasted for two years and never attracted many non-Asian members. He also went on tours to France, the United States and other countries to spread the Dharma.<sup>44</sup>

In his teachings, he drew from the Pure Land tradition, which suggested that by repeating the name of a Buddha, one would be reborn into a Pure Land without defilements, where one would be able to attain spiritual enlightenment. However, Taixu viewed this path as selfish, since the person was only attempting to achieve his or her own enlightenment. He thought rather that people should see the Buddha-nature (*foxing* 佛性) in themselves and build a Pure Land here on earth so that all sentient beings may reach enlightenment. He thought that people should not wait to be taken to a Pure Land by the Buddha Amitābha, but rather that they should build one on earth through good works. This was a change from relying on the power of others (*tali* 他力) to now relying on the power within oneself (*zili* 自力) to achieve enlightenment. As a result of the above changes, rituals containing ghosts and supernatural aspects, which drew attention away

---

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 63-72.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 106-114

from this world were deemed undesirable. Popular practices for obtaining income were also attacked. Being paid for performing funerary rites, which had helped to fund many monasteries, was also seen as abhorrent as it made the focus of Buddhism one's afterlife. The focus in Buddhism was being shifted from the afterlife to the current life, hence the title Taixu gave this Buddhist ideal, "Buddhism for Life" or *Rensheng Fojiao* 人生佛教.<sup>45</sup>

He also tried to use Buddhism to accelerate social change, so as to compete with the role that Christianity was performing. He started schools, hospitals, and orphanages in China. Taixu encouraged laypeople and monastics to be political so that they could understand what was going on in the world and be able to institute social change, yet he also believed that no monks should hold office or start a political party. He did not want them to advance too far into the lay world. Taixu created many new ideas in Buddhism, but to give them authenticity he often connected them to preexisting Buddhist text, such as Mahāyāna ideas of compassion, as others had done in the past. He often located his idea in older Buddhist texts, for example by connecting the idea that bodhisattvas stay on in this world and help others to the *Vimalakirti Sutra* saying that the bodhisattva should teach in every world.<sup>46</sup>

Despite this shift in focus away from the supernatural, after Taixu's cremation, more than three hundred relics were found in his ashes. This discovery was required to show that he was an adept and enlightened Buddhist master, but as a tribute to the compassion that his Humanistic Buddhism champions, his followers explicitly pointed out that his heart was completely preserved as a whole relic. According to his followers the preservation of his heart was a mark of the greatness of his bodhisattva vows. Although he was an innovative thinker, he was not a

---

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 71, 105-177, 202-229.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 149-150, 221

great leader and many of his ventures failed after a short period, such as the World Buddhist Federation as well as the reform schools he started, as mentioned above.<sup>47</sup>

Yinshun 印順 (1906-2005 born Zhang Luqin 張鹿芹), was one of the major participants in bringing Humanistic Buddhism to Taiwan, and in furthering the ideas of Taixu. He did not come to Buddhism until later at the age of twenty after having tried other religions. This allowed him a better understanding of the religions he would have to compete with or work with. He became a monk in 1930 at Putuoshan, but then traveled to South Fujian Seminary to study under Taixu. After Taixu's death in 1947, he helped to edit Taixu's *Completed Works*. When Communists took over China, like many monks, Yinshun fled. He first headed to Hong Kong, where he was contacted by Li Zikuan 李子寬, a famous follower of Taixu's, and asked to come to Taiwan to teach.<sup>48</sup>

It was in Taiwan that Humanistic Buddhism would thrive. In Taiwan, Yinshun published his *New Treatise on the Pure Land (Jingtu Xinlun 淨土新論)*, which espoused the ideals of Humanistic Buddhism. In this treatise, he placed more emphasis on the idea that bodhisattvas are not gods and had an even stronger denunciation of the supernatural. He stated that relying on others for salvation was only for the “dimwitted who have no other way.” In this book, he often titles Humanistic Buddhism “Buddhism for the human realm” 人間佛教 (*rejianfojiao*), rather than “Buddhism for human life” 人生佛教 (*renshengfojiao*).<sup>49</sup>

This entire work caused a controversy among the Buddhist in Taiwan, angering many Pure Land followers because of the book's strong rebuke of the Pure Land tradition. As a result, he withdrew from society. Many monks who disagreed with his treatise sent out flyers to the

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 151-189, 230-298

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 262-270

<sup>49</sup> Jones, *In Taiwan: Religion and the State 1660-1990*, 126-133

Buddhist Association of the Republic of China (BAROC), the official sanctioned Buddhist association at that time, asking that he be ostracized and his works be boycotted. They also used the BAROC's connections with the Taiwanese government to get the Nationalist Party to discredit his work more widely. Despite this effort, after a while the ideas of Humanistic Buddhism began to gain acceptance.<sup>50</sup> Neither Taixu nor Yinshun defined their ideas as a single school, as they themselves had followed several different schools, but later Humanistic Buddhist leaders in Taiwan, such as Hsingyun, leader of Foguangshan, Shengyan 聖嚴, leader of Dharma Drum Mountain (*Fa Gu Shan* 法鼓山), and Zhengyan 證嚴, the leader of Ciji 慈濟, would take these ideas further and create large institutions around them.<sup>51</sup>

It is surprising in this tradition not only that a tooth relic would be accepted, but also that a large ceremony would be held to welcome this tooth, which drew attention to its arrival. Because of this new trend away from relying on the power of others, to relying on ones own power, it is interesting that Foguangshan could allow this relic to be utilized, through which the power of the Buddha could be accessed to gain merit or enlightenment. Furthermore, Foguangshan planned to build a large complex in order to bring in many more followers to venerate the relic. Like the need to find relics in Taixu's ashes, Foguangshan similarly had to look to traditions in the past to show the authority of their organization. Like the preservation of Taixu's heart, their use had uniquely humanistic characteristics. As we will see, Hsing Yun later changed the focus of what the relic could do, but he still accepted the previous roles: its supernatural powers and role as a field of merit. Despite Taixu's belief that using one's own power was the best way to achieve salvation, Foguangshan used the tooth relic allowing people

---

<sup>50</sup> Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu's Reform*, 263-270 and in Charles Brewer Jones, *In Taiwan: Religion and the State 1660-1990* (Honolulu, Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 124-135.

<sup>51</sup> Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu's Reform*, 268.

to venerate the relic and using the relics to help, at least the plane crash victims near Taoyuan Airport, reach a better afterlife.

### **Foguangshan**

After the Guomindang (KMT) fled to Taiwan in 1949, many members of the Buddhist community followed. The Buddhist Association of the Republic of China (BAROC) moved to Taiwan with the others fleeing the Communist government in China. While in China, Taixu was part of the BAROC, who had fought for reform in the BAROC against many conservatives. Now that BAROC with many Mainland Chinese Buddhist leaders had come to Taiwan, one of Taixu's followers, a Taiwanese lay Buddhist named Li Zikuan, helped to set up the new council. The first election of the president of this association was a Tibetan candidate that both the reformers and conservatives could agree on, but next conservative president Baisheng 白聖 (1904-1989) was elected in 1960. The government set up by the KMT in Taiwan gave the BAROC the power to issue passports, and exit and entry permits for monks who wanted to study abroad, as travel outside Taiwan was limited at that time. They were also the only group who were allowed to tonsure new monks.<sup>52</sup> Due to martial law in the country as well as a law that prevented oppositional parties, other Buddhist groups could not form. This law was created to eliminate any political parties that would oppose the KMT, but the law was written generally so that no two groups in any arena of society could perform the same function. These laws began to be relaxed in the 1970 and were ended by 1986. As martial law in Taiwan was lifted, an age of pluralism began. There were many religious communities made up of reformist or Humanistic Buddhists that came into existence and none of them had enough power to exert their control

---

<sup>52</sup> Jones, *Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State 1660-1990*, 135-79.

over the others and create a singular orthodox Buddhism. In this situation several Humanist sects sprang up and gained a significant following. One of these is Foguangshan (佛光山).<sup>53</sup>

Hsing Yun 星雲 (1927 - ) is the founder of Foguangshan, and its associated international lay organization counterpart, Buddha's Light International Association (BLIA). Hsing Yun was born in Jiangdu city in Jiangsu province in Mainland China in 1927. He was originally named Li Guoshen 李國深. Like Taixu, Hsing Yun's grandmother piqued his interest in Buddhism, often taking him and his sister to Buddhist Temples.<sup>54</sup> In 1937 at the young age of eleven, he was tonsured under Master Zhikai 志開 (1911-1981) in the Linji School of Chan Buddhism. He was the youngest student at Qixia College, (*Qixia Lüxueyuan* 棲霞律學院), where he began to study Buddhism in depth under strict leadership of Master Zhikai. Hsing Yun also attended Jiaoshan Buddhist College (*jiaoshan foxueyuan* 焦山佛學院), where many of the teachers had studied under Taixu and Yinshun, or had done extensive reading of many of Taixu's written works. This is also where Hsing Yun gained a love for even secular written work, and discovered the effectiveness of the written word as a means of reform. Hsing Yun wished to carry out the ideas Taixu had for a new form of Buddhism, Humanistic Buddhism. At the age of twenty Hsing Yun wrote many essays and began the publication of several Buddhist magazines as part of a literary campaign that pushed for reforms in Buddhism.<sup>55</sup>

Hsing Yun came to Taiwan with the wave of KMT that was fleeing the communists after their defeat in 1949. He came to a Taiwan with folk deities mixed into its Buddhism. Clergy

---

<sup>53</sup> Goosaert and Palmer, *Religious Question in Modern China*, 356.

<sup>54</sup> Jones, *Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State 1660-1990*, 186.

<sup>55</sup> Chi-ying Fu, *Handing Down the Light: The Biography of Venerable Master Hsing Yun*, trans. Amy Lui-Ma (Hacienda Heights, California: Buddha's Light Publishing, 1995), 20-37. And in Jones, *Buddhism in Modern Taiwan*, 275

were participating in what the mainlanders considered unorthodox practice like eating meat, and some lay practitioners were acting as heads of temples. Some of these practices were the result of Japanese influence, where others were unique to Taiwan. The mainland Buddhists, and especially the BAROC, felt the need to correct these practices to make them conform to their idea of orthodox Buddhism.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, similar to Taixu's situation in China, there was a growing number of Christians in Taiwan who had been converted by American missionaries in postwar Taiwan. Even Chiang Kaishek, leader of KMT at that time, and his wife converted to Christianity.<sup>57</sup>

Meanwhile, according to many of the Buddhists who fled Mainland China, Buddhism was also deteriorating on the mainland due to the communist government control. Like many other monks, Hsing Yun wandered looking for food and shelter at monasteries having little money, nowhere to go, and was met with a hostile government as they were suspicious of any mass gathering or lone travelers. He was once even detained by the government, which suspected many wandering monks of collaborating with either the Japanese or communist government on Mainland China.<sup>58</sup>

This showed how large an effect the government has had on Buddhism in Taiwan. They controlled who could be an official group, and thus who could issue entrance and exit permits, who could tonsure monks, or whose activities would be considered suspicious. Hsing Yun was elected to the board of directors of the BAROC in 1952, but he declined because he thought he was too inexperienced. Rather in 1952 Hsing Yun traveled to Leiyin Temple in Ilan where he

---

<sup>56</sup> Jones, *Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State 1660-1990*, 111-115, 186.

<sup>57</sup> Philip Clart and Charles Brewer Jones, eds. *Religion in Modern Taiwan: Tradition and Innovation in a Changing Society* (Honolulu Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), 275

<sup>58</sup> Fu, *Handing Down the Light: the Bibliography of Master Hsing Yun*, 48-51. and in Jones, *Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State 1660-1990*, 160,186.



began to try and carry out Taixu's ideas of Humanistic Buddhism. He started by leading *fonianhui* 佛念會, ceremonies in which the name of the Buddha Amitabha is repeated to help bring one to his Pure Land after death, and then he began to give lectures on other topics. Later he also taught creative writing in an attempt to bring others into the temple and maybe even to Buddhism. He was willing to let others use Pure Land Buddhist practices to help them reach salvation and to let people come to him for non-religious purposes to bring them to Buddhism. He also picked up some popular Christian practices to bring in new followers. Hsing Yun created a Buddhist choir to sing Buddhist hymns, and he started a Buddhist Sunday School. Yet, like Taixu, he saw creating a Pure Land here on earth through one's own power as a more important practice than relying on the Buddha. This reliance on the power of others for salvation was something Yinshun especially viewed as a degrading practice. Hsing Yun allowed it as an easier path to reach a Pure Land, although not his ideal way. He also gave lectures at schools hoping that by planting the seed of the dharma these children would grow up to be devoted Buddhist. His followers said that he had a skill for knowing how to connect with the general public. Since then Hsing Yun had given lectures in towns, schools, factories, museum and even prisons. He changed his teachings to reach each particular group; teaching chants to musicians, and teaching the science of Buddhism to scientist at a college. He was willing to use modern forms of media: television, radio, and even the Internet to bring Buddhism to people.<sup>59</sup> I myself even used Fogunagshan online dictionaries as well as YouTube videos to do research for this project.

After leaving the temple at Ilan, he went on to found several other temples. One influential temple was Shoushan temple, which he established in 1962 out of which he began to

---

<sup>59</sup> Fu, *Handing Down the Light: the Bibliography of Master Hsing Yun*, 62-73. And in Jones, *Buddhism in Taiwan*, 186.

organize and build Foguangshan. Over the years, his activism in Buddhism allowed him to gain many followers, especially in the south of Taiwan, where he decided to build this temple. Since he was such a prolific writer, Hsing Yun was able to use the royalties from some of his publications, as well as, agricultural rental income, surplus donations for social welfare projects, surplus donation from other temples, and other donations to buy a bamboo-covered hill on the outskirts of Kaohsiung, a city in the south of Taiwan. It was here that he started Foguangshan. What was a small temple has now grown into a complex covering the entire hill that includes living quarters for monastics, a public library, and a high school.<sup>60</sup>

Hsing Yun officially founded Foguangshan temple on May 16, 1967. Martial law restricted the functions that this temple could serve until 1989 when martial law was relaxed, and Foguangshan could expand its functions to set up a larger organization.<sup>61</sup> Foguangshan was said to have four essential ideals; first, to spread dharma through culture; second, to nurture talent through education; third, to benefit society through charity; and fourth, to purify minds through cultivation.<sup>62</sup> To fulfill the first ideal Hsing Yun has tried to spread Buddhism not only throughout Taiwan, but throughout the world. He has created a lay Buddhist group called Buddha's Light International (BLIA), which has branched throughout the world to fifty-five countries. As for the second ideal, Hsing Yun saw education as integral to creating good Buddhist, stretching from kindergarten to college. He has funded the education for many young monks and nuns; some of them, like Ven. Dr. Yifa and Ven. Dr. Huikai, have even received

---

<sup>60</sup> Jones, *Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State 1660-1990*, 186-188.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 187-190

<sup>62</sup> Fu, *Handing Down the Light: the Bibliography of Master Hsing Yun*, 100.

doctorates from abroad. Hsing Yun sees this education as a way to gain knowledge that could be relevant to teaching people in Taiwan and especially abroad.<sup>63</sup>

In order to benefit society, the third ideal, Foguangshan had also established several medical charitable and cultural enterprises. Institutions such as the Great Compassion Nursery for orphans, Foguang Retirement Home, Ilan Gracious Home for the Needy, and Foguang Walk Clinic have been set up, and several mobile clinics and food and cloth drives have been established for the needy.<sup>64</sup> These actions are consistent with the Humanistic ideas of compassion and outreach to focus on helping others in this world.

Finally, to fulfill the fourth ideal of purifying minds through cultivation in Foguangshan, there was daily chanting and meditation for monastics, as well as short-term monastic retreats offered to the laity, in which they could take the five monastic precepts for a seven-day period of time while residing at Foguangshan. However, at Foguangshan, meditation and abstract study were kept to a minimum.<sup>65</sup> Like Taixu, Hsing Yun preached focusing on this world first. He suggested that one should help those living in this world first, and then one can take care of their afterlife.<sup>66</sup> With this idea came the de-emphasis of the supernatural; the mundane earthly matter is more important, and he condemned people who claimed to have powers such as fortune telling as charlatans. Yet, strangely, in Hsing Yun's biography, Fu Chi-yi, the author and one of his followers, suggested that Hsing Yun, himself might have powers. However, the author refused to say if he really does possess these powers, or what the powers might be, thus deemphasizing

---

<sup>63</sup> Stuart Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth: The Foguang Buddhist Perspective on Modernization and Globalization* (Honolulu, Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 123. and in Fu, *Handing Down the Light: the Bibliography of Master Hsing Yun*, 116.

<sup>64</sup> Fu, *Handing Down the Light: the Bibliography of Master Hsing Yun*, 102-3, 291.

<sup>65</sup> Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth: The Foguangshan Buddhist Perspective on Modernization*, 74-77, and 149-51.

<sup>66</sup> Fu, *Handing Down the Light: the Bibliography of Master Hsing Yun*, 97-99.

their importance at the same time that he hints at their existence.<sup>67</sup> This must be done in order to show that Hsing Yun was just as powerful as the masters that came before him, but at the same time following Taixu's idea that Buddhist should not turn to the supernatural for solutions.

As far as the supernatural was concerned, Xinyun suggested in his paper *The Buddhist Perspective on the Supernatural*, that supernatural powers were clearly present in Buddhism, as he cannot deny thousand of years of Buddhist adepts that claimed to have powers. Like previous Buddhists, he claimed that such powers should be used only in special situations to help others or to bring others to Buddhism, but that their use was not itself a goal of Buddhism. He also worked to explain supernatural powers in a way that helps them to coexist with scientific thought. He suggested that these powers are gained from the enlightened being's supreme understanding of the universe. He said that as science has evolved, understanding more of the world, it has also been able to create supernatural powers like celestial hearing and celestial sight. Televisions now allowed one to see things happening miles away, and telephones allowed one to hear people miles away.<sup>68</sup> He downplayed powers, which others have done in the past, but with Humanistic Buddhism he had new reasons to deemphasise this tradition, while still not being able to completely ignore it.

As we have seen before in this paper, Hsing Yun believed that one can change the message of Buddhism to suit audiences as he did with his lectures. He also tried to integrate other schools of Buddhism to set up Foguangshan as a world Buddhism. Hsing Yun is a Chan master, and a Pure Land master; like Taixu, he does not adhere to a single school. As I have previously mentioned, this mixing of schools is not a new phenomenon, but has been a part of

---

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 253.

<sup>68</sup> Hsing Yun, *Buddhist Perspective in the Supernatural*, trans. Fo Guang Shan International Translation Center (Hacienda Heights, California: Buddha's Light Publishing, 2009).

Chinese Buddhism for some time. Hsing Yun suggested that all forms of Buddhism are just different paths taught so people could find a Buddhism that suits themselves, but that all Buddhist paths are valid. As a result, he has tried to connect people to the different Buddhist traditions. Foguangshan has especially worked to connect with the Tantric Tradition from Tibet. In 1985, he established the Chinese Tibetan Cultural Association (*Zhonghua Hanzang Wenhua Xiehui*, 中華漢藏文化協會), and in 1986, he organized the World Tantric Sutric Buddhist Conference (*Shijie Xianmi Fojiao Huiyi*, 世界顯密佛學會議).<sup>69</sup> Some of the Tibetan monks he brought over continued to stay and study at Foguangshan. In addition to Tibetan monks, monks from many traditions and countries have taken the precepts at Foguangshan, including Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Great Britain. Some of these are nuns from Theravada schools who were not able to receive tonsure in their native countries of India, Sri Lanka, or other Theravada Buddhist countries.<sup>70</sup> The master even claimed to revere other Humanistic Buddhist sects such as Ciji,<sup>71</sup> but one has to wonder how far this reverence goes when they are competing for followers and donations.

In addition to bringing people from other countries to Foguangshan, he started to move his organization out into other countries. To aid in this international movement of Buddhism across the globe, Hsing Yun also created the BLIA. It is a lay Buddhist organization that is connected to Foguangshan, with branches around the world. Foguangshan and the BLIA have 111 regional and local chapters in 55 countries worldwide. The BLIA has sent many monks and nuns abroad to these locations to spread their ideas. And through these networks of temples and

---

<sup>69</sup> *Fojiao Jinianguan* 佛教纪念馆: *Buddha Memorial Center*, Pamphlet 3-4

<sup>70</sup> Fu, *Handing Down the Light: the Bibliography of Master Hsing Yun*, 107, 245-8. and in Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth: The Foguangshan Buddhist Perspective on Modernization*, 161-4.

<sup>71</sup> Fu, *Handing Down the Light: the Bibliography of Master Hsing Yun*, 250.

other venues Hsing Yun regularly travels around the world to spread the dharma. However despite this valiant attempt, many of the people that they are reaching are overseas Chinese rather than persons not of Chinese descent, as he wished.<sup>72</sup> This organization has also provided for many unique political interaction, such as the visit of the Mainland Chinese ambassador to Xilai, the BLIA's monastery in California, allowing Xilai to act as an international buffer zone.<sup>73</sup> Other important people have also visited, such as the Dalai Lama before he was allowed to go to Taiwan. They even invited Al Gore in for lunch, although this backfired, causing a political funding scandal in the United States.<sup>74</sup> Hsing Yun had also petitioned the United Nations to grant the BLIA non-political group membership, even though—or maybe because—Taiwan is not part of the UN.<sup>75</sup> He was using his organization to represent Taiwan. This is not the first time that this had occurred yet it is surprising in a modern society where there has been an attempt to keep religion out of the realm of politics.

For all of this political maneuvering, Hsing Yun had become known as a political monk.<sup>76</sup> He had even backed a politician, Chen Lü'an 陳履安 (1937- ), in a presidential campaign, and has himself served on the Central Advisory Committee of the KMT, although the post is mostly ceremonial.<sup>77</sup> This attempt at political maneuvering by Hsing Yun, the backing of Chen Lü'an, backfired, triggering a controversy about the separation of religion and the state in

---

<sup>72</sup> Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth: The Foguangshan Buddhist Perspective on Modernization*, 265-306, 188.

<sup>73</sup> Fu, *Handing Down the Light: the Bibliography of Master Hsing Yun*, 219.

<sup>74</sup> Fu, *Handing Down the Light: the Bibliography of Master Hsing Yun*, 245-7. and in Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth: The Foguangshan Buddhist Perspective on Modernization*, 278.

<sup>75</sup> Fu, *Handing Down the Light: the Bibliography of Master Hsing Yun*, 241.

<sup>76</sup> Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth: The Foguangshan Buddhist Perspective on Modernization*, 108.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 104-117.

Taiwan.<sup>78</sup> One can see that political, social, and economic changes have gotten him where he is today, from not being allowed to form his group under martial law to being paid for television interviews as the popularity of Buddhism rises. His participation in politics helped to substantiate changes that might be beneficial to the spread of Buddhism as Buddhism is still a government-controlled institution in Taiwan. Buddhist organizations are still required to register with the state.<sup>79</sup> Also in a pamphlet by Foguangshan, it mentioned that the officials were wary about the legality of the Buddha's tooth welcome gathering at the Taipei Airport, and it mentioned all of the registrations Foguangshan had to complete.<sup>80</sup>

Hsing Yun tried to walk a fine line as to what use of politics is acceptable, and what is excessive for a monk and interfering with politics, rather than just observing and offering advice. He tried to follow Taixu's idea of being aware of political concerns while not holding office or creating a political party, maintaining that he is not a political monk, and rather tried only to act as a political council.<sup>81</sup> This fits with Taixu's idea that monks should be politically aware, but it may cross Taixu's line that no monk should take part in politics. Hsing Yun had built more ties with the KMT than with the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), a grassroots movement started in the southern Taiwan that sought Taiwanese independence.<sup>82</sup> It is not surprising that Hsing Yun would favor the party that had been in power for most of this century, but it is surprising he would favor the party from the north, given his base in the south of Taiwan

---

<sup>78</sup> Andre Laliberte, *The Politics of Buddhist Organizations in Taiwan: 1989-2003: Safeguarding the faith, building a Pure Land, helping the poor* (Abingdon, Oxon, Great Britain: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 71-2.

<sup>79</sup> Fu, *Handing Down the Light: the Bibliography of Master Hsing Yun*, 289

<sup>80</sup> *Fojiao Jinianguan 佛教纪念馆: Buddha Memorial Center*, Pamphlet, 19-20

<sup>81</sup> Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth: The Foguangshan Buddhist Perspective on Modernization*, 104-117.

<sup>82</sup> Clart and Jones, eds. *Religion in Modern Taiwan: Tradition and Innovation in a Changing Society*, 181.

where the DPP began. Hsing Yun also had many influential friends in a wide range of areas including politics, business, and the arts. For example, Wu Po-hsuing 吳伯雄 (1939- ) who was the mayor of Taipei at the time the tooth came to Taiwan and had also been the Secretary General and former vice president of the KMT Lien Chan 連戰 (1936- ) are counted among his high-ranking political friends. These officials claimed they will use their power and influence to help Buddhism. He also was friends with many business leaders who provided him with many donations, and with academics, popular painters and writers, and other people in the entertainment industry who can help to spread the dharma through their publicity.<sup>83</sup> Andre Laliberte reminded us, involvement in politics by the *sangha* and lay Buddhists spans back to the Three Kingdoms era (220-265), the Sui dynasty (581-618), and the Tang dynasty (618-609).<sup>84</sup> Buddhism involvement in politics was a traditional part of Buddhist that we have seen used by Wang Shoushen trying to aid Empress Wu in legitimizing her rule by facilitating a relic distribution campaign.

In order to bring followers into Foguangshan, Hsing Yun has tried several different means. As I said before, he was willing to use modern technology to teach people about the dharma, but he was also willing to use modern technology such as air conditioning in the public buildings to make visitors more comfortable.<sup>85</sup> He also at one point and time constructed a theme ride called the “Pure Land Cave.” It has since been shut down, but it was only one of the recreational facilities that Foguangshan used to entice visitors, like the Guanyin Release pond

---

<sup>83</sup> Fu, *Handing Down the Light: the Bibliography of Master Hsing Yun*, 153-7.

<sup>84</sup> Philip Clart and Charles Brewer Jones, eds. *Religion in Modern Taiwan: Tradition and Innovation in a Changing Society* (Honolulu Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), 159.

<sup>85</sup> Fu, *Handing Down the Light: the Bibliography of Master Hsing Yun*, 95. and in Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth: The Foguangshan Buddhist Perspective on Modernization*, 71.



and Water Drop Tea House.<sup>86</sup> In addition many tours are given daily at Foguanshan. There are even pilgrimage tours where devotees and non-devotees can spend two days and one night touring Foguangshan.<sup>87</sup> Chandler suggested that the monastery has been closed so only devotees can visit, yet tours such as these occurred daily, and the monastery was still open for a long celebration around Chinese New Year.<sup>88</sup> Foguangshan was still bringing in many newcomers to introduce them to Buddhism. Hsing Yun maintained that Buddhist groups should not do anything to expose Buddhism to ridicule as stated in the pratimokṣa, a sutra of monastic discipline laws, yet some of the changes he has made to Buddhism to connect with politics, bring in more followers, and have exposed Buddhism to ridicule, such as the campaign funds issue with Al Gore, being known as a political monk, or people saying that his Pure Land ride commercializes Buddhism.<sup>89</sup> The relic given to Foguangshan could be considered a possible cause for ridicule as several non-Buddhists have questioned its authenticity, and have called it a power move by Foguangshan.<sup>90</sup>

Hsing Yun's version of Humanistic Buddhism, which was practiced at Foguangshan, sprang out of Hsing Yun's life experiences. Being exposed to Taixu's ideas at a young age, his passion for writing and the experiment with Humanistic Buddhism at Ilan all helped to create Foguangshan. It was here in Ilan that Hsing Yun began to stress ideas, such as spreading the dharma through, education, charity, and purifying minds. The idea of spreading dharma through

---

<sup>86</sup> Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth: The Foguangshan Buddhist Perspective on Modernization*, 11.

<sup>87</sup> Fu, *Handing Down the Light: the Bibliography of Master Hsing Yun*, 130.

<sup>88</sup> Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth: The Foguangshan Buddhist Perspective on Modernization*, 21-22.

<sup>89</sup> Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth: The Foguangshan Buddhist Perspective on Modernization*, 181.

<sup>90</sup> Chen Yixian 陳義憲, "Yiguo Foya Jinqi de Fengbo 一顆佛牙引起的風波," Christian Center for Buddhism Research - 佛學研究, <http://www.gotobr.org/LCCBRSUB/KnowingFuJiao/FuTooth.htm>.

culture has been shown in his willingness to learn about other nations to spread Buddhism, but also through all the expedient means using amusement rides, and radio or the Internet to attract people to his institute. He even added air conditioning to guest quarters to make their stay in Foguangshan more enjoyable, thus making it more appealing to visit. In this case the tooth relic coming to Foguangshan might have just been another strategy to attract followers both domestically and internationally. But Hsing Yun also needed to cooperate with the government, and through having this relic he might be able to gain powerful political and financial allies that could help his organization grow. He also has demonstrated his will to fund the education for many monks and nuns, as well as, fulfilling his idea that the organization should further charity efforts. He had started many schools, including a college, and paid for many monastics' education abroad. Hsing Yun has also set up orphanages, clinics, and other charitable organizations. These ideas however, as well as his de-emphasis of the supernatural, are not consistent with the idea of venerating a relic. Traditionally, a relic would only help one's self or relatives to gain merit, be healed, or attain a better rebirth. These usages only serve as a way to bring people to Buddhism or help in extreme circumstances. Due to its presence of the Buddha, the relic can be used to reach enlightenment; however, this is through the use of Buddha's power rather than one's own, which Hsing Yun has encouraged.

In 1998 the Buddha tooth relic came to Taiwan and Foguangshan. The relic was used by Hsing Yun in this modern form of Buddhism continuing the themes of the tradition mentioned above. One can see how this relic's usage was similar or different to the way that relics have been used in the past, and how Foguangshan's unique form of Humanistic Buddhism had affected the use of this relic.

## Usage of the Relic by Foguangshan and the Taiwanese government

On April 8<sup>th</sup> 1998 the Kunga Dorje Rinpoche (*Gongga Duoqie Renboqie* 貢噶多傑仁波切), the previous holder of the tooth relic, and Hsing Yun met in Thailand with a retinue of other monks and nuns as well as important political figures from Taiwan to transfer the Buddha tooth relic to Foguangshan. This Buddha's tooth was said to have come from Nalanda University in India. Then it was said to have been taken to Tibet, from where during the Cultural Revolution the tooth was spirited out of Tibet by Kunga Dorje Rinpoche and taken into hiding in India for several years. Nevertheless, the details of this story are unclear and specific dates and places are never mentioned in any of the Foguangshan published media.<sup>91</sup> It was in India that the aging Kunga Rinpoche decided that the tooth needed to go somewhere, where it could be housed properly in a pagoda, which he did not have the ability to construct.<sup>92</sup> He saw Hsing Yun as the leader of a major Buddhist organization, which had the resources to properly house the tooth. Hsing Yun claimed that this decision was also made because several Tibetan lamas recognized his work in Taiwanese-Tibetan relations, including establishing both the Chinese Tibetan Cultural Association and the World Tantric Sutric Buddhist Conference in 1985 and 1986.<sup>93</sup> He had worked to bring together Northern, Southern and Tibetan traditions at Foguangshan, ordaining monks and nuns from many different countries from all three traditions: Mahāyāna, Theravāda, and Vajrayāna.<sup>94</sup> I believe that Hsing Yun wanted to claim that he was the proper

---

<sup>91</sup> *Fojiao Jinianguan* 佛教纪念馆: *Buddha Memorial Center*, Pamphlet, 8-9.

<sup>92</sup> *Buddha Tooth Relic Shrine: Foguangshan Gushi – Foya Shelidian* 佛光山的故事—佛牙舍利殿, FGSinenglish, January 25, 2011, youtube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JcJPMcyCQKk>.

<sup>93</sup> *Fojiao Jinianguan* 佛教纪念馆: *Buddha Memorial Center*, Pamphlet, 3-4.

<sup>94</sup> Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth: The Foguangshan Buddhist Perspective on Modernization*, 160-4. also in *Fojiao Jinianguan* 佛教纪念馆: *Buddha Memorial Center*, Pamphlet, 3-4. referred to as *nanchuan*、*beichuan*、*zangchuan* 南傳、北傳、藏傳

holder of the relic, and as the only holder of a tooth relic of the Buddha in Taiwan, his was the most worthy Buddhist organization in that country. He has reached out to international Buddhist organizations, and they have viewed him as capable of housing the relic. Plus, he had the financial means to build it a proper *stūpa*. It seems to me that Hsing Yun hoped to bring in more followers through the popularity of the tooth, but also through showing the authority his organization holds by having a relic. It also appears that he wished to gain support from wealthy or politically connected benefactors.

According to Foguangshan's publications, the exchange was chosen to take place in Thailand because of its central location in Asia and its Buddhist culture. Hsing Yun also said it was chosen because of the huge impact that the troubles in the Asian economic sphere has had on the economy of Thailand.<sup>95</sup> Hsing Yun suggested bringing the tooth there will allow the Thai people to gain merit through worshipping the relic, which in turn might be able to better their economic situation, showing how relics are believed to be able to change even people material circumstances. Yet, I think this location might also have been chosen because unlike India and Burma, Thailand, is not a major supporter of Mainland China, but a more neutral Buddhist country. Many different Buddhist organizations such as the World Buddhist Association (*Shi Fo Hui* 世佛會), the World Buddhist Youth Association (*Shi Fo Qing* 世佛青), Dharmakaya Temple (*Fo Shen Si* 佛身寺), and several Tibetan monks attended this ceremony in Thailand. In addition to this Buddhist support, several Taiwanese political figures such as Wu Pohsiung, mayor of Taipei, and Wu Denyih (吳敦義), mayor of Kaohsiung.<sup>96</sup> However, according to one source outside of Foguangshan, the Chinese government requested that the Thai officials not attend the

---

<sup>95</sup> *Fojiao Jinianguan* 佛教纪念馆: *Buddha Memorial Center*, Pamphlet, 3-4, 6.

<sup>96</sup> *Fojiao Jinianguan* 佛教纪念馆: *Buddha Memorial Center*, Pamphlet, 11.

ceremony and Chinese officials and Chinese Buddhist organizations also boycotted this event.<sup>97</sup> The presence of Taiwanese political figures, absence of Thai political figures, and even the Chinese boycott showed how much importance the governments of Taiwan and China place in this relic. As I see it, this showed that China is worried about the way that other countries will perceive their right to rule Taiwan, or will see this acquisition of a relic of the Buddha as a sign that Taiwan is the rightful place for other Buddhist nations to turn to instead of China. This also showed that Taiwan was hoping to use this tooth for their government to gain equal standing with the Chinese, through showing that like China they also can acquire a tooth of the Buddha.

Foguangshan and Taiwan were competing with the Peoples Republic of China's (PRC's) tooth relics, a tooth and a finger bone, which China regularly lent out to other countries for the purpose of creating political connections. In 2002, the Hsing Yun brought the Chinese finger bone relic to Taiwan.<sup>98</sup> It seems that Hsing Yun was trying to use his ability to bring the finger bone to Taiwan to bolster his image further, despite the fact that he already possessed one Buddha tooth relic. In contrast, the Chinese said that they were trying to use the tooth to help ease the tension of cross-strait relations.<sup>99</sup> Most recently in November of 2011, China sent the tooth to Myanmar, as it has done three other times. China might be doing this to help show Myanmar their commitment to their partnership, by offering them temporary use of the relic. The government officials of Myanmar, like those of Taiwan, came to veneration the relic to better the nation's political, economic, and social situations, as well as to prove that they are the

---

<sup>97</sup> Chen Yixian 陳義憲, "Yiguo Foya Jinqi de Fengbo 一顆佛牙引起的風波," Christian Center for Buddhism Research – *foxue yanjiu* 佛學研究, <http://www.gotobr.org/LCCBRSUB/KnowingFuJiao/FuTooth.htm>.

<sup>98</sup> "Fozhi Laitai Yuanqi 佛指來台緣起," Fo Guang Shan 佛光山, last modified 2011, [http://www.fgs.org.tw/subject/subject\\_stupa\\_05.aspx](http://www.fgs.org.tw/subject/subject_stupa_05.aspx).

<sup>99</sup> "Taiwan monks applaud Buddha's finger," *CNN.com*, February 23, 2002, World edition, <http://archives.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/asiapcf/east/02/23/taiwan.buddha/>.

legitimate leader of Myanmar, a staunchly Buddhist country.<sup>100</sup> Taiwanese government and Hsing Yun have seen these actions by Chinese, and realized that they themselves could use the relic for the same diplomatic usage. I think this goes even farther, Taiwan maybe even trying to use this relic to compete with China for political support from other Buddhist nations, especially in an attempt to subvert Chinese claims over Taiwan.

The Buddha tooth relic arrived in Taiwan's Taoyuan Airport (*Taiwan Taoyuan Guoji Jichang* 臺灣桃園國際機場) on the 9<sup>th</sup> of April, and on the 11<sup>th</sup> of April the tooth was taken to the Sun Yatsen Memorial Hall (*Zhongshan Jiniantang* 中山紀念堂). In both the pamphlets that Foguangshan sent out and the video of the speech that they distributed they pointed out that there were forty Tibet monks who came and played instruments at this ceremony.<sup>101</sup> It is possible that Hsing Yun was making a special effort to show that they include all forms of Buddhism into his community, but also possible that he was using these Tibetan lamas to show the international reach of his organization or to show that other Buddhist leaders supported his cause. At this ceremony, President of Taiwan Lee Teng-hui 利登輝 (1923- ) came and offered flowers to the Buddha tooth relic. Lee Teng-hui venerated this relic despite the fact that he is a Christian.<sup>102</sup> He still saw the usefulness of this relic to the society and his political power. In addition, the vice-president of Taiwan Lien Chang attended the ceremony and made a speech, in which he discussed how the tooth relics would affect the whole of Taiwan. He hoped that the tooth would make Taiwanese people, families and society better, as well as creating a harmonious society

---

<sup>100</sup> "Pilgrims add in crowd paying homage to Sacred Buddha Tooth Relic," *The New Light of Myanmar (NAYPYI TAW)*, November 12, 2011, <http://www.myanmar.com/newspaper/nlm/index.html>.

<sup>101</sup> *Fojiao Jinianguan* 佛教纪念馆: *Buddha Memorial Center*, Pamphlet, 9. and Foguang Weixing Dianshitai 佛光衛星電視台, prod., *Gongyin Foya Sheli Huigu Guangji* 恭迎佛牙舍利回顧專輯, VHS.

<sup>102</sup> Clart and Jones, *Religion in Modern Taiwan*, 276.

where politics are enforced smoothly and the people are united.<sup>103</sup> Another speaker at this function was the President of the Foguangshan National Association (Zhonghua Foguang Zonghui Huizhang 中華佛光總會會長), Wu Pohsiung, who was chosen to be the head of the Buddha's tooth welcoming ceremony organization (Gongyin Foya Sheli Tuan de Tuanzhang 恭迎佛牙舍利團的團長). He was an integral lay leader in the Foguang organization, but he was also a prominent politician; at the time of the ceremony, he was also the mayor of Taipei.<sup>104</sup> This involvement of political figures suggested that the government cares what is being done with this relic. Their speeches showed how they viewed the relic as belonging to Taiwan rather than a single religious sect. They hoped to use it for their own propose both in the country for the welfare of the people, society, economy, and government and internationally, allowing them to compete with the PRC's government and the relics that Mainland China possesses. All of these political figures mentioned above are members of the KMT. They are the ones allowed to use the relic, to authenticate their rule of Taiwan. One wonders what Hsing Yun would do under DDP rule? In one of the pamphlet that Foguangshan sent out, they mentioned that when bring the tooth to Taipei the Jianguodang (建國黨 Nation Building Party) protested the entrance of the tooth lying in the street to stop its progress. This party held similar beliefs as the DDP that Taiwan should remain an independent state rather than rejoining with Mainland China.<sup>105</sup> This protest seemed to show that the Jiaogudang saw Hsing Yun only supporting the KMT and fear

---

<sup>103</sup> “...人人身心自在，吉祥如意，家家幸福美滿，諸事順利，社會繁榮進步，國家政通人和，富強安樂...” from Foguang Weixing Dianshitai 佛光衛星電視台, prod., *Gongyin Foya Sheli Huigu Guangji* 恭迎佛牙舍利回顧專輯, VHS.

<sup>104</sup> *Fojiao Jinianguan* 佛教紀念館: *Buddha Memorial Center*, Pamphlet, 6.

<sup>105</sup> *Fojiao Jinianguan* 佛教紀念館: *Buddha Memorial Center*, Pamphlet, 17

that he will use the power of the relic to support the reunification of Taiwan and Mainland China, which the Jiaogudang oppose.

In between the tooth's arrival in Taiwan on the 9<sup>th</sup> of April and the ceremony at the Sun Yatsen Memorial Hall on the 11<sup>th</sup> the tooth was taken on tour in Taiwan. First it was taken to the sight of a horrific Air China plane crash near Taoyuan Airport in Dayuan Township (大園鄉).<sup>106</sup> They went to the site of this crash to purify the land through the sprinkling of water, but Hsing Yun also suggested that the tooth relic could save the souls of the people who died in the crash from a terrible rebirth.<sup>107</sup> Next he traveled to Taipei. During this journey, it was raining badly, but just as he arrived the rain stopped and the sun came out. This caused the sun to reflect of the street in a gold colored hue. The broadcasters and the Buddhist community called this road lit with golden light, a Buddha light road.<sup>108</sup> The ability to aid society, people, and their souls, as well as, miraculous events such as this sort of strange weather phenomenon have often been attributed to relics, as was discussed in the first section of this paper, but is surprising to see in Humanistic Buddhism.

The relic was placed in a temple in Taipei for two days, hundreds of people came to pray to the tooth. Foguangshan mentioned that people from five continents showed up and featured foreigners prominently in the video. They also mentioned the one hundred and two year old national monk of Sri Lanka came to praise the tooth.<sup>109</sup> This was especially interesting given

---

<sup>106</sup> *Fojiao Jinianguan* 佛教纪念馆: *Buddha Memorial Center*, Pamphlet, 15-16.

<sup>107</sup> Yi Kong 依空法師, "foya sheli baodao" "佛牙舍利報導," foguangshan banquan suoyou 佛光山 版權所有, 2011, [http://www.fgs.org.tw/subject/subject\\_stupa\\_04.aspx](http://www.fgs.org.tw/subject/subject_stupa_04.aspx).

<sup>108</sup> "zhende shi jinguan dadao." "真的是金光大道。" "foguang dadao" "佛光大道" from Foguang Weixing Dianshitai 佛光衛星電視台, prod., *Gongyin Foya Sheli Huigu Guangji* 恭迎佛牙舍利回顧專輯, VHS.

<sup>109</sup> Foguang Weixing Dianshitai 佛光衛星電視台, prod., *Gongyin Foya Sheli Huigu Guangji* 恭迎佛牙舍利回顧專輯, VHS.



that Sri Lanka is another holder of one of the three Buddha's tooth relics in the human realm. This, again, showed the international support the relic drew for Foguangshan. Later the tooth relic is taken down to Foguangshan's main monastery in Kaohsiung in the South of Taiwan where it was housed until a proper pagoda can be built.<sup>110</sup>

Hsing Yun had plans to build a Buddha Memorial Center (*Fojiao Jinianguan* 佛教紀念館), to house the Buddha tooth relic. The original plan was to build the temple near Taipei in the north of Taiwan. Hsing Yun suggested that with Foguangshan in the south and the Buddha tooth in the North all of Taiwan could be covered by fougang (佛光), meaning either the Buddha's light or Hsing Yun's organization. This may reflect Hsingyun's wished to expand his organization beyond the south of Taiwan.<sup>111</sup> However, land was brought and construction has begun on the memorial center in Pingtung County in southern Taiwan, rather than in the north. Hsing Yun suggested that this construction project is similar to structures such as the high-speed rail line but instead of advancing technologically it helps Taiwan advance spiritually.<sup>112</sup> According to the plans for the building of this complex it would be a thirty-five hectare complex consisting of eight pagodas, four towers, a large central complex, and a massive bronze status of the Buddha, the largest in Taiwan. Foguangshan hopes with this complex to bring in more than just Taiwanese people, but for this to become a world center for Buddhism. There, however, was no mention of any burial site near or around the relic as is common practice. In the past good

---

<sup>110</sup> *Fojiao Jinianguan* 佛教紀念館: *Buddha Memorial Center*, DVD (Kaohsiung, Taiwan: Fo Guang Shan 佛光山, n.d.).

<sup>111</sup> Foguang Weixing Dianshitai 佛光衛星電視台, prod., *Gongyin Foya Sheli Huigu Guangji* 恭迎佛牙舍利回顧專輯, VHS.

<sup>112</sup> Hsing Yun 星雲法師, "*fotuo jinianguan baodao* 佛陀紀念館相關報導," foguanshan banquansuoyou 佛光山版權所有, 2011, [http://www.fgs.org.tw/subject/subject\\_stupa\\_03.aspx](http://www.fgs.org.tw/subject/subject_stupa_03.aspx).

merit had been obtained to help the soul of the dead buried nearby in its next rebirth, suggesting once again despite his use at the Air China crash site, that he did not want to equate his ministry with the afterlife. At the time this paper was written, the temple was not yet complete, so these plans could change. There was also a plan to build a reconstruction of vulture peak, a famous preaching site of the Buddha, next to this complex.<sup>113</sup> I believe this was being done to relocate important Buddhist places to Taiwan, as Buddha himself was already being relocated there with the tooth, making this the new center of the Buddhist world. This echoed the push for internationalization that Hsing Yun had previously displayed, as he tries to use the relic hall to bring in an international crowd. It might also have been able to function as an attraction like the amusement ride, or the tours of Foguangshan to bring in more followers both national and internationally, as well as donors or political support due to the draw that such a rare relic has.

Since this tooth had to fit into a Humanistic Buddhism, and needed to coincide with western ideas, such as the importance of charity or a need for rationality. One might have assumed that Hsing Yun would allow scientist to look at the tooth and prove the validity of their relic, but Hsing Yun has said that the tooth is not a matter of science or history, but rather a matter of belief.<sup>114</sup> This is especially interesting given his previous attempts to equate Buddhism with science, even comparing the building of the memorial hall to technical advances, but I imagine his response to this would be much like other supernatural occurrences. Hsing Yun has said science simply cannot see the whole picture yet, as it has not gained as much knowledge as Buddhism. Like in the past the burden of proof lied in documents rather than scientific authentication, but instead of its story in text, a paper was signed by twelve rinpoches attesting

---

<sup>113</sup> *Fojiao Jinianguan* 佛教纪念馆: *Buddha Memorial Center*, DVD.

<sup>114</sup> *Fojiao Jinianguan* 佛教纪念馆: *Buddha Memorial Center*, Pamphlet, 9. “但是佛牙的真偽，不是科學實驗、不是歷史考證，而是宗教信仰的問題”

to the tooth's authenticity.<sup>115</sup> Although he still recognized the supernatural aspects of the tooth relic, such as its ability to generate merit, and to help with current lives and future rebirths, in an attempt to engage with Humanistic Buddhism, Hsing Yun downplayed these aspects. He comments both on the Foguangshan website and in the speech he gave when the tooth arrived in Kaohsiung, that the tooth will inspire kindness and compassion in the minds of those who see it.<sup>116</sup> With this statement he was refocusing the use of relics from helping oneself through the power of the Buddha, enabling people to better help others. This was a very humanistic spin on the use of relics, yet the other uses still remains. He could not stop his followers, other Buddhists, or politicians from using the relic for its traditional merit field and supernatural purposes.

From the way that this relic was treated several ideas can be extrapolated. First, governments were paying attention to relics and not dismissing them as superstitious religion, as some scholars have previously thought. Taiwan was using the relic like previous political leaders to show through its miracles and the relic's will to come to and stay in Taiwan that the leaders were the proper rulers for Taiwan. The relic was also used to show that Taiwan is as powerful a Buddhist center as China. Foguangshan has allowed this relic to be used to back the political party in power by allowing many prominent members of the Taiwanese government attend to speak at the tooth welcoming ceremony, but conversely the government was also using Foguangshan, allowing it time in the spotlight for the use of the relic, as now they both hold tooth relics of the Buddha. This might have also helped Hsing Yun gain political backing, as leaders came to venerate the tooth to build a better Taiwan. Hsing Yun did this in spite of

---

<sup>115</sup> *Fojiao Jinianguan 佛教纪念馆: Buddha Memorial Center, Pamphlet, 8.*

<sup>116</sup> Yi Kong 依空法師, "foyashelibaodao 佛牙舍利報導," [http://www.fgs.org.tw/subject/subject\\_stupa\\_04.aspx](http://www.fgs.org.tw/subject/subject_stupa_04.aspx).

having been called a political monk in the past, and possibly bringing ridicule on the *sangha*. Hsing Yun was also continuing his push for an internationalization of Foguangshan, by first proving his relationship with the Tibetan Vajrayana tradition, and secondly by trying to recreate Taiwan as the center of the Buddhist world, which would, Hsing Yun hoped, bring in international followers. I believe that Hsing Yun was trying to improve the image of his sect in the Taiwanese religious scene, suggesting that Foguangshan was the best place for this rare form of relic in Taiwan, rather than other sects in the pluralized Buddhist atmosphere of Taiwan. He was hoping to gain more followers, or maybe even bring new followers to Buddhism through the allure of a tooth relic. Hsing Yun was also setting up a way of looking at relics that recognizes their supernatural powers, because without them the relic would not meet the standards of the past tradition. However, rather than focusing on the supernatural abilities, Hsing Yun hoped that people receive compassion and kindness in their hearts from looking at the relic, this was seen in his speech and the lack of a cemetery in the Buddha Tooth Memorial Complex.

## **Conclusion**

One might suggest that a form of Buddhism that seeks to compete with western ideas of Christianity's humanistic tendencies and to expand internationally might treat relics differently from the way that relics were used in the past. One might also think that the use of the relic by modern nation-state with new forms of politics and science would be different from the monarchies that have used relics for thousands of years, . However, in many ways the treatment of the tooth relic at Foguangshan mirrors those that have been seen in the past.

Relics are still being used by governments to help them gain support and efficacy among the Buddhist community in Taiwan and throughout the world. This was shown through the way

that the KMT members including the president, vice president, and mayor of Taipei publicly made offerings to the relics and gave speeches during the several days of the Buddhist welcoming ceremonies. This was reminiscent of the way that relics were used by Empress Wu to support her reign as she started a state sponsored distribution of relics. Just like history had to be rewritten when Empress Wu lost power and the Tang rose again, one might assume the allegiance of the tooth will have to change to support any new political party that rises to power. Maybe, however, the tooth will continue only to support those whose political ideas agree with Hsing Yun, such as supporting the reunification policies of the KMT. Also it was clear that China viewed the relics of the Buddha as important using their own in Burma and worrying about a relic that would be controlled by Taiwan. Otherwise they would not be worried enough about its movements to boycott and ask others to boycott the relic welcoming ceremony.

This tooth was also being used as it has in the past to recreate Taiwan as a center for Buddhism. Before the time of Empresses Wu, leaders had been discovering relics in China that they claimed had been placed there by Aśoka. This relocated the Buddha, and thus the proper center of Buddhist influence from India into China. Hsing Yun did something similar to this relocation. He brings the Buddha himself, through the relocation of the tooth relic, to Taiwan. In addition to relocating the Buddha to Taiwan he also was trying to relocate Vulture Peak, a hill where the Buddha preached, to Taiwan through reconstructing it at the site of the Relic Memorial Hall. This relocation of relics can raise issues of their authenticity. In both cases, the relic at Famensi and the relic at Foguangshan, the stories of how it came to reside in their current location, and the miracles that it produces helped to prove that it was a true relic of the Buddha for the believers. Yet in Foguangshan there had to be a signed letter from twelve rinpoches

-serving to prove its authenticity. This demonstrated a new method of proving authenticity of relics in the modern day.

Also similar to the past the relic at Foguangshan was seen as having supernatural powers and was treated as a powerful field of merit. During the broadcast of the welcoming ceremony of the tooth, the announcer repeatedly remarked on how several days of rain only ceased when the relic arrived in Taipei, and there was a golden colored light that covered the road. In addition to this, public officials attended this ceremony on behalf of the nation and other individual Buddhists made offerings to the tooth. From this they expected to gain a more prosperous and well functioning nation. Individual Buddhists also expected to receive a better life in their next rebirth as the tooth can keep you from entering one of the three bad rebirths, or more merit for this life from the offerings and prayers they make to the tooth. Upon request of follower, Hsing Yun brought the relic to the Air China crash site to ease the suffering of the victims. For Empress Wu a tooth also had supernatural powers, she hoped to use it to heal her husband or to allow him a better rebirth. Then at the time of her death she brought the tooth to her side in hopes of a similar ending. Also during her reign monks were willing to, in extreme cases, make offerings of their finger to the Buddha so that through their sacrifice they could gain more merit. In the case of Foguangshan, however, even though Hsing Yun admitted that the tooth holds supernatural powers, he downplayed the importance of such power. Instead he tried to focus on the kindness and compassion that he believes this tooth relic can inspire in people's hearts when they see it. This supported the teaching of Humanistic Buddhism, where doing works of compassion in this world were important, and one should use their own power to turn this world into a Pure Land. This, however, could not serve to abolish the old practices as they have been practiced for thousands of years and are still seen by many as a valid path to salvation.

In the case of Foguangshan because of the pluralization of Buddhism in Taiwan, it needed to bolster their organization over all the other Buddhist organizations that were functioning in Taiwan. Through describing his works abroad, including establishing groups such as the Tantric Sutric Buddhist conference, he showed that his work allowed his institution to stand out to the lamas of Tibet. Also, through having this relic, he hoped to gain more followers, and with more support and donations he can finish building the Buddha Memorial Center. Once this center is complete Hsing Yun said that he hopes to bring in people from around the world. One can assume that he also hopes to make follower and donors out of both domestic and international visitors.

Despite what some scholars like Vincent Goosaert and David Palmer might have suggested about the way that the spaces in the government that used to house religion are being replaced by the idea of morality, this religion, through this tooth, is still continuing to play a very important role in the state.<sup>117</sup> Also despite the tooth's superstitious quality it maintains an important role in society, in the realms of religion and government. This is also contrary to what scholars have suggested about a move away from more superstitious forms of religion, especially popular religions in Mainland China and Taiwan.<sup>118</sup> These differences in expectations show that scholars need to take a second look at how relics are actually being used, rather than focusing only on how they are described in texts.

---

<sup>117</sup> Goosaert & Palmer, *Religious Question in Modern China*, 10-11.

<sup>118</sup> Goosaert & Palmer, *Religious Question in Modern China*, 215. and in Dubois, *Religion and the Making of Modern East Asia*, 164-5.

## Works Cited

- Buddha Tooth Relic Shrine: Foguangshande Gushi – Foya Shelidian* 佛光山的故事—佛牙舍利殿. FGSinenglish, January 25, 2011. Youtube.  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JcJPMcyCQKk>.
- Barrett, T. H. "Was There an Imperial Distribution of Buddha Relics in Ninth-Century China?" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 68, no. 3 (2005): 451-454.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20181952>.
- "Chapter Twenty-three: The Former Deeds of Bodhisattva Medicine King." In *The Lotus Sutra*, compiled by Burton Watson. <http://nichiren.info/buddhism/lotussutra/text/chap23.html>.
- Chen, Jinhua. "Sarira and Scepter: Empress Wu's Political Use of Buddhist Relics." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 25, no. 1-2 (2002): 33-150.
- Chen Yixian 陳義憲. "Yiguo Foya Jinqi de Fengbo 一顆佛牙引起的風波." Christian Center for Buddhism Research – *Foxueyanjiu* 佛學研究.  
<http://www.gotobr.org/LCCBRSUB/KnowingFuJiao/FuTooth.htm>.
- Chandler, Stuart. *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth: The Foguang Buddhist Perspective on Modernization and Globalization*. Honolulu, Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004.
- Clart, Philip, and Charles Brewer Jones, eds. *Religion in Modern Taiwan: Tradition and Innovation in a Changing Society*. Honolulu Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003.
- CNN.com*. "Taiwan monks applaud Buddha's finger." February 23, 2002, World edition.  
<http://archives.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/asiapcf/east/02/23/taiwan.buddha/>.
- DuBois, Thomas David. *Religion and the Making of Modern East Asia*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 2011.



Faure, Bernard. *Rhetoric of Immediacy: A Cultural Critique of Chan/ Zen Buddhism*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994.

*Fojiao Jinianguan* 佛教纪念馆: *Buddha Memorial Center*. DVD. Kaohsiung, Taiwan:

Fo Guang Shan 佛光山, n.d.

*Fojiao Jinianguan* 佛教纪念馆: *Buddha Memorial Center*. Pamphlet. Kaohsiung, Taiwan:

Foguangshan Chubanfaxing 佛光山 出版發行, n.d.

Foguang Weixing Dianshitai 佛光衛星電視台, prod. *Gongyin Foya Sheli Huigu Guangji* 恭迎

佛牙舍利回顧專輯. VHS. Taiwan: Xianghai Wenhua Shiye Youxian Gongsi 香海文化

事業有限公司, 1999.

"*Fozhi Laitai Yuanqi* 佛指來台緣起," Fo Guang Shan 佛光山, last modified 2011,

[http://www.fgs.org.tw/subject/subject\\_stupa\\_05.aspx](http://www.fgs.org.tw/subject/subject_stupa_05.aspx).

Fu Chi-ying. *Handing Down the Light: The Biography of Venerable Master Hsing Yun*.

Translated by Amy Lui-Ma. Hacienda Heights, California: Buddha's Light Publishing,

1995.

Germano, David, and Kevin Trainor, eds. *Embodying the Dharma: Buddhist Relic Veneration in Asia*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2004.

Goosaert, Vincent. "1898: The Beginning of the End for Chinese Religion ?" *Journal of Asian Studies* 65, no. 2 (2006): 307-336. <http://hal.inria.fr/docs/00/09/25/38/PDF/1898.pdf>.

Goosaert, Vincent, and David Palmer. *Religious Question in Modern China*. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

Hsing, Yun. *Buddhist Perspective in the Supernatural*. Translated by Fo Guang Shan International Translation Center. Hacienda Heights, California: Buddha's Light Publishing, 2009.

\_\_\_\_\_. 星雲法師. "Fotuo Jinianguan Xiangguan Baodao 佛陀紀念館相關報導."

*Foguangshan* 佛光山. 2011. [http://www.fgs.org.tw/subject/subject\\_stupa\\_03.aspx](http://www.fgs.org.tw/subject/subject_stupa_03.aspx).

Jones, Charles Brewer. *In Taiwan: Religion and the State 1660-1990*. Honolulu, Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999.

Kieschnick, John. *Chapter One, Sacred Power. In The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003.

Laliberte, Andre. *The Politics of Buddhist Organizations in Taiwan: 1989-2003: Safeguarding the faith, building a Pure Land, helping the poor*. Abingdon, Oxon, Great Britain: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004.

Lopez, Donald. *Buddhism and Science: A Guide for the Perplexed*. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2008.

*The New Light of Myanmar* (NAY PYI TAW). "Pilgrims add in crowd paying homage to Sacred Buddha Tooth Relic." November 12, 2011.

<http://www.myanmar.com/newspaper/nlm/index.html>.

Pittman, Don A. *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu's Reform*. Honolulu, Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001.

Ritzinger, Justin, and Marcus Bingenheimer. "Whole Body Relics in Chinese Buddhism – Previous Research and Historical Overview." *The Indian International Journal of Buddhist Studies* 7 (2006): 37-94. <http://mbingenheimer.net/publications/ritzinger-bingenheimer.buddhistMummies.pdf>.

Schopen, Gregory. "Relics." In *Critical Terms for Religious Study*, 256-268. Chicago, Illinois: Chicago University Press, 1998.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Figments and Fragments of Mahayana Buddhism in India: More Collected Papers*. Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005.

Sen, Tansen. *Buddhism, Diplomacy, & Trade: The Realignment of Sino-Indian Relations*. Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2003.

Sharf, Robert H. "On the Allure of Buddhist Relics." *Representations* 66 (Spring 1999): 75-99.  
from <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0734-6018%28199921%290%3A66%3C75%3AOTA Obr%3E2.0.CO%3B2-W>.

Strong, John S. *Relics of the Buddha*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004.

Trainor, Kevin M. "When is Theft not a Theft? Relic Theft and the Cult of the Buddha's Relics in Sri Lanka." *Numen* 39 (June 1992): 1-26. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3270073>.

Yang, Mayfair Mei-Hui. *Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2008.

Yi Kong 依空法師. "Foya Sheli Baodao佛牙舍利報導." *Foguanshan 佛光山*. 2011.  
[Http://www.fgs.org.tw/subject/subject\\_stupa\\_04.aspx](http://www.fgs.org.tw/subject/subject_stupa_04.aspx).