

## Japanese Influence on Buddhism in Taiwan

*Yu-Shuang Yao*

So far as can be discovered, before 1919 there were no Buddhist nuns in Taiwan. Now, however, Taiwan is famous for its nuns, who far outnumber monks. How did this come about? Between the two World Wars, several Japanese Buddhist sects proselytized in Taiwan. The Rinzai Zen was particularly active; they ordained some men but more women, and took some of those women to Japan for education. In particular, this was done by a monk called Gisei Tokai, who also established a (now defunct) Buddhist charity in Taiwan called Tzu Chi, like the current movement. Another link between this and today's Tzu Chi is a nun called Xiu Dao, now in her nineties; in 1961-2 she was the companion of the young lady who was later to found Tzu Chi and become known as the Master Cheng Yen. Perhaps because of this influence from Japan, Tzu Chi has adopted some features of the Japanese religion Risshō Kōsei-Kai.

This article sets these discoveries in a broader framework: the invention of "humanist" Buddhism by Tai Xu in the 1920s; the influence of Japanese Buddhism on him and of Japanese culture on Taiwan; and the role of the reformist Yin Shun.

### **The historical context: Japan in Taiwan**

The current population of Taiwan is slightly over 23 million. The 2005 census found just over 8 million Buddhists, 35% of the population. Though classification of religious adherence in Chinese populations is notoriously contentious, this is accurate enough for my present purpose.

At the end of the First Sino-Japanese War, in 1895, China had to cede Taiwan to the Japanese; but in 1945, at the end of the Second World War, Taiwan was returned to the Republic of China. On the Chinese mainland the Nationalists under Chiang Kai-Shek were then losing their struggle against the advancing Communists; they were finally defeated in 1949 and in the December of that year Chiang made Taipei his capital. Some 2 million people fled China during 1945 – 9 and settled in Taiwan, where they then constituted about a quarter of the population.

On 28 February 1947 there began what is known as the “2/28 Incident”. A soldier from the mainland killed a local civilian, and this led to a spontaneous rebellion against the rule of the Chinese Nationalists. “Over the next several months, untold numbers of people suspected of involvement with Taiwan independence movements were rounded up and were executed, or disappeared. The victims came from all levels of society, from workers to scholars and county magistrates.”<sup>1</sup> The records were long sealed and the number of dead may never be known, but is estimated between 18,000 and 30,000,<sup>2</sup> and that includes a disproportionate number of members of the Taiwanese elite. This notorious episode has a bearing on the topic of this article.

“Around 1935, the Japanese began an island-wide assimilation project to bind the island more firmly to the Japanese Empire and people were taught to see themselves as Japanese; ... Taiwanese culture and religion were outlawed and the citizens were encouraged to adopt Japanese surnames. During World War II, tens of thousands of Taiwanese served in the Japanese military.” In 1938 there were over 300,000 Japanese settlers in Taiwan; most of them were repatriated to Japan in 1945.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, however, Taiwanese had been receiving their education in the Japanese language. As a result, early in the present century there was still a substantial number of elderly Taiwanese who were as fluent in Japanese as in Hokkien, the local form of Chinese.<sup>4</sup>

In the era of Japanese control, the Japanese opened a large number of Buddhist temples, many of them converted from Chinese temples and other buildings. When they had to leave in 1945, local governments were supposed to return these temples to their former owners; but it is recorded that nearly 20 years later

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Brewer Jones, *Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State 1660–1990*, Honolulu, 1999, p.101.

<sup>2</sup> *Wikipedia* article “Taiwan”.

<sup>3</sup> *Wikipedia* article “Taiwan”.

<sup>4</sup> In Taiwan many people call this language “Taiwanese”.

66 of them had not yet been disposed of according to this law.<sup>5</sup> This too illustrates how Japanese influence lingered after their rule ended.

What is even more important for my theme, though it is difficult to illustrate succinctly, is the affinity that many Taiwanese feel for Japan and the Japanese – something in which they contrast with the mainland Chinese. Indeed, Taiwan is probably the only country to have been occupied by the Japanese where the sentiment towards Japan is now predominantly positive. This may well be due in large measure to the 2/28 Incident, mentioned above, and the harsh period of martial law which followed it. The result was that many Taiwanese came to feel that the Japanese treated them better than did the hordes of mainland Chinese who arrived almost as soon as the Japanese were expelled.

Though it may not be politically tactful to say so, the result has been that many Taiwanese like Japan better than mainland China, even if one discounts Communism. Though it is expensive, Japan is the favourite destination for an overseas holiday. After the March 2012 earthquake and tsunami hit Japan, the Taiwanese public contributed more money for disaster relief than any other nation, including even the United States. And a surprising number of Taiwanese go to Japan for their higher education.

### **Tai Xu and Buddhist modernism**

Almost all Taiwanese Buddhists now follow religious leaders who consider themselves part of the movement which in English is usually known as humanistic Buddhism. This movement was founded in China by the monk Tai Xu (1890 - 1947). He did not have very much success in his homeland, but travelled a lot and had considerable influence internationally. Indeed, it is his “humanistic Buddhism” which, under the name of “Engaged Buddhism” (coined by Thich Nhat Hanh), is the form of Buddhist modernism most widely espoused by Buddhists in much of Asia and even further afield.

“Humanistic Buddhism” (Chinese: *ren shen fo jiao*, literally “Buddhism of the human realm”) is so called because Tai Xu wanted to make Buddhism far more relevant to life in this world, in reaction to its focus on the afterlife, the cult of ancestors, etc., and its concomitant preoccupation with ritual. He considered the Saṅgha too much concerned with meditation and the study of ancient texts, and thus remote from daily life and its problems. Accordingly he also wished to shift

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<sup>5</sup>Jones, *op.cit.*, pp.169-170.

the balance between clergy and laity and to give the laity a far greater role. Obviously this all reflects an impulse to modernise, and to modernise in accord with an idea of modernity derived from contact with the West, and in particular with Protestant Christianity.

Though the main theme of this article is Buddhism in Taiwan, readers may wonder what part Japanese Buddhism has played on the Chinese mainland. It was on Tai Xu's initiative that the Chinese and Japanese governments both approved his holding the first conference of the World Buddhist Federation in Lu Shan in 1924. The conference discussed "the future exchange of Buddhist teachers and students between China and Japan", and how by stages to unify Buddhists throughout the world; it also arranged to hold the next conference in Tokyo in November 1925.<sup>6</sup> Holmes Welch writes:

"This was perhaps the first international Buddhist conference of modern times. Small delegations of three members each came from Taiwan and Korea. Twenty came from China. Most of them were close to Tai Xu or shared at least some of his views about the modernization of Buddhism. Seventeen were laymen ...

"Tai Xu, literally and figuratively, took the center of the stage. He pointed out that, whereas the Chinese excelled in religious cultivation, the Japanese excelled in organizing, propaganda, and community service. A Sino-Japanese liaison committee was set up to put these complementary talents to work ... and resolutions were passed for action in the fields of education and social welfare. Also included in the conference was a symposium on Buddhist doctrine, at which Tai Xu gave papers on the [Yogācāra] theory of *ālaya-vijñāna* and on the secularization of Japanese Buddhism. Plans were made to hold the next East Asian Buddhist conference in Peking – plans that never materialized."<sup>7</sup>

The organization then petered out, but it can be seen as the precursor, after various vicissitudes, of the still extant World Fellowship of Buddhists, which Dr. G.P. Malalasekera, a Sinhalese, founded in 1950, after Tai Xu's death, declaring that he was inspired to do so by Tai Xu.<sup>8</sup>

The main reason why Sino-Japanese co-operation in Buddhist matters collapsed was that the Japanese government pursued a policy of sending Buddhist missionaries to China and even setting up temples with the aim, partially realised from 1937 on, of conquering China. Such attempts as they made to convince

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<sup>6</sup>Holmes Welch, *The Buddhist Revival in China*, Cambridge, Mass., 1968, p.56.

<sup>7</sup>Welch, *op.cit.*, pp.166-7.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p.64.

Chinese Buddhists of the excellence of their own Buddhist tradition also failed because their priests married and were not vegetarian.<sup>9</sup>

Against this unpromising background, it is perhaps rather surprising that Taiwanese Buddhists have been at all susceptible to Japanese influence. In general, one may note that, as Tai Xu indicated in 1925, Japan has led the way in East Asia in adopting various forms of modernity and secularization, and this has led to superior organization and a great rise in the importance of the laity. This increase in lay involvement has also fed back into emphasising concern with practice in daily life, sometimes – as Tai Xu would have wished – at the expense of ritual and the study of texts. We find, however, that there are points at which the influence has been more specific.

### Buddhism in Contemporary Taiwan

The largest and best known Buddhist movements in Taiwan today are three: Fo Guang Shan (meaning “Buddha’s Light Mountain”) founded by Hsing Yun (b. 1927); Tzu Chi (meaning “Compassionate Relief”) founded by Cheng Yen (b. 1937); and Dharma Drum Mountain, founded by Sheng Yen (1930-2009). Though these three movements differ in many ways, all three consider themselves to preach humanistic Buddhism.

However, it would not be quite accurate to say that they all closely follow Tai Xu. Yin Shun (1906 – 2005), a monk of exceptional depth and breadth of Buddhist learning, cannot be quite left out of the picture. Early in life he became convinced “that Buddhism had become corrupted ... in its transmission from India to China”<sup>10</sup> and boldly set about trying to explain and see beyond later accretions to the Buddha’s message. He criticized the view of Pure Land Buddhism currently dominant in China and Taiwan, which made him quite unpopular. He also edited Tai Xu’s collected works. He escaped from China to Hong Kong in 1949 and moved to Taiwan, where he then stayed, in 1952.

Yin Shun was a propagandist for Tai Xu’s reformism, but reformulated part of it. He replaced Tai Xu’s *ren shen fo jiao*, which literally means “Buddhism of the human realm”, with *ren jian fo jiao*, which literally means “Buddhism of human life”. “The primary difference between these two theories consists in their diagnosis of what constitutes Chinese Buddhism’s main impediment to meeting modern

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.169-171.

<sup>10</sup> Jones, p.125.

social needs.”<sup>11</sup> Tai Xu had emphasised that Buddhism was focusing too much on rites for the dead and placating spirits; his proposed remedies were rational re-organization of the Saṅgha, purging superstitious practices and promoting social welfare activities. Yin Shun, by contrast, thought that the problem had deep historical roots in Buddhism’s admission of theism (under other terms) and treating Buddhas like gods. For example, he argued that the Pure Land was nothing like a heaven but should be created on earth through social welfare, environmental awareness, etc..<sup>12</sup>

Yin Shun was fearlessly untraditional. He took the unheard of step of ordaining the Master Cheng Yen as a nun, though she had none of the traditional ritual qualifications. He simply met her and was impressed. Had he not done this, it is not likely that she could have gone on to create Tzu Chi as she did. Cheng Yen treated her “master” with great respect, visiting him regularly until the end of his life; but it is hard to say that she was much influenced by his doctrinal views.

I have written above that the great majority of Taiwanese Buddhists are adherents of three *movements*. The closest Christian equivalent would probably be sects, but Christian sects have boundaries which are clearly defined by doctrine and often by other criteria as well. Christian terms simply do not fit the Buddhist situation. A major reason for this is that the criteria for membership in a Buddhist group have traditionally applied only to the Saṅgha. A member of the Saṅgha is formally ordained and remains a member unless formally expelled. Moreover, grounds for expulsion are not doctrinal belief or philosophical school, but matters of conduct which affect morality or decorum.<sup>13</sup> With the laity, things are looser; we may however summarise a rather complex situation by saying that in practice it is a donor to the Saṅgha who is acknowledged as a lay follower.<sup>14</sup> Thus a layman may well be considered a follower of more than one group, and it is less misleading to call the groups “movements”.

It may in fact better describe Chinese Buddhism to say that someone attaches themselves to a master (traditionally always a male monastic) and may follow that master either as an ordained or as a lay disciple; and the master’s soteriological beliefs and philosophical views become those of his followers. Identity is thus determined by the master and his pupillary lineage, on a patriarchal model.

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<sup>11</sup>Jones, p.133.

<sup>12</sup>Jones, pp.134-5.

<sup>13</sup>Richard Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History*, London & New York, 1988, p.113.

<sup>14</sup>Cf. Gombrich, *op. cit.*, pp.74-5.

The movement in which Japanese influence is most important is Tzu Chi. This also happens to be the one which I have studied intensively, so it is quite possible that there are traces of Japanese influence in the other two movements of which I am as yet unaware. Tzu Chi's Master is a native Taiwanese, and a woman, while the founders of the other two movements are men, born in mainland China, who arrived in Taiwan as refugees from the Communists. Hsing Yun, founder of Fo Guang Shan, is from Jian Su in Southern China and speaks the dialect of that area, which is not intelligible to ordinary Taiwanese, so that he needs interpreters, but this has done surprisingly little to impede his progress. Thus the movements founded both by him and by Sheng Yan use Mandarin as their liturgical language and main medium, whereas Tzu Chi mainly uses the local Hokkien.

Fo Guang Shan, much the largest of the three movements both within Taiwan and internationally,<sup>15</sup> is a kind of broad church and the one with the fewest obvious breaks with mainstream Chinese Buddhist tradition. It is led by a Saṅgha, who relate in much the traditional manner to an enormous lay following. Outsiders tend to find that its most salient feature is that a very high proportion of the Saṅgha are nuns.

However, this is typical of Taiwan as a whole: it has for some time had more Buddhist nuns than any other country in the world, maybe even ten times as many nuns as monks.<sup>16</sup> The reasons for this have been much discussed; though this article shows that there are deeper roots, I believe that the main reason nowadays is quite simply the shortage of male vocations. In fact Fo Guang Shan may be using its high reputation and influence to attract more monks than is possible for other monasteries in Taiwan.

### **The Japanese creation of Taiwanese nuns**

My research suggests that it is the Japanese who were originally responsible for the preponderance of nuns in Taiwan. The Rinzai Zen sect instituted a campaign of ordaining Taiwanese. In 1917 in Kai Yuan temple in Tainan in southern Taiwan there was held the first ordination ceremony for monks in Taiwan; Tai Xu offi-

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<sup>15</sup>Tzu Chi now claims to have about ten million members world wide, but this figure apparently includes all those who take part in their charitable projects, and they themselves say that many of these are not Buddhists.

<sup>16</sup>Elise Anne De Vido, *Taiwan's Buddhist Nuns*, Albany, 2010, is disappointing, in that she gives hardly any statistics. It appears that the censuses count Buddhists, but not Buddhist nuns.

ciated.<sup>17</sup> In 1919 the same temple held the first ordination ceremony in Taiwan ever to include women. We have the following figures for ordinations in Taiwan, which were performed under Japanese auspices:<sup>18</sup>

1919	84 monks	79 nuns
1923	83	58
1924	8	50
1934	31	83
1940	16	41

These figures show that while initially the sexes were fairly evenly matched, the number of male candidates then declined severely, but female candidates were not in short supply. The Japanese said, according to my source, that Taiwanese women had very hard lives and should realize that they would be better off as nuns.<sup>19</sup>

In the 1930s there were 120 Rinzai Zen temples in Taiwan funded by Japanese.<sup>20</sup> Most of these seem to have housed nuns.<sup>21</sup> There was also a Japanese Rinzai hospital in southern Taiwan.

In 1937, the Japanese counted 170,000 lay followers of Japanese Buddhism in Taiwan, and 56 Japanese Buddhist temples.<sup>22</sup> Twelve Japanese sects were preaching in Taiwan, the Zen sects Rinzai and Sōtō prominent among them.

One Japanese Rinzai monk was particularly notable in this period. Gisei Tokai learnt Hokkien. He supervised more than one hundred preaching centres, which

<sup>17</sup>De Vido, p.14.

<sup>18</sup>Fai-yan Shih, "The study on Social Status Development of Taiwanese Buddhist Nuns", *Hsien Chang Bulletin of Buddhist Studies*, vol.8, January 2007, p.60. This article reports that according to a Japanese government report dated 1919, **there were at that time no Buddhist nuns in Taiwan.**

<sup>19</sup>Once the Japanese had set the ball rolling, others too made successful efforts to recruit and educate nuns. In particular, Jue Li, a monk from the Chinese mainland, but ordained into the Japanese Sōtō sect, played a major part (see Jones, *op.cit.*, pp.51-2). It is noteworthy that Jue Li was a Taiwanese delegate at the Tokyo conference organized by Tai Xu in 1925.

<sup>20</sup>Li-man Lin, "Interview of Genyou Nun (Miss Yuzhuo Huang): Nuns' Education in the Rinzai Sect Myoshin-ji School in Taiwan during the Japanese Colonial Period". [http://www.ykbi.edu.tw/addpage/journal/data\\_22/journal\\_22\\_6.pdf](http://www.ykbi.edu.tw/addpage/journal/data_22/journal_22_6.pdf), viewed 30/1/2014.

<sup>21</sup>Unfortunately Li-man Lin does not make it clear how many temples housed nuns or how many nuns there were, even approximately. But evidently there were hundreds.

<sup>22</sup>Wang Jian Chuang, "Attempt to study the Japanese monk Gisei Tokai and his preaching career in Taiwan", *Bulletin of Yuan Kuang Buddhist Institute*, vol.3, March 1990, pp.357-382. Most of the information in the next five paragraphs is from Wang; the rest is from Lin (see 20 above).



paid annual fees to the Rinzai headquarters in Japan, and he received an award from the headquarters for his activities. He also was advisor to the Taiwanese Buddhist vegetarian association. He founded a college in Taipei, called Zhen Nan Xiu Xin, for Buddhists (both clergy and lay), and was its warden and professor; the syllabus included Mandarin and other languages, mathematics, history and geography. In 1918 the college was taken over by the Sōtō sect. In 1934 it recruited 120 students, and 30 more joined in the second semester, so that the college decided to employ three more teachers.

Tokai founded a hospital in southern Taiwan and was chairman of its board; the hospital included a department for teaching Mahayana Buddhism and correcting wrong beliefs. He also founded a Buddhist charity called Tzu Chi, like the modern movement. It raised funds through members called “commissioners” (*mu kuan wei yuan*), who went round with begging bowls to collect donations; that today’s Tzu Chi uses the same name for fundraisers, who operate in the same way, can hardly be a coincidence.

It is also of particular relevance to my theme that he recruited nuns whom he sent to Japan to be given their monastic education by the Rinzai sect, who gave them scholarships. In 1933, of the 29 graduates from the college in Taipei half went on to study in Japan, where they were ordained; though the college was in Sōtō hands, one gathers that it was the Rinzai sect which taught and ordained them in Japan.

After 1945, when the Japanese were for the most part replaced by mainland Chinese, many of the nuns who had been educated in Japan were re-ordained into traditional Chinese sects by BAROC, the organization which then had sole control of Taiwanese Buddhist institutions. They continued however to be in charge of nunneries, though they are unlikely to have discarded all that they had learnt in Japan.

Ironically, Japan has very few Buddhist nuns, and they are still struggling to gain any kind of parity with monks.<sup>23</sup> However, in the vast arena of Japanese “new religions”, which covers roughly the past two centuries and millions of adherents, female leadership is a conspicuous feature. For instance, the religion Tenrikyō was founded in 1838 and led by a peasant woman.<sup>24</sup> Helen Hardacre writes that in the world view of Japanese new religions, the concept of pollution, including

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<sup>23</sup>Paula Kane Robinson Arai, *Women Living Zen: Sōtō Buddhist Nuns*, Oxford 1999.

<sup>24</sup>Helen Hardacre, *Kurozumikyō and the New Religions of Japan*, 1986, p 21 fn.22.

the pollution of women, is in general downplayed, and this gives women more scope to be religiously active.<sup>25</sup>

Thus it fits well into my general picture that some of the leading nuns of Fo Guang Shan have received their university education, or higher degrees, at Japanese Buddhist universities.<sup>26</sup> Since the Master Hsin Yun is now very old, we shall no doubt find out before very long whether any of these nuns, who are probably abler than his leading monks, will succeed to the leadership.

Sheng Yen, founder of Dharma Drum Mountain and the Chung-hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies, had some difficult years after arriving in Taiwan. Then in 1968, “at the age of 38, he began doctoral studies in Buddhist literature at Risshō University in Japan and received his LLD in 1975. He has more formal education than any other major Buddhist leader in Taiwan.”<sup>27</sup> He studied Chan/Zen under both Taiwanese and Japanese masters, and has a clear Zen identity, but has about 300,000 regular followers, spanning Taiwan and New York, where for many years he spent about half his time.<sup>28</sup> His Saṅgha I believe to be quite small, and again to contain more nuns than monks. I do not know how his movement has been affected by his death, but I have heard that the movement has recently built a new temple in Taipei which is utterly Japanese in style.

### Japanese influence on the current Tzu Chi movement

On Tzu Chi I have far more significant data. It is almost entirely a lay movement, founded and headed by a woman, and at least its first generation of membership was preponderantly female – though the balance is now shifting. I have published a rather long book<sup>29</sup> on this remarkable organization; here I must confine myself to matters of Japanese influence.

The personnel and structure of Tzu Chi recall Japanese new religions. If we hark back to the remarks of Tai Xu, we may also detect Japanese influence in the fact that Tzu Chi is both tightly organized and extremely regimented, down to matters of personal appearance. There have been lay Buddhist movements in China, but surely none of them were ever so smartly turned out.

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<sup>25</sup> *Op.cit.*, p.14.

<sup>26</sup> It is relevant to remark at this point that Fo Guang Shan is reticent about the personal details of its members, so that to come by precise information is by no means easy.

<sup>27</sup> Richard Madsen, *Democracy's Dharma*, Berkeley & LA, 2010, p.92.

<sup>28</sup> Madsen p.85.

<sup>29</sup> Yu-Shuang Yao, *Taiwan's Tzu Chi as Engaged Buddhism*, Leiden and Boston, 2012.

In 1960, the father of Jin-yun (who later became Master Cheng Yen) died, which gave the first impetus for her to leave the household life. She took to visiting a nearby temple called Ciyun Si. There she became friendly with a resident nun called Xiu Dao. “Xiu Dao had been trained in Japan by Japanese Buddhists and she disagreed with some of the practices in Taiwanese Buddhist temples, which relied for their upkeep on revenue from services rendered. ... [She] also claimed that there was a lack of discipline within temple communities.” She thought that the Chinese Chan principle that a day without work is a day without food should be restored, and decided to follow it herself.<sup>30</sup>

In 1961 Jin-yun and Xiu Dao secretly left together and tried to lead an austere life by themselves in a remote area. In the end, Xiu Dao’s health started to give way and she returned to her old temple. Now in her 90s, she is still living as a nun in that temple, with three followers.

Before meeting Jin-yun, Xiu Dao had studied in a Rinzai nunnery in Aichi Prefecture in Japan, near Nagoya, for six to seven years. She has told me that she was one of the recruits of Gisei Tokai, who took nuns to Japan for education in the 1930s (see p.18 above). I deduce that she had a considerable influence on Cheng Yen – though Cheng Yen has never visited Japan.<sup>31</sup> For example, she taught Cheng Yen that monks and nuns should live on alms collected daily; this original Buddhist tradition had been lost in China.

Though it is nowadays rarely if ever mentioned, I believe that Cheng Yen has been influenced by the Japanese lay Buddhist movement Rishshō Kōsei-Kai, one of the “new religions” which gives central importance to the *Lotus Sutra*.<sup>32</sup> Attaching such importance to the *Lotus Sutra* is more typical of Japanese than of Chinese Buddhism. It is probably significant that in Tzu Chi the name of the *Lotus Sutra* is *Miao-fa Lien-hua Ching*, as is normal in Japan. *Miao-fa* means “Mystic law” and the Chinese never use this expression as part of the text’s name. For Cheng Yen the *Lotus Sutra* is so important that every morning from 4 to 6 she gives a class on it; the movement is planning to publish the teaching given in those classes in a multi-volume work.

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<sup>30</sup> Yao, *op.cit.*, pp.62-3.

<sup>31</sup> She has never been abroad because she has a weak heart and doctors tell her not to fly.

<sup>32</sup> In Tzu Chi’s yearbook for 1992-6 a photo of the chairman of Rishshō Kōsei-kai and the Master Cheng Yen was taken while the Japanese chairman visited the movement’s headquarters, and a very senior member of Tzu Chi has told me that the Master took a correspondence course with Rishshō Kōsei-kai in her early days.

Another point at which we may discern Japanese influence is this. We have mentioned that some Japanese new religions are headed by women and that Tenrikyō was founded by a woman. That lady was believed to be permanently possessed by a divinity and so was herself considered a goddess. In Chinese Buddhism no woman can ever be a goddess in any sense. However, there is ambiguity in Tzu Chi about the ontological status of Cheng Yen, and in some ways she is treated as a kind of goddess, an incarnation of Guan Yin.

In Risshō Kōsei-Kai, “an applicant for entry ... needs to be introduced by a ‘god-parent’, and the new member is called ‘godchild’. As parent and child have ties of blood, those who join the society, as a group of fellow believers in the Buddha, are bound by the *dharma*-relationship. Therefore, the godparent not only introduces a newcomer, but “just as a parent brings up his child, continues to be the guardian and adviser of the godchild, a guide in the faith, and labors for his sound growth. The new member is introduced to the fellow members by his godparent, and gets new brothers, sisters and friends in the faith.”<sup>33</sup>

An analogous system to this exists in Tzu Chi. Cheng Yen has introduced a new concept, *fa yuan*, meaning “*dharma* relationship”, which is a bond between members of Tzu Chi. It is more important than *su yuan*, “worldly relationship”. The latter ends at death but the former is eternal. The same applies to the pair of concepts *fa-qin* and *su-qin*: *qin* means “blood affection”, and that created by kinship in *dharma* is more valuable than that arising in the normal secular way.<sup>34</sup>

Though it is normal in Buddhist monastic communities for monks and nuns to regard each other as brothers and sisters, and senior teachers etc. may be considered to stand *in loco parentis*, this idea of *dharma* relationships among lay followers seems to go further than anything found elsewhere in contemporary Chinese or Taiwanese Buddhism.

There are similarities between how Tzu Chi and Risshō Kōsei-Kai carry out the recruitment and socialisation of new members. I have described how new converts to Tzu Chi are “invited to the local informal group gathering called *chahui* (tea party) held every fortnight at the converter’s home or a neighbouring household ... The meeting is normally led by the testimony of the senior members [to] the positive effects experienced after their conversion: the resolving of personal problems and weaknesses. Within this confessional atmosphere, the isolated new

<sup>33</sup> *Risshō Kōsei-Kai* [official handbook], Tokyo 1966, p.107.

<sup>34</sup> Yao p.88.

convert would be encouraged to disarm their self-protection and guardedness.”<sup>35</sup> Risshō Kōsei-Kai has a similar practice.

There are further similarities between Risshō Kōsei-Kai and Tzu Chi. For example, the former has its own hospital, established in 1952, whereas Cheng Yen decided in 1966 to create a hospital in Hualien in eastern Taiwan, thus launching Tzu Chi as a medical charity.<sup>36</sup> Similarly both movements have their own school system. Another feature that Tzu Chi may have borrowed from Risshō Kōsei-Kai is that in its early days one of its chief methods of publicity was to distribute cheap printed leaflets. These features are more widely shared among modern Buddhist movements; but they do add up to a pattern of greater similarity than can be due to coincidence.

A striking similarity between Tzu Chi and some of the largest Japanese new religions is that there is no role for any clergy in the rituals and events surrounding death. Everything is done by laymen. Moreover, death is not regarded primarily as an occasion for mourning, but is given a comparatively optimistic interpretation. This too I have described in detail in my book.<sup>37</sup>

### The “Silent Mentor” programme

However, in my book I make no mention<sup>38</sup> of the remarkable way in which Tzu Chi encourages people to donate their bodies for dissection by medical students, and how all this is carried out. The cadavers are known as “Silent Mentors”. The whole “Silent Mentor” programme is described in a fine article by Rey-Sheng Her.<sup>39</sup> Rey shows that although it has taken the whole matter much further, Tzu Chi has built on something started in Japan by what was called the White Chrysanthemum Society. This article seems so far to have attracted little attention, so I take the liberty of quoting Rey at some length.

“In 1870, under the Meiji Restoration, Japan’s medical world decided to adopt Germany’s medical science, including its study of anatomy. From the late 1930s to the 1950s, Japan used “dead travellers”, people who fell sick and died by the roadside, for dissection. Many medical schools were reluctant to rely on such

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<sup>35</sup> Yao pp.168-9.

<sup>36</sup> Yao p.66.

<sup>37</sup> Yao pp.94-8.

<sup>38</sup> It had hardly begun when I was writing my book.

<sup>39</sup> Rey-Sheng Her, “The Silent Mentors of Tzu Chi”, *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies*, vol. 4, May 2013, pp.47-74.

material for the practice of anatomy, as the wishes of the deceased could not be ascertained.

Then in this century, just when the medical world in the West began to consider the issue, Japan too started to adopt “respect for dead bodies” as the core value in anatomy education. The White Chrysanthemum Society (*Shiragikukai*) was established in Japan in 1971, with over 20,000 registered donors/members, who are recruited by appeal through various channels. Professor Tatsuo Sato, a leader of that society, commented on current practice: “They might wish not to be dissected, or on the contrary, they might be willing to. I assume most of them don’t wish so. Though they are just lifeless bodies, they should still be shown respect. Such use would create a bad impression on the students, so this practice is not welcome. It would be hard to teach students ethics with those bodies. The bodies now used have all been willingly donated with the implicit message that ‘this is to help you to become a good doctor, please use my body’. Such a message has a very good influence on the students.”<sup>40</sup>

This is how the White Chrysanthemum Society operates. Whenever a member passes away, the family notifies the Anatomy Teaching Department. The professor on duty will then put on a funeral black robe, which is kept on the premises, and rush to the funeral. A token contribution of 20,000 Yen towards the funeral costs will be handed over along with a body donation agreement. After that is signed, the body will be delivered to the medical school for study.

Respect for the donors is emphasised. Before the start of each class, the students must observe a moment of silence as a tribute to the donors’ contribution. In the classes, the teachers and students must hold the donors in high esteem. On the first day of anatomy practice, some of the society’s members are invited to attend and explain why they wish to donate. The students bring a bunch of white chrysanthemums to the first class. White symbolizes mourning, the chrysanthemum denotes nobility. Led by the teaching staff, the students place the flowers at the monument to body donors on the campus. At the beginning and the end of each class, all present must stand in silent tribute. At the completion of the course, each student team places the body they have dissected in a coffin covered with flowers. At some medical schools, the students also help to collect the bones after the cremation. At the end of the course, the students summarise their experience in a book which they send out to the donors’ families and society’s

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<sup>40</sup> 3rd April, 2007; interview with Professor Tatsuo Sato of Tokyo Medical and Dental University.

members; they write of their feelings during dissection, whether their attitudes have been changed, etc....

In its early days, Japan's medical community was influenced by the Western way of thinking. Natural science was embraced with the belief that matter was the centre of the universe and that science education was to advocate rationalism. They deeply believed that rationalism in exploring the physical world was the ultimate value in the quest for truth as well as the highest human quality. But by the end of the 20th century, the White Chrysanthemum Society began soul-searching. They proceeded to merge the rational thinking of science with Japan's traditional etiquette. Gradually, body donation is being accepted as a virtue by Japanese society. But the White Chrysanthemum deliberately removes all religious connotations and bases its belief on science. Its aim is not to help deal with death, nor to provide guidance in overcoming the fear of death. It also does not seem to emphasise the sublimation of grief through the donation process. Instead, its aim to maximise the effective use of bodies is based purely on practicality: in the spirit of Jeremy Bentham, the British founder of utilitarianism, they hold that the aim of all social and political institutions should be the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Not only do the students show respect; through donation the bodies have become objects useful to society."

In his impressive article, Rey shows how, without detracting from the rational, scientific spirit here described, Tzu Chi has added to the proceedings, often at the Master's personal suggestion, features which indeed help those involved to "deal with death and provide guidance in overcoming the fear of death". This noble cultural edifice is built on Japanese foundations.

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