Community and the New Buddhism in Taiwan

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Abstract: Chinese folk religion played an important role in strengthening ties between families in village temple communities, but in so doing it created boundaries between one temple community and another. Moreover, with the mass migration to urban areas over the past fifty years, the great majority of the population no longer lives in local rural communities. This paper, based on survey and interview data in addition to secondary sources, will argue that Taiwan’s new Buddhist groups (Tzu Chi 慈濟, Foguangshan 佛光山, Fagushan 法鼓山, Lingjiushan 靈鷲山, Fuzhi 福智, and Zhongtai Chansi 中台禪寺) not only have a positive effect on community formation by providing venues where like-minded people can get to know each other, the communities created are inclusive, vitiating ethnic/political divisions in Taiwan.

Key words: socially-engaged Buddhism, social capital, community generation, migration, modern Taiwan society.
Introduction

In the 1950s and 1960s many Western social scientists predicted that as societies modernized, they would move toward a democratic political system, and although modernization theory has been roundly criticized on various grounds, one could argue that in some quarters democratization is still seen as a vital first order change for developing societies—as witness American policy for post-Saddam Iraq. However, others are not so sanguine. Snyder argues that in countries with an ethnically or religiously pluralist population, especially if the democratization process significantly threatens the privileges of the elite, there is a good chance that either war with a neighboring country or internal strife will break out (2000; see also Bell 2004). Inglehart and Welzel demonstrate that if the values of a society are not supportive of democracy, efforts at democratization will fail, as in the case of the “democracy without democrats” Weimar Republic (2005).

As a new democracy, Taiwan has some of the conditions that Snyder says have produced conflict in other new democracies: “deep social cleavages” based on ethnic divisions (Madsen 2007:xxii), a déclassé second-generation elite, and a sensationalist press (2000). Happily, these ethnic cleavages are not overlaid with religion as they are in countries such as the former Yugoslavia. In Taiwan, I will argue, the manifest growth in religion, in particular Buddhism, rather than exacerbating the usually latent ethnic tensions has been a force for rendering them unimportant. Rather than producing animosity, it has helped to create a kinder, more embracing and compassionate society (See Schak [forthcoming]). This paper examines Taiwan’s new Buddhism and its contributions to community formation and unity in Taiwan society at both the local and national levels. Specifically, it will examine, first, the role that the growth of Buddhism has played in generating nodes of community in Taiwan’s highly and relatively recently urbanized society, and, second, how it has been a force to reduce rather than inflame ethnic tensions that, at least at the political level, could easily threaten Taiwan’s democracy and society.
Aside from various secondary sources, the data for this paper come from a project\textsuperscript{1} to study the relationship between Taiwan’s new Buddhist groups on one hand and social capital, civil society and citizen-level participation in democratic politics (i.e. taking a sufficient interest in politics to be informed and to vote) on the other. This project, which commenced in 2003, examines six groups, Tzu Chi, Foguangshan, Dharma Drum, Lingjiushan, Fuzhi and Zhongtai Chansi. Although Buddhism itself has been in China for close to two millennia, all these groups originated locally and recently, two in the 1960s, the others in the 1980s. Data collected include observations, qualitative interviews with members and cadres, and a random, stratified sample, telephone survey carried out by the Survey Research Centre, Academia Sinica in July 2004.\textsuperscript{2}

\begin{itemize}
  \item 1. The grant in support of the project, “Constructing a Public Sphere in Taiwan: the Contributions of Foguangshan and Tzu Chi to the Establishment of Civil Society in Taiwan” (RG004-P-02), is from the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation; I express my gratitude to the Foundation. I also wish to thank the Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica, for their hospitality to me as a visiting scholar and to the many researchers there who assisted and befriended me, in particular Chiu Hei-yuan, who analyzed my survey, and to Hsiao Hsin-huang and Chang Mau-kuei.
  \item 2. The survey’s purpose was to examine reported behavior and attitudes relevant to social capital, civil society, social and civic participation, government related institutions and society in general, comparing persons claiming affiliation with one of the Buddhist groups under investigation with persons not claiming such an affiliation. Interviewers rang over 18,000 telephone numbers. If the household had someone aged 30 or over who was willing to be interviewed they were then asked if they had participated in any activities of any of the six Buddhist groups. If they had, they were identified with that group. If they had participated in more than one, they were asked which they had participated in for the longest group and were then identified with that group. If not they were assigned to the “public” category. The initial aim was to obtain one hundred or
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The Problem of Community in Taiwan

It is safe to say that in 1895, when Japanese colonization began, most people in Taiwan lived in neighborhood-based communities, villages made up of several surname groups who were on one level competitors, striving to maximize their own group's prosperity but on another were generally united by common worship at the village temple (Baity 1975). These temples also functioned as a venue for people to chat, smoke or otherwise idle away the time. The village temple community also set residents apart from those in surrounding villages in such matters as access to irrigation water or possible encroachment of village land. Emphasizing the village boundaries of the temple community, many temples had funds, which could be used for minor welfare activities or loans, but recipients were restricted to community members. Thus, these temples were the foci of both an inclusive and an exclusive community.

Even in the 1950s, the majority of people lived in such villages or in small towns where they were on at least a face recognition basis with most of their neighbors. In small towns neighborhoods were stable and since there were few motorized vehicles, residents spent a fair amount of time on the street, shopping or worshipping at a local temple, or sitting outside on hot summer evenings to cool them-
selves. Even in the large cities, there were some neighborhood communities: blocks of houses given to various government bureaus as residences for their employees; areas near military bases where military families lived; squatter areas where much of life was lived on the street (Schak 1972); and even some of the shop-house areas in the long-settled parts of cities.

What disrupted these communities were migration and the expansion of cities which engulfed adjacent villages. Taiwan is similar to many other countries in having gone from a mainly rural society with strong communities to a highly urbanized society in which village populations have declined and their composition has changed, and its cities have grown by several orders of magnitude, largely through migration. Migration began shortly after Japanese colonization in 1895. At that time, Taipei’s population was around 47,000 (Speare et al. 1988:60). By 1904, it had grown to 85,890. The following year, the Japanese government united three old settlements and their environs to make an area of 1000 hectares meant to house a planned population of 150,000. Taipei exceeded that by 1913; it grew to 281,852 by 1931 (Chiang & Hsiao 1985:194-95) and 392,000 in 1940. In 1945 its population was about 350,000; soon afterward around half a million Japanese in Taiwan were repatriated but were more than replaced over the next five years by a million and a half migrants from China, many of whom settled in Taipei, swelling its population to 616,000 in 1950 and 1.097 million in 1960 (Speare et al. 1988:65). From 1960, aside from natural increase and a boundary expansion, which added about fourteen per cent in 1968, Taipei’s growth has come from migration from other parts of Taiwan. Taipei City presently has 2.632 million (Interior 2007), and the Taipei Metropolitan Area over six million (Civil Affairs 2007).

Beginning in the 1950s villagers left in gradually increasing numbers to find more remunerative work, to continue their education or, in the case of young males when they reached twenty years of age, to fulfill their military obligation. Migration to urban areas caused disruption on two levels. First, it severely disrupted village communities as a whole as they were emptied of that segment of the population which would otherwise reproduce and replenish them. Moreover,
because economic opportunities in villages were generally very limited, once having left, migrants did not usually return, at least not until after finishing their working lives. Community worship was to some extent preserved for a while as migrants made visits home at least annually, for the Chinese New Year, and, depending on their circumstances, for important festivals such as tomb-sweeping.

Migrants, however, were usually scattered in various cities and neighborhoods and generally lost access to a community. Those documented by Bernard and Rita Gallin are an exception. They left the village in a typical chain migration fashion, and many ended up working in Taipei’s central markets, also living relatively close to each other, which facilitated frequent contact between them. Many years later, led by some more prosperous migrants, they set up a branch of their home temple in nearby Banqiao (2001). However, their experience was definitely not the norm; while chain migration was not uncommon, being employed in the same area was, and given the long work hours and infrequent days off, making regular contact with fellow villagers in different parts of the city problematic. Having a sufficient number of fellow villagers in an urban area far from home to set up a branch temple was even more difficult. Therefore, community for migrants consisted of occasional contacts with fellow villager migrants and friends occasionally made through lengthy periods of association or work.

Urban communities, which were never as strong as those in villages, began to deteriorate in the 1980s, when new housing developments were built on the increasingly distant fringes of cities and when older parts of cities, particularly those containing single-level, wooden Japanese houses, were razed to make way for high-rises. These redevelopments destroyed those communities that had developed in the thirty-plus years since they had been settled by Chinese,\(^4\) including areas occupied by co-workers. Also replaced with

\(^4\)Prior to 1945 they had been occupied by Japanese residents; they were taken over by the incoming Kuomintang 國民黨 government and used to house government employees and military officers.
high-rises were squatter settlements scattered throughout the cities, and since residential units in them were very small with few facilities, residents spent more time outside where they could more easily interact with their neighbors. When residents in these two types of housing were resettled, they were often scattered and had new neighbors. Moreover, living in multi-family buildings, interaction with old acquaintances declined.

Taiwan’s New Buddhist Groups

Around the time that industrialization, urbanization and migration were undermining communities in Taiwan, Buddhism was growing. Buddhism has been a part of Chinese folk religion for centuries, if not millennia, Buddhist deities such as Guanyin being worshipped alongside both ancestors as well as folk and Daoist divinities. This posed no problem to worshippers, whose notions of the supernatural were open to including any powerful being who could harm them or bring them benefit. Buddhism as a religion in its own right had been very weak in Taiwan, and even up to the end of the nineteenth century, would be initiates had to go to Fujian to be tonsured. In Taiwan itself, the closest practices to Buddhism were found in the “vegetarian sects” (齋教) (see Jones 1999).

This began to change with the influx of Buddhist monks from China in the late 1940s, a number of whom had been disciples of the reforming monk, Ven Taixu (太虛大師), and his socially engaged Buddhism (人間佛教). Among these was a talented young monk, Ven Xingyun (星雲法師), who at age twenty-five went to a temple in Yilan to spread the dharma. Few would have predicted at the time that such a beginning would lay the foundation of Buddhism’s spectacular growth in the 1980s and 1990s. Yilan, though not far from Taipei in absolute distance, was remote because of the geophysical barriers.

5. This term literally means “Buddhism for the human realm,” but I prefer to render it as socially engaged Buddhism because that better describes what it is. Others render it as engaged or humanistic Buddhism.
surrounding it. Its population was small, poor and composed largely of Hoklo speakers generally lacking facility in Mandarin. Ven Xingyun not only spoke no Hoklo but his Mandarin was thickly accented. However, with perseverance, the help of a translator and innovative communication methods, he attracted a large congregation. In the 1960s, he took his message to the more populated south of Taiwan near Gaoxiong, and by 1967 he had a sufficient following to begin building the Foguang Mountain\textsuperscript{6} Monastery, a large and, especially for the time, quite impressive compound which also contained a large Buddhist seminary and temples for both monastic and lay devotional activities. Moreover, its ornate and colorful decor gave it some of the elements of a theme park, inspired by a visit he made to Disneyland, which attracted large numbers of visitors as well as a good deal of publicity.

Another event, which gave Buddhism a growth spurt, was the building of the Tzu Chi Hospital in Hualian. Tzu Chi\textsuperscript{7} began in 1966, at that time numbering only thirty members and six nuns, including founder Ven Zhengyan (證嚴法師). Initially, unlike Ven Xingyun, she appears to have had more humble goals in terms of growth; Tzu Chi had only 293 members in 1968 and 8000 in 1986, when the hospital opened. At first, the hospital was just an idea, though one of heroic proportions: a nun representing a small organization in Hualian, which, like Yilan, was remote, wanted to build a first-class medical facility in a poorly served and difficult to reach area—truly a David vs Goliath struggle. However, the media picked up the idea, and the public responded with donations and interest in the group. The government also assisted in helping to procure land.\textsuperscript{8} By the year following the hospital's opening, 1987, Tzu Chi's membership had reached 102,000; it then doubled each year to 1991 and reached four

\textsuperscript{6} This marks the beginning of Foguangshan (佛光山) or Buddha's Light.
\textsuperscript{7} The full formal name is Buddhist Compassionate Relief Merit Association (佛教慈濟功德會).
\textsuperscript{8} In 1967, the government instructed all temples to become involved in charity work (Madsen 2007:34).
Meanwhile, Buddhist groups began appearing on university campuses in the 1960s and 1970s where their message included issues such as environmental protection, personal morality, and compassion for the unfortunate. Although these messages were also carried, perhaps even more powerfully and actively, by Christian groups, Buddhism was attractive because, while it originated in India, it has a close to two thousand year history in China and has accommodated itself to Chinese culture to the extent that it is more usually referred to as “Chinese tradition Buddhism” (漢傳佛教) rather than Mahāyāna Buddhism (大乘佛教). Christianity, by contrast, is foreign, and affiliation with it requires a much stronger break with Chinese culture and social practices. Christianity may also be tainted in some people’s minds because of the close association of its leaders with the Chiang Kai-shek 蔣介石 government (see Madsen 2007:12-13). The exception is the Presbyterians, who have been active in providing social relief and medical care since the nineteenth century. It also has close affinity with the Hoklo speakers, having transliterated the Bible into Romanized Minnan, enabling otherwise illiterate persons to read the Bible after a short period of study. Its leaders also stood on the side of the Taiwanese population during the Japanese occupation from 1895-1945 and did what it could to further their cause.10 However, the Buddhist worldview appealed to young university students, both on its own merit as well as giving them a way to assert their ethnic identity as Chinese as opposed to the association of Christianity with

9. Tzu Chi’s definition of membership is based on the number of persons making monthly donations of whatever amount, moreover, it is cumulative, not deducting persons who stop donating. Thus, while Tzu Chi has claimed five million members in 2005, an upper-middle level employee told me that there were about 1.25 million active members at the time.

10. This probably explains the prominence of Presbyterians in the anti-Guomindang government dictatorship during the time when Taiwan was governed by Chiang Kai-shek and his son Chiang Ching-kuo.
the West; it was also an antidote to the spiritual-ideological vacuum in Taiwan at the time.

The growth of Buddhism accelerated in the 1980s, when Dharma Drum, Zhongtai Chansi, Lingjiushan and Fuzhi were established, and it surged following the passage of the civil organizations law (人民團體法) in 1989, which did away with state corporatist controls, and the democratic reforms which followed. Laliberté cites a 1992 Ministry of Interior survey showing that 48% of respondents claiming one or more religious beliefs identified as Buddhists, 4,856,000 persons (1999:4). However, according to other national survey data, 38.5 per cent of respondents claimed to be Buddhists in 1994 and 26.3 per cent in 1999 (Zhang 2000:240). The same survey also found that 12.6 per cent of respondents had attended a Tzu Chi activity, 3.7 per cent a Foguangshan activity, 2.3 per cent a Dharma Drum activity and 1.0 per cent a Zhongtai activity (Zhang 2000:270-76); the surveys did not inquire into the two smaller groups.

More recent survey data found that 28.2 per cent of respondents self-identified as Buddhists. Of those 63.37 per cent had participated in a Tzu Chi activity, 5.23% in Foguangshan, 4.65 per cent in Dharma Drum, and 3.49 per cent in Zhongtai (Zhang and Fu 2005:144, 146). Claims of follower numbers by the groups are as follows: Tzu Chi five million; Foguangshan one million; Dharma Drum 480,000, Zhongtai 400,000; Lingjiushan 100,000; Fuzhi 100,000.11

Four of these groups (Tzu Chi, Foguangshan, DDM and Lingjiushan) describe themselves as practicing engaged Buddhism, meaning that they are concerned about and involved in society (入世). The

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11. Field research data. Also the figures on identification as Buddhists need examination. Zhang and Fu show that in 1984, 46.9 per cent identified themselves as Buddhists while in 2005, the figure was less than half that, 20.9 per cent. However, Daoist increased from 7.2 to 13.5 per cent and folk religion from 21.6-41.4 per cent. My guess is that whereas in the past, most people who were not Christian identified themselves as Buddhist, but Buddhist in the traditional, syncretic sense, they are now more sophisticated and see both Buddhism and Daoism as religions in their own right, separate from folk practices (民間宗教 or 拜神祭祖).
other two do not, but they, too, contribute to making the world a better place, though Zhongtai Chansi’s contributions are marginal. Their involvements vary in how directly they contribute to community building, but the overall message is to reach out to others, to transcend the self, to be concerned about and engage with others.

Involvement takes several forms. The engaged groups generally cite four or five categories of engagement: culture, education, medical/healing, philanthropy and disaster relief, and environment. Most common is “culture,” which refers to making Buddhist and Confucian materials available through their publishing arms. This reflects the main goal of Buddhists, spreading the dharma so that people can purify their hearts. In addition, Foguangshan promotes art, the founding Master Xingyun believing that appreciating art makes the mind more receptive to the dharma. The Foguang Mountain monastery has a large art museum and branch temples I have visited have some sort of art display. Lingjiushan, which has a strong emphasis on world peace and ecumenism, has established a different sort of museum, a Museum of World Religions (世界宗教博物館) located in Yonghe, a suburb of Taipei. The museum has exhibits representing all the major religions of the world and some folk religions as well. A central purpose of the museum is to present different religions to the public in a non-judgmental and generally positive light and so generate tolerance and acceptance of different belief systems. In terms of community building, however, because little human interaction is involved, these cultural activities do very little.

The same is true of education. Five of the six groups discussed in the paper have educational facilities including, on a case-by-case basis, kindergarten primary, secondary, vocational, tertiary and postgraduate. Tzu Chi also has a medical school. These schools are staffed

12. Several of the groups have a strong emphasis on Confucianism, especially Confucian ethics, and their book shops carry The Analects and other materials.

13. The Lingjiushan Master, Ven Xindao (心道法師), stated in an interview that he regards all religions as dharma paths.
mostly by professional teachers and administrators, and clerics are rarely involved in teaching. Three also have monastic education to train clerics and lay persons, Foguangshan conducts community education courses, and two groups, Fuzhi and Lingjiushan, contribute to the Life Education (生命教育) program of the Ministry of Education.\textsuperscript{14} They and Tzu Chi also run summer retreats for teachers and principals. Although the groups contribute to the public stock of education, this does not involve much interaction between members or members and the public, although Foguangshan partly funded Foguang University by having members get their kin, friends and neighbors to contribute NT$100 per month toward the building of a Buddhist university.

More directly contributing to community building are medical service, charity and disaster relief and environmentalism. Regarding medical services, Tzu Chi is now building its fourth Taiwan hospital, and Foguangshan has sponsored mobile clinics to provide free medical care to those living in remote regions since the 1970s. The first Tzu Chi hospital initiated the scrapping of the registration fee so that anyone needing treatment, no matter how poor, would be admitted.\textsuperscript{15} Although medical or clinical care does not normally generate community, the Tzu Chi hospitals use large numbers of member volunteers to greet people at the door and help them register, find the department they need to access, assist staff and visitors, and visit patients to keep them company while in hospital and check on their condition after returning home. These volunteers, in directly interacting with the public, add to the social links, which make up community generation.

The four self-described engaged groups are all involved in social

\textsuperscript{14} This program was initiated in the 1990s to replace Three People's Principles (三民主義) studies. Religious and community groups can contribute lesson material, which can be spiritual but not denominational, and schools are free to adopt that which appeals to them.

\textsuperscript{15} Previously, hospitals demanded a registration fee which had the effect of denying treatment to the poor. Tzu Chi’s initiative forced other hospitals to drop this practice.
service projects helping poor or disadvantaged segments of society. Lingjushan volunteers work with children in single-parent families, Dharma Drum assists families whose income level makes them ineligible to receive income assistance from the government but who are still needy; Foguangshan has long had a prison program working especially with drug addicts, an orphanage, and an old folks home; and Tzu Chi has poverty assistance programs in the Hualien area. In addition, its overseas branches engage in projects with the local population. In Queensland, for example, the local branch has contributed to a Catholic women’s hospital and more recently sponsored a dental health program in the outback.16

All the groups contribute to disaster relief, though Fuzhi, being a small group with fewer than 25,000 active members, does so indirectly, collecting money and giving it to organizations equipped to assist directly. Both Tzu Chi and Foguangshan have been active for many years in China, especially providing sustenance for disaster victims and building schools. Tzu Chi, again through local volunteers, has assisted in disaster relief around the world, e.g. Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, bush fires in Australia, and earthquakes in Turkey and Pakistan. In the aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, several of the groups had projects in Sri Lanka and other affected areas.17 Dharma Drum began an overseas disaster relief program in 2004 and through donation drives and sending volunteers have since assisted in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Indonesia Bangladesh the Philippines and Peru.

For people in Taiwan, however, the most direct experience of Buddhist disaster relief was after the 1999 earthquake. Although Tzu Chi, Foguangshan, Dharma Drum and Zhongtai, as well as other philanthropic and religious organizations and the civil authorities, sent

16. Almost all of Tzu Chi’s overseas relief programs are initiated and funded by those in local branches.
17. Foguangshan claims that about half its million members reside abroad, and Tzu Chi also has branches wherever there are concentrations of Taiwanese migrants or sojourners. The latter’s overseas projects are usually carried out by Taiwanese residing in the local area of the work.
personnel, equipment and relief supplies to assist the victims, the public is likely to have been most aware of Tzu Chi. Because of its action set-like\textsuperscript{18} organizational structure it was able to communicate with large numbers of cadre in a very short time who were then able to contact members for whom they were responsible and swing into action. Tzu Chi members in the areas which suffered severe damage almost immediately set up relief stations and began to help the injured, while those in unaffected areas collected meals, bottled water, medical supplies, tents, blankets, etc., which they then transported to the affected areas. Indeed, Tzu Chi was assisting people many hours before government teams arrived. Especially after seeing the results, those involved in Tzu Chi’s efforts would have felt themselves to be parts of both a smaller face community based on fellow volunteers in the local area and an island wide community united in carrying out one of Tzu Chi’s missions.

Finally, all groups also have a manifest concern with the environment. In addition to emphasizing resource conservation, including limited consumption, Tzu Chi and Foguangshan have recycling programs, which involve volunteers sifting through trash to find recyclable materials and render them saleable to various recycling companies. Tzu Chi also manufactures various products such as shopping bags and mobile phone holders from recycled materials. Lingjiushan has sponsored international conferences on various aspects of the environment, such as a 2005 symposium on water, and has a project in Fulong, the town adjacent to its monastery area, of periodically cleaning up the beach. Dharma Drum stresses environmentalism of both the physical world and the individual heart (心靈環保).

Fuzhi began an organic agriculture program some years ago. It bought land in Nantou County to grow such produce itself and also

\textsuperscript{18} An action set is a vertical, pyramid-like network with many strands going down from the top, each strand representing links to multiple lower level strands, and several levels of such strands. A message from the top can thus reach many, many persons on the ground in a very short time. See Mayer 1968.
encouraged local farmers to grow crops organically, promising to buy their produce. It did this for environmental and religious reasons: to protect the health of the farmers by lessening their exposure to agricultural chemicals, to protect the life forms in the soil which are harmed by such substances, and to provide safe food for consumers. Initially the food produced was intended for its members, but others gradually became aware of the availability of organic products and asked that they also be allowed to buy. Fuzhi has since established a retail business, the Liren shops, for that purpose, and they are now an important source of its funds.

**Buddhism and the Generation of Community**

Taiwan’s new Buddhism groups contribute to community formation in a variety of ways. Most fundamentally, they bring people together who would not otherwise meet each other. All groups hold major dharma meetings, but these are infrequent and are large and thus not conducive to making new acquaintances. However, there are also local branches spread throughout Taiwan as well as branches overseas, and activities take place at branch level several times per week. Although their primary functions are worship, dharma study, meditation, or volunteer work for the group or branch, some socializing takes place on even the most solemn occasions, and there are also activities which are mainly social in character.

The methods of recruitment also contribute to community generation. Groups try to attract new members by publicizing meditation retreats, study courses on a particular sutra, the charisma of

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19. Taiwanese farmers had the highest pesticide use rate per capita in the world.
20. To Buddhists all life forms are equal and Buddhists are committed to protect all life forms.
21. The local branches act as local voluntary associations, and Little shows that regardless of the primary aim of an association one of the functions it fulfills is to bring people together, that is the or not (1965).
their leader, their large Water and Earth Dharma Meetings (水陸法會), special events or their social service or relief activities.

Another commonly used method is to get members to bring others in and to recognize success. To become a cadre or leader in a branch or a group, ordinary members must become “commissioners” (委員), and a common qualification for that is to recruit a set number\(^\text{22}\) of “financial” (contributing)\(^\text{23}\) new members and undergo a period of training. Those aspiring to become commissioners often begin by inviting friends, kin and acquaintances to make regular monthly contributions and to participate in group activities.\(^\text{24}\) One way to do this is by talking to intended recruits. Another is to invite groups of people to one’s home for a social occasion such as a tea party,\(^\text{25}\) not only attracting newcomers but also bringing strangers together in a situation conducive to their getting to know each other. Moreover, some of those recruited will wish to become commissioners themselves, so they continue the process, recruiting from their own networks and neighborhoods.

Having recruited members, commissioners have a duty of care toward them. In Tzu Chi, for example, the commissioner is referred to as her (usually her) members’ “mother hen,” (母雞) and they as her “little chicks” (小雞).\(^\text{26}\) Mother hens visit their recruits monthly, in part to collect their monthly contribution but also to visit with them, inquire as to how they and their family are doing, invite them to

\(^{22}\) Generally from 25 to 40, depending on the group. Nomenclature differs from group to group.

\(^{23}\) The amount is not definite but ranges from NT$100 (US$3) to as high as the person is able to give.

\(^{24}\) Interview data shows that a common method of recruiting new members is by those already members bringing their friends and relatives in. See also Huang 2009.

\(^{25}\) Membership in the groups is around 70 per cent female, and their acquaintances are also likely to be female.

\(^{26}\) Pacey notes that these terms respectively denote experienced and new commissioners (2003:94-95), but an interviewee said they had also been used as stated above though their use had been discontinued.
upcoming activities or ask them to volunteer. This increases the chances that the members will become active in the group and the community it constitutes. Lingjiushan commissioners, though not using the Tzu Chi terminology, have a similar relationship with members they have recruited.

Several of the groups periodically ask members to volunteer or attend meetings at the main monastery, a large Dharma Meeting, a recycling center, a hospital or a clinic, taking them out of their normal social circle and providing opportunities to meet people new to them. Social service activities by volunteers are also opportunities to expand one’s network. The two larger groups, Tzu Chi and Foguangshan, sometimes even bring overseas cadre back to Taiwan for activities at their headquarters or send teams of volunteers overseas to work on projects.

Aside from the social interaction that takes place in meeting and carrying out activities together, these groups provide a good deal of symbolism promoting group unity, the oneness of the involved and a singleness of purpose. Commissioners and volunteers have uniforms, from the blue and white of Tzu Chi to the more colorful, formal Chinese dress (qipo) of Lingjiushan and Foguangshan. All the founders of the groups are charismatic in their own way, and in working for the group, members also have a sense of unity in carrying out the leader’s will.

Tzu Chi has even developed its own “culture” and the notion of the “Tzu Chi person” (慈濟人). First, it differs from the other groups in that while their emphasis is on conventional methods of cultivation such as dharma study, chanting and meditation, it stresses doing (做就對了). Second, it has developed its own ways of doing things. For example, when members walk together from one place to another they do so in formation. It has a tea ceremony, which stresses precise movements and postures. It has its own prescribed way to hold a rice bowl and to eat, e.g. eating should be done with chopsticks as that is “more sanitary.” In Tzu Chi people greet each other not by “Amitabha” (阿彌陀佛) as other Buddhist groups do but “gan en” (感恩), an expression of deep gratitude. Doing everything together or in the same way demonstrates that “we are all of one
heart.” Finally, it has developed a method of “singing,” using hand and arm movements (手語).

Although these symbols of unity are powerful reminders of being a part of a particular group, this group identity does not translate into a sort of “we are the only way” exclusivity. Buddhists are fond of saying that in Buddhism there are 84,000 dharma gates (法門), i.e. ways to cultivate the self and attain salvation. Thus, some like the Tzu Chi way, while others prefer more meditation such as Dharma Drum and Zhongtai provide, more dharma study, which can be found in Fuguangshan, the Tibetan and Theravāda approach provided by Fuzhi and Lingjiushan, or the emphasis on chanting as preferred by the followers of popular television evangelist Ven Jingkong (淨空法師). Lingjiushan founder Ven Xindao even regards Christianity as a dharma gate. Tzu Chi recently commissioned a number of South African women who were strong Christians, and in a sermon given at the presentation, Ven Zhengyan stated that it made no different whether someone was a Chinese or a Zulu, a Catholic, a Mormon, or a member of Yiguandao—“they’re all good.” To her, what was important was serving others.

Interviewees saw different groups as having different emphases and strengths, but with the exception of some Zhongtai members who criticized Tzu Chi’s social welfare efforts, they did not see their group as best or true and the others as inferior. In interviews, I found that members of other groups donate monthly to Tzu Chi because they support what it is doing and want to help. Conversely, some Tzu Chi members, because there is little if any dharma study or meditation practice in the group, attend study and meditation classes

27. Some interviewees had initially participated in others of the groups studied before settling into the one in which they were interviewed.
28. Stated in a conversation between Ven Xindao and the author.
29. They said that many of the poor were poor because they drank or gambled, and providing financial assistance will not help if they waste that aid. At best it cures the symptoms rather than the disease because it does not emphasize purifying the heart.
in other groups. Other Chinese Buddhists attend classes run by lamas because they want to know more about the Tibetan tradition, and some even visit folk temples for various rituals. Taiwan's Buddhist groups generally do not claim exclusive truth or condemn other groups for having inferior dharma.

Buddhist group and branch activities are not the only associations, which generate community for Taiwan's urban population. There are many kinds of voluntary associations in Taiwan, among them: schoolmate associations, hiking clubs, same county associations (同鄉會), sports clubs, reading groups, local opera or drama associations, sports and arts based societies, business and industry groups, service clubs such as Lions and Rotary, temple associations, political groups such as the Taipei Society (城社). There are also informal groups of friends as well as efforts by government to foster local neighborhood pride and identity by providing grants to finance activities to explore local history or special characteristics about the locale or to improve the physical environment. Some ward leaders (里長) are also active in these projects. However, while important, these groups lack the common moral content that mission-driven associations such as religious groups can generate, the strength it can give to extant relationships, or its ability to facilitate the formation of new bonds with strangers. Moreover, Buddhism generally adds to the stock of associations; it does not displace others that could be performing the same function.

As for other religious groups, aside from those self-identifying as folk religion practitioners (worship of local gods and sacrifice to ancestors), in the latest Social Change Survey, Buddhism is the largest religious identity in Taiwan. Protestants appear to have maintained their numbers, though Catholics were below one per cent, less than

31. Madsen notes that Taiwan's democracy is chaotic and seems to imply that it is weak (2007), but government efforts to foster horizontal ties in neighborhoods and communities should allay any such fears if Putnam's findings on Italian democracy are correct (1993).
half their numbers in the survey five years before (Zhang and Fu 2005:117). A part of Buddhism’s success is the publicity it receives, especially Tzu Chi,\(^{32}\) for its relief and other philanthropic work. Being more in the public eye, it attracts more followers and donors. Another strong attraction, especially to the urban middle class, is meditation, which often perceived as a way to relieve the tensions and stresses of high-pressure work. Dharma Drum and Zhongtai Chansi especially benefit from this perception.\(^{33}\) Thus, socially-engaged Buddhism’s contributions to community generation is likely more important than those of other social groups.

**Buddhism and Ethnic Relations**

The other way that Buddhism contributes to community generation is on a macro level, Taiwan as a whole, where it ameliorates ethnic divisions. Ethnic divisions have existed at least since relatively large-scale Han settlement began in the seventeenth century and the Han confronted Taiwan’s aboriginal population (there were undoubtedly divisions between the various aboriginal groups well before then). Initially most of the Han settlers were ancestors of the present-day Hoklo people, originating from various locales around Xiamen in Fujian. At some point, Hakka also began to settle in Taiwan. On the eve of Japanese rule, there were divisions between these three groups, but among Han settlers, identity was primarily defined by the community from which their ancestors and their local religious cults came—Zhangzhou, Quanzhou, Anxi, etc. (Katz 2003). There is no evidence of a “Taiwan” or even a Hoklo or Hakka identity. Resistance to the Japanese was because they were foreigners, not because the inhabitants of Taiwan were self-consciously Taiwanese (Chang 2003).

\(^{32}\) Tzu Chi has a formidable media unit and its own Da-ai television station. Buddha’s Light has a newspaper and has recently also acquired a TV channel.

\(^{33}\) In fact, this is one of their appeals to potential new members.
A Taiwanese identity began to emerge from 1918 and into the 1920s among Taiwanese students studying in Japan who became conscious of the ceding of Taiwan to Japan and Japan’s incursions into China. In the 1930s, there was a division between those, especially the Taiwanese Communist Party, who wanted independence, and those Taiwanese elites who wanted reform and more opportunities for the native population (Chang 2003:37-39; 2004:72-75). The 1930s also saw the implementation of the *kōminka* or Japanization policy of the colonial government during which it, *inter alia*, advanced the adoption of Japanese names, the learning of Japanese and the suppression of Chinese, at least in the print media, and the promotion of Japanese Buddhism at the expense of Chinese Buddhism (Ching 2001, Chang 2004).

The end of World War II brought in yet another ethnic group, the Mainlanders. Although internally the Mainlanders were by no means a homogeneous group—they came from different provinces, spoke various Chinese languages and dialects, and there was rivalry between groups in various government bodies—they were more or less united against the “Taiwanese,” a collective term for Hoklo and Hakka speakers. Moreover, there were misunderstandings between Taiwanese and Mainlanders in the initial period after World War II; Taiwanese wanted a degree of autonomy for Taiwan that went well beyond the strongly centralist values of the Mainlander-imposed Kuomintang government (see Phillips 2003). This led the Mainlanders to believe that Taiwanese were not trustworthy in a political sense, which eventually fomented the 2-28 Incident and the White Terror that followed during which some 20,000 Taiwanese were killed by police and military, and many more imprisoned (Lai, Myers & Wei 1991).

The next forty years saw an authoritarian government in power, Taiwanese generally discriminated against in higher level jobs connected with the public sector, teaching and the military (Chu 1996), attempts to suppress Taiwanese religious activities and thus Taiwanese identity, and the prohibition of Hoklo or Hakka language use at primary and secondary schools and in the governmental sphere. Although discussion of ethnic divisions was suppressed, they
were, paradoxically, kept alive for political reasons until the late 1980s by the practice of identifying people by name, year of birth and native place.\textsuperscript{34} They were also manifest in marriage patterns. Both Mainlanders and Taiwanese objected to their daughters marrying men from the other group. In part, this stemmed from the government’s avowed goal to recover the mainland. If they did so, the Mainlanders would return home, and since women stay with their husbands, Taiwanese women who married Mainland men and vice versa would be separated from their families and perhaps never see them again. There was also prejudice on both sides. Mainlanders felt culturally superior to the Taiwanese. Taiwanese objected to having a Mainlander daughter-in-law, first because she would be unlikely to speak Hoklo or Hakka and would thus be unable to communicate with her mother-in-law;\textsuperscript{35} and second, because Mainlander women were regarded as spoiled and thus unsuitable for the rigorous housework routine a mother-in-law would demand.

Despite this, ethnic tensions seemed to abate in the 1970s and 1980s. First, Taiwan had a large surplus of mainland men over mainland women, resulting in many Mainlander men marrying Taiwanese women. These mixed marriages blurred and diluted the formal ‘native place’ identity as, although children from these marriages had Mainlander fathers and were thus officially classed as Mainlanders, most Mainlander fathers had few if any kin in Taiwan. Thus, the children had much denser Taiwanese kin networks, and they often grew up speaking Taiwanese as well as Mandarin. Second, although there was a proportionately larger Mainlander than Taiwanese middle class, which gave Mainlander children educational advantages, the education system was non-discriminatory, and bright Taiwanese children suffered no structural barriers in progressing to university. Third, Tai-

\textsuperscript{34} This was to remind Mainlanders that their home was Mainland China, not Taiwan, and keep up the “recover the Mainland” spirit.

\textsuperscript{35} At least up to 1980, many Taiwanese women had very limited capacity in Mandarin, and even younger Taiwanese, especially from the small and medium manufacturing sector much preferred to speak Hoklo.
Japanese found open economic niches in commerce and manufacture, and by the mid-1980s had at least caught up with the Mainlanders (Chu 1996).

The violent Gaoxiong Incident in 1979 brought latent Taiwanese nationalism to the surface, but the transformation from authoritarianism to democracy which followed beginning in 1987 was non-violent, sometimes even civil (Chang 2004; Wachman 1994). Moreover, even though the previous elite has lost much power and influence, Taiwan did not follow the “voting to violence” path that has plagued other democratizing pluralistic nations (Snyder 2000, Henders 2004).

Since the mid-1990s, however, ethnic identity has reappeared as a salient issue, though it is usually addressed in terms of the status of Taiwan vis-à-vis China. Mainlanders and some Taiwanese feel that Taiwan is culturally Chinese and should eventually be reunited with China. By contrast, other Taiwanese seek an identity for Taiwan not only separate from but exclusive of China, and since democratization, Taiwan’s executive branch leaders have increased the differentiation between the two. This not only assaults Mainlander cultural sensitivities and sense of identity, but it also symbolizes their loss of hegemony and leaves them feeling threatened politically and economically.36

The growth of Buddhism, facilitated by democratization and the abandonment of state corporatism, took place around the time that ethnic identity was increasingly more stridently expressed publicly. However, Buddhism has had an ameliorating effect on ethnic difference. This was, I believe, epiphenomenal rather than the result of a direct frontal assault on ethnic tensions. Indeed, potentially controversial topics are studiously avoided even in casual conversations in the Buddhist groups. Instead, this issue is attenuated by making it a non-issue, by the example of Buddhists helping those in need regardless of who they are, and at least in the case of Tzu Chi, by cultivating “those habits of the heart that embody a disciplined sense of responsibility for the public good” (Madsen 2007:46).

There is an old English hymn, “In Christ there is no east or west.” While I’ve not heard of a similar song or sutra in Buddhism, it really does not need one because two of its basic ideas are non-discrimination, i.e. all life is equal, one should not make differentiations, and compassion is owed to all beings. So in the dharma it makes no difference whether one is Hoklo, Mainlander, Hakka, Aboriginal, Chinese, foreigner, even male or female. Moreover, in Taiwan Buddhism, this is more than a theoretical notion; it is practiced.

Evidence that ethnicity is a non-issue lies in examining the ethnic composition of the groups, which is found in Table One. If ethnicity were an issue one would expect to reflect that in the ethnicity of members matching that of the founding monastic. As Table One shows, this is not the case.

Data in this table come from the survey mentioned in the introduction. The Chinese characters below the table title denote how the questions were asked by the surveyors. The rows labeled 2001 and 2006 are figures from random samples taken from the Taiwan Social Change Basic Plan Surveys, one prior to and one following my own survey, for comparison of the ethnic composition of Taiwan.

In the discussion below, I analyze only the three major ethnic groups; the numbers of Aborigines are too small to be significant. Regarding religious group affiliation I concentrate on the three largest groups whose numbers of respondents are sufficient to be statistically significant.

### Table 1: Father’s Place of Origin by Religious Affiliation in number and group percentage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hakka</th>
<th>Hoklo</th>
<th>Mld</th>
<th>Abor</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Unk</th>
<th>Refuse</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Buddhists</strong></td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>73.4</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public</strong></td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>70.1</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>72.6</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>649</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

37. See also footnote 2.
Comparing the percentages of Hoklo, Hakka and Mainlander in the Buddhism Total sample with the 2001 and 2006 Social Change Survey samples, the variance is small and unimportant. As the different percentages of Hakka and Hoklo in 2001 and 2006 show, variation from sample to sample is possible and does not mean that there were population shifts. However, the total Buddhist sample for the three larger groups shows that the proportion of Mainlanders attracted to Buddhism is about one-third smaller than their proportion of the Taiwan population. With the exception of Presbyterianism, which is relatively strong among Taiwanese, Mainlanders are much more likely to be Christian.

Turning to Buddhist groups, the percentages of each in the larger three ethnic categories show scant differences with their proportions of the population in general except that there are fewer Hakka than would be expected in Dharma Drum. Dharma Drum personnel I spoke to about this they were unaware of the smaller number of Hakka and were puzzled. However, it turned out that Dharma Drum had only one branch in a predominantly Hakka area, in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2001*</th>
<th>2006*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>75.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>70.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tzu Chi</td>
<td>16.5; 26</td>
<td>73.4; 116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foguangshan</td>
<td>11.5; 6</td>
<td>76.9; 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fagushan</td>
<td>6.8; 3</td>
<td>86.4; 38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhongtaishan</td>
<td>12.5; 2</td>
<td>75; 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lingjiushan</td>
<td>28.6; 2</td>
<td>4; 57.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuzhi</td>
<td>14.3; 1</td>
<td>71.4; 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(Fu and Chang 2007:99). Note: figures in normal font are actual numbers of persons in each group; those in italics are percentages.

38. It may reflect the efficacy of the Hakka consciousness movement's emboldening people to declare that they are Hakka.
39. I use this term in the English sense, which includes Catholics.
Taoyuan; there are none in Pingdong Xinzhu or, Miaoli. It does not indicate a rejection of Dharma Drum based on ethnicity.

In fact, the table indicates no ethnic factor in group allegiance despite some objective reasons for there to be some. The Tzu Chi founder and head, Master Zhengyan, is a Hoklo and often gives sermons in Hoklo, though she speaks Mandarin as well. The founders of the other Buddhist groups are all Mainlanders and give sermons in—often heavily accented—Mandarin as they are all from the central or southern parts of China where standard Mandarin is not the regional language. But even if they do not understand the other language, Mainlanders will sit through sermons or chanting in Hoklo, and Hoklo will do the same for those in Mandarin. So it is obvious that persons do not choose a group on the basis of the ethnicity of the founder or leader, and they will endure not understanding what is said some of the time.

Moreover, although the number of Zhongtai respondents is too small to be statistically significant, their ethnic identity is indicative. Three-quarters of Zhongtai members I sampled are Hoklo, the same as their proportion of the total Taiwan population. Yet the founder of Zhongtai, Ven Weijue (惟覺法師), prior to both the 2000 and more stridently in the 2004 presidential elections admonished his members and the public not to vote for candidates from parties regarded as supporting Taiwan independence (however, a plurality of all voters did so in 2000 and a bare majority did so in 2004). I was told that some members left in protest in 2004, but it did not yield a Hoklo membership percentage below the Hoklo proportion of the population in the survey four months later.

Moreover, in 2005, after the stronger of his two admonitions, I attended a Zhongtai meditation retreat aimed at introducing new people to its practices. Other attendees were employees at the Neihu Information Technology Park, who were overwhelmingly Hoklo (as were the members inviting them to come), yet Ven Weijue’s remarks did not deter them from attending. What this shows is that for people interested in Buddhism, it is Buddhism itself that is important, not where the Master is from, or the language generally spoken. Moreover, this non-discriminatory, people are people attitude is manifest
in the targets the groups choose for their charity and relief work.

Conclusions

In this paper, I have argued that Taiwan’s new Buddhist groups have had a very positive effect on community generation and have made significant contributions to replacing the community ties that were eroded as Taiwan industrialised and its rural population migrated to the cities. They have accomplished this for the following reasons. First, they are very popular. Large numbers of people participate in their activities, which translates into thicker social networks and richer social capital for participants. Moreover, the various branches bring together people who in all likelihood would not otherwise have become acquainted, thus the net stock of social capital is increased. Second, the Buddhist groups, by their fundamental Buddhist beliefs and their social activities, are outwardly directed and demonstrate compassion for others, and this encourages members to be socially oriented and establish bonds with others.
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臺灣的新興佛教社群

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摘要：在有村廟的社區中，民間宗教強化社區內家庭間的關係，但同時也造成村與村間的界域。過去五十餘年間大量的都市移民，已造成臺灣大多數的人口不再居住於鄉村社區的現象。根據調查及訪談的資料再輔以文獻材料，本文擬討論臺灣的新興佛教團體(慈濟、佛光山、法鼓山、靈鷲山、福智及中台禪寺)不僅提供志同道合者互相認識的機會，從而有形成同修社群的積極效果，如此形成的社群是具有包容性的，對臺灣族群及政治色彩的對立也有中和的效果。

關鍵詞：人間佛教，社會資本，社區培養，移民，現代臺灣社會。