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Yu-Shuang Yao and Richard Gombrich, *Chinese Buddhism Today: Conservatism, Modernism, Syncretism and Enjoying Life on the Buddha's Light Mountain*. Sheffield, UK: Equinox Publishing, 2022, 127 pp. ISBN: 978-18-00502314, \$80.00 (pbk)

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In *Chinese Buddhism Today*, Yu-Shuang Yao and Richard Gombrich offer a learned introduction to one of two major Taiwanese Chinese Buddhist groups to expand beyond their beginnings on the small and somewhat isolated island where they were born to make a global impact. Previously, Yao, a professor at Fo Guang University in Taiwan, published a study of one of the groups, the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, in her 2012 volume *Taiwan's Tzu Chi as Engaged Buddhism*. In this later volume, Yao combines her insider access to Fo Guang Shan with the lengthy immersion in Buddhist studies of co-author Gombrich, the president of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies in the UK, to highlight the other prominent Taiwanese group, Fo Guang Shan (i.e., Buddha's Light Mountain).

Tzu Chi and Fo Guang Shan share many characteristics. Both were born in Taiwan just as the martial law which had been imposed in the 1950s and had hobbled the development of new religious expressions was being brought to an end in the 1970s. And each established its place in the world as an expression of an early twentieth century movement in Chinese Buddhism called "Humanistic Buddhism." Founded by a mainland Chinese monk, Humanistic Buddhism emerged as a reaction to the dominant forms of Buddhism that Tai Xu (1889–1947), found around him in the tumultuous time of political transition in China. In his view established Buddhism traditions were caught up in ritual, internal explorations, and the afterlife even as they offered little insight on the immediate needs of believers to make their way in the rapidly changing world.

Drawing on influences from the various revolutionary political movements contending for China's heart and the social concern emphases of a rival Christianity, Tai Xu began to develop a Buddhism that challenged monastic separatism, encountered the real world, and emphasized the improvement of human life. Over his life, he was able to travel widely and spread his ideas. Among the places they bore fruit was Vietnam, where a young monk named Thich Nhat Hanh would spread Tai Xu's ideas under the label of "engaged Buddhism."

Shortly before the aging teacher's death, a young Chinese monk initially encountered Tai Xu. After World War II, Hsing Yun (1927–2023) migrated to Taiwan

where he established his own Humanistic Buddhist movement as Fo Guang Shan, a Buddhist monastic order, and its accompanying lay organization, Buddha's Light International Association.

As Yao and Gombrich recount the story of Tai Xu and his passing his teachings to Hsing Yun, they call attention to the distinctive innovation Hsing Yun would make to the tradition out of his own unique life experience. Maturing in the post-World War II era, he was duly impressed by the material success emerging in the West in general and America in particular. In the 1970s, in the immediate wake of Fo Guang Shan's founding, Hsing Yun visited America and founded a branch temple in Los Angeles. Even as he initiated the global spread of his innovative Buddhist teachings, he opened what would become the largest Chinese Buddhist temple in the West in California. Meanwhile, back home in Taiwan he refocused the attention of followers away from targeting life in the Pure Land of the world after death and toward the building of a Pure Land-like world in this life. Hsing Yun has continued to encourage Buddhists to enjoy life utilizing the tools and products of modern life and has advocated the end of the separation of monastic life from the rest of the world.

The main body of *Chinese Buddhism Today* surveys in some detail the activity of the movement in revising traditional Chinese Buddhist rituals for modern consumption; its revised perspectives on the afterlife relative to the key ideas of karma, death and ancestor worship; and the importance of education. Each of these emphases have become the focus of the dominant practice within the movement—practice being, Yao and Gombrich note, far more important in Buddhism than belief. Relative to education, Fo Guan Shan has founded a university adjacent to its showcase California temple, a key demonstration of the readiness of Buddhism encountering the West's intellectual structures.

*Chinese Buddhism Today* is a welcome overview of Fo Guan Shan and the international movement that it has become. Though based in Taiwan, it has been able to build cordial relations with the religiously hostile government in mainland China. Though having its major strength in the relatively isolated Taiwan, it has been welcomed throughout both the Buddhist world and the Chinese diaspora. Even as it is recognized by the global Buddhist establishment, it has become a force advocating the movement of Buddhism into an encounter with the modern world. Those wishing to understand where Buddhism is going will find Yao and Gombrich's presentation a helpful aid in that endeavor.