Introduction

‘Master Yinshun is a treasure of the Buddha Land, and he also is a treasure of the country. On behalf of the government and the people of the Republic of China, I personally confer the honour of the Second-Class Order of Propitious Clouds, in order to commend his contribution to the society.’

My paper aims to offer some results from my current research project on renjian fojiao and Buddhism in Contemporary Taiwan, with special reference on Master Yinshun _ (1906-).

First of all, I would like to outline briefly the key figures that this paper will focus on: Master Yinshun, the reality of the Buddhist nuns in Taiwan and the phenomenon of renjian fojiao ____ (“Buddhism for the Human Realm”).

Native of Zhejiang (Mainland China) but resident in Taiwan since 1952, Yinshun played a key role in the development of Buddhism in contemporary Taiwan. Yinshun made two main contributions to Chinese Buddhism. First, he is regarded as the founder of the so-called renjian fojiao spread in Taiwan. To summarise, although often translated into English as “Modern Buddhism” and “Engaged Buddhism”, the renjian Buddhism in Yinshun’s thought is the original Buddhism, the True Dharma rooted in the initial Indian Buddhism. In addition, Yinshun is well known for his critical and scholarly approach to the Dharma teachings and practice, which makes him closer to a lay than to a monastic figure, and to the Japanese and Western hermeneutics than to the classical Chinese methodology. Consequently, Yinshun has been called “scholar-monk”, “critical Buddhist” and “contemporary Buddhist thinker”. Because of his large and precious literary production, he has been defined as “the first eminent figure since Xuanzang” (Xuanzang yilai di yi ren ____).

The Buddhist Order of Nuns that exists in contemporary Taiwan is an unprecedented phenomena in the history of Buddhism. That is both the result and a manifestation of the renjian fojiao renewal movement that has spread throughout the island. Nuns have become the main practitioners and propagators of this renewed interpretation of

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1 http://www.hongshi.org.tw/new9302-79.htm
2 Other common Chinese expressions adopted in alternative of renjian fojiao but indicating the same phenomenon are: canyu de fojiao ____ , shehui canyu de fojiao______ , xin fojiao ____ , xinjiaoshi fojiao____ and rushi fojiao____.
the Dharma, both in Taiwan and on the international stage as well. The relationship between the nuns’ development and the principles of the renjian fojiao is manifested in the nuns’ active engagement in society. In recent years, an increasing number of nuns have adopted the practice of “engagement in the world” (ru shì ___) rather than the practice of “retirement from the world” (chu shì ___) as a method of Buddhist practice. In contrast to the image of the world-denying renunciant, this mode of cultivation keeps the nuns in contact and in dialogue with humanity in a form of interaction that is both continuous and concrete.

This paper will analyse two nuns, Zhaohui ___ (1957-) and Zhengyan ___ (1937-), who are concretely engaged in society following the principle of “active engagement in the world guided by an ultramundane spirit” (Yī chú shì de jǐngshēn lài zuò ru shì de gòngzuò ＿＿＿＿＿＿). In addition, they are both related to Yinshun, even if in different ways. On the one hand, Zhengyan is a disciple of Yinshun, since she became a nun with Yinshun as ordination master. On the other hand, Zhaohui became a nun under a different master, but made Yinshun become her mentor and guidance later.

Described as “One of the most powerful figures in the Buddhist world” by Charles B. Jones,3 and called “The mother superior of Buddhism” by Ching Yu-ing,4 Zhengyan has also been defined “the Mother Teresa of Asia”. Founder in 1963 of the Ciji Foundation (Ciji gōngdè huì ＿＿＿），Zhengyan undertook the four missions of education, culture, medicine and charity, focusing especially on the last two.

First scholar of Buddhism, then firm activist in defense of animal rights and women rights, Zhaohui outstands for the variety of social engagements that she is carrying on. Founder of the Buddhist Hongshi College (Fojiao hongshi xueyuan ＿＿＿) as well as of the Life Conservationist Association of the ROC (Zhonghua minguo shengming guanhuai xiehui ＿＿＿), Zhaohui devotes her efforts in both educational and cultural initiatives, and humanitarian campaigns, showing concern for scholarly work and social welfare.

Renjian Buddhism is a topic widely discussed in Taiwan and in the West as well. Since 2000, annual conferences on the theory and practice of Yinshun’s teachings have been organised in Taiwan, in celebration of Yinshun’s birthday. Nevertheless, the papers presented on those occasions mainly centred on renjian fojiao and Yinshun as in dialogue with rensheng fojiao and Taixu. In other words, the previous studies on Yinshun and his renjian fojiao focused on the relationship between the “Pre-Yinshun Era” and Yinshun, with special emphasis on the link between Taixu (and his rensheng fojiao) and Yinshun (and his renjian fojiao), looking for a shift, line of contibuity or similarity between the two figures and thoughts. On the other hand, this paper seeks to analyse the relationship between Yinshun and the “Post-Yinshun Era”. My research will question the connection between the fundamental principles of renjian fojiao, as formulated by Yinshun, and its concrete realisation by his followers, looking for any shift and/or gaps between the theoretical teachings of Yinshun and the practical action performed by Yinshun’s disciples. Since my previous research work on Buddhist women in Taiwan, I have decided to consider the two nuns Zhengyan and Zhaohui as case-studies of Yinshun’s disciples.

The analysis of theory and practice of renjian fojiao will cover the two contexts of social engagement and political involvement. As for the social engagement, my investigation will develop on the theme of the relationship between master and disciple and on a generational discourse. On the other hand, my treatise of the political involvement of renjian fojiao will base on the three figures examined here, as representative of this Buddhist tradition, in terms of their positions and related works.

The final part attempts to place Yinshun’s renjian fojiao in the wider context of Contemporary Taiwan and Taiwanese Buddhism. The results of this analysis will offer a more comprehensive and comparative prospect of the different definitions and socially engaged practices of renjian fojiao.

I. Social Engagement

‘Today, in behalf of the government and of the people of the Republic of China, I am here to send birthday greetings and to give this special birthday gift, the medal of the Second-Class Order of Propitious Clouds, to the 100 year old Master Yinshun, who is an eminent Buddhist monk highly admired and respected on the international stage. This gift aims to express high reverence to the virtuous deeds that Yinshun accomplished during his life, his scholarly achievements and the influence that he exerted on the society’\(^5\)

On the 5\(^{th}\) of March 2004, only two weeks before the presidential elections, Chen Shuibian awarded Master Yinshun the Second-Class Order of Propitious Clouds (er deng qing yun xun zhang _______), making him the only religious leader who have received such a honour.\(^6\)

Yinshun has been commended for his contribution to the society, but the Buddhist master responded saying that he has not made any contribution, on the contrary he dedicated his own life to the study and writing (shusheng __). Consequently, I do question if there is any contribution by Yinshun. Or better, is there any concrete contribution made directly by Master Yinshun or is everything result of the works of his disciples, i.e. those

\(^6\) The significance of the Order of Propitious Clouds bases on the characters qing and yun: in the ancient time, that qing was synonymous of qing, and so the “propitious clouds” symbolise the “clouds carrying auspicious signs”. One song of the legendary emperor Yu Shun (ca 2,200 B.C.) is origin of the expression. Since the 12\(^{th}\) of February 1941, the Order of Propitious Clouds has been divided into nine classes, that have been grouped into four categories: (1)1\(^{st}\) to 3\(^{rd}\) Class; (2) 4\(^{th}\) and 5\(^{th}\) Class; (3) 6\(^{th}\) and 7\(^{th}\) Class; (4) 8\(^{th}\) and 9\(^{th}\) Class. Those who may receive this honour are: (1) public officials of the National Government, for their meritorious service and contribution to the nation; (2) people not holding official functions or foreigners, for their distinguished contribution to the society. So far, Yinshun has been the third Taiwanese to have been awarded the Order of Precious Clouds, and the only religious leader among the three people. Here is the complete list of the awarded figures: (1) Zhang Junxiong ____, Executive Yuan, Dean [4 February 2002]; (2) Tao Baichuan ____ , Office of the President, National Policy Advisor [2 August 2002]; (3) Master Yinshun, Buddhist scholar-monk [5 March 2004]. For further details, see: http://www.president.gov.tw/1_art/article/cloud.html.
belonging to the so-called “Post-Yinshun Era” (Yinshun houdai ______)? Finally, how much, and in which terms is this “Post-Yinshun Era” linked to Yinshun?

If these questions will be treated in the following sections of this paper, here I want to focus on what happened on the 5th of March, how Chen Shuibian addressed Yinshun and motivated the award, and how this award is somehow linked to the nuns ZhaoHui and Zhengyan. I quote from Chen Shuibian’s speech:

‘As a reformer and pioneer, Yinshun was usually lonely and could not avoid to be misunderstood. Sometimes he was subject to pression and persecution. Nonetheless, Yinshun did not manifest resentment nor regret, but continued his mission, receiving praise and facing blame with indifference. Master Yinshun said to be “just a foolish Chinese”, but the seeds that he sowed are flourishing now. His literary production influenced numerous Buddhist disciples and scholars. Inspired by the “Buddhism for the Human Realm”, his disciples have some accomplished humanitarian campaigns and obtained admiration throughout the world (like the nun Zhengyan), some others advanced penetrative and sharp reforming actions in the society (like the nun ZhaoHui). His “Buddhism for the Human Realm” initiated the stream of the Contemporary Chinese Buddhism, and influenced deeply the development of Buddhism on the international stage.’

A few months before, on the of 9th of December 2003, Zhengyan was also awarded the Second-Class Order of Brilliant Stars (er deng jing xing xun zhang ______).8 ZhaoHui’s comment follows:

‘Yinshun and Zhengyan, who are the only figures of the Buddhist world who have received this meritorious award, are related as master and disciple, and both are spiritual leaders of the “Buddhism for the Human Realm”. Consequently, this award might be intended as the national

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8 The medal has the shape of a five-pointed star. The “brilliant star” symbolises the “virtuous star”. The origin of this expression can be found in the Tianguanshu ___. The division into nine classes and the criteria of awarding is the same followed for the Order of Propitious Clouds. So far, only three religious leaders were awarded the Second-Class Order of the Brilliant Stars: (1) Archbishop Luo Guang ___, Catholic Church of Taiwan, Former Chairman; (2) Ven. Zhengyan, Ciji Foundation, Founder; (3) Master Yinshun, Promoter of the “Buddhism for the Human Realm”. Since Yinshun is Zhengyan’s master, Chen Shuibian thought it was more appropriate to commend him a higher level award. Consequently, Yinshun has not only been awarded the Second-Class Order of Brilliant Stars, but also the Second-Class Order of Precious Clouds. As for Zhengyan, she had been awarded for her contribution to the society even before. Among the several recognitions, in 1991 she was awarded the Magsaysay Prize (The Asian Peace Nobel Prize), in Singapore, for her role of guidance for the social community. Later, in 1993, she was also candidate to the Nobel Peace Prize, for her devotion to service the others, and for guiding the society to practice the spirit of compassion. For further details, see: http://www.president.gov.tw/1_art/article/star.html.
recognition and tribute to the teachings and accomplishments of the “Buddhism for the Human Realm”\(^9\)

In the same article, Zhaohui commented the award and Yinshun’s *renjian fojiao*. According to Zhaohui, *renjian fojiao*, that embodies the quality of Yinshun’s teachings, influenced and led the Buddhist practice and activism of many Dharma organisations in Taiwan. Zhaohui listed Foguangshan ____ (Gaoxiong), Fagushan ____ (Taipei) and Ciji Foundation (Hualian), and defined the humanitarian campaigns, educational and cultural activities that they have been carrying out as the concrete effect of Yinshun’s theoretical teachings of *renjian fojiao*.

**I. 1 Master Yinshun: theorist and/or activist?**

‘I have not made any contribution, I am just someone who has spent the whole life studying and writing’\(^10\)

This affirmation may offer evidence supporting the theory that Yinshun has made a theoretical, but not concrete, Buddhist participation in the society.

Mustering Yinshun’s works, we find the recurrence of the two Chinese expressions *ru shi* and *renjian fojiao* as index of Yinshun’s idea of the potential participation of Buddhism in the human realm. *Renjian fojiao* is the starting element of a sort of “*renjian* terminology”, a vocabulary including expressions such as *renjian pusu ____* (“Bodhisattva in the Human Realm”) and *renjian jingtu ____* (“Pure Land in the Human Realm”). About the literary production of Yinshun on this theme, I would signal the following works: *Fofa shi jiu shi zhi guang Fofa gai lun____* (1949), *Cheng fo zhi dao ____* (1960), *Fo zai renjian ____* (1971), *Xue fo san yao ____* (1971), *Qingnian de fojiao ____* (1973), ____ ____ (1973), and the essay ‘Qili qiji zhi renjian fojiao’ ________ (1989).

Here I would like to lay the attention on the concept of *ru shi*, as conceived by Yinshun, with reference to the essay entitled ‘Tan ru shi yu fo xue’ ________, dated 1967 and later included in the volume *Wu zheng zhi bian____* published in 1972. In this essay Yinshun based explicity on Taixu’s teachings: according to the latter, the *chu shi* practice belongs to the Lesser Vehicle, while the *ru shi* practice belongs to the Great Vehicle. Yinshun developed this idea even further and made a threefold distinction, by adding the concept of *lian shi__* (“love/attachment for the world”) to *ru shi* and *chu shi*. Yinshun highlighted that the concept of *lian shi*, that may also be worded as *xun shi__* (“desire for the world”), does not refer to any Buddhist teachings, and should so be distinguished from both *ru shi* and *chu shi*. Finally, according to Yinshun, the combination of *ru shi* and *chu shi* can result in the ideal practice of Buddhism. Here is the basis of the principle “Engagement in the worldly under the

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guidance of the ultramundane spirit” on which the Taiwanese Buddhist nuns (Zhengyan and Zhaohui included) rely for their practice.

I. 2 First Issue: Master-Disciple Relationship

‘Besides the Master of Human Life and the Master of S_tras, there a third [teacher] who is superior in strenght of influence and edification: the Guiding Master. A Guiding Master is able not only to provide the human beings with the corpus of wisdom, but also and at the same time, in the journey of the human life, to change and to guide the life path of a human being.’

The analysis of the link binding master and disciple in a not merely religious but specifically Buddhist context involves various themes.

First of all, we should define the terms master and disciple, teacher and student, how to put them in reciprocal relation, and how much the respect for the guiding figure may imply influence and subjection. To speak on the specific cases examined here, we should question how Yinshun related himself to Zhaohui and Zhengyan, which expectations and hopes he held, and how Zhaohui and Zhengyan conceived their connection with Yinshun and fulfilled his expectations.

Zhengyan’s analysis of the different categories of teacher that I have quoted at the beginning of this section can well express the specific relationship between Yinshun and her. In fact, the list of titles given to Yinshun includes Dharma teacher (jā shi __), Elder (zhang lao __), and (in most occasions and for most of the people) Guiding teacher (daoshi__). Zhengyan affirmed:

‘Thanks to favourable causes and conditions, I, Zhengyan, became disciple of the master [Yinshun] in 1963, and afterwards the erudition and patience of the master, his moral integrity and ability in teaching became the source of both my path of life and my corpus of wisdom. In my mind, the master is not only a remarkable teacher of scriptures, but also a successful teacher for the circumstances related to the daily life. Moreover, he is a guiding master whom everyone keeps in high esteem’

Zhaohui refers to Yinshun as daoshi as well. In addition, Zhaohui affirmed that Yinshun represents her “Dharmakaya Parents” (jashen fumu ____), and, speaking on a more personal level, she also said to recognize the kind of link binding grandfather and granddaughter in the relationship between Yinshun and her.

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11 Pan Xuan （2002）Kanjian fotuo zai renjian. Yinshun daoshi zhuan ____________, p. ii
12 Terms such as daoshi, jingshi __ and rensi __ are rooted in the Buddhist culture: Jing shi (Pali: suttantika) indicates who is well acquainted with the Buddhist scriptures, while dao shi (Pali: n_kaya) is who holds the capability to guide the human beings on the Dharma path.
13 Pan Xuan (2002), p. ii
How about Yinshun? How did he refer to the two nuns? As Zhengyan has the full right to be called “disciple” (dizi __), Yinshun has defined Zhaohui his xiao zhiyin ___, that may be translated into English as “young confidant”.

On a more general level, Yinshun tried to distinguish his role from the role of a family relative. Once, in reply to his disciple the nun Huirun __, who affirmed that Yinshun was totally similar to a father for his compassion, Yinshun stressed that a master (shifu __) is a master, and so different from a father (fuqin __). Here is the definition of how teacher/master and student/disciple should be related in the religious context according to Yinshun.14

In addition, asking his followers to make vows and concretise their commitments for the three treasures (san bao __) and not for him, the master recalls another fundamental tenet of Buddhism, and renjian fojiao as well, that is rarely followed within the renjian Buddhist community in Taiwan.15

A second issue concerns the reasons that lead the Dharma practitioners to approach one particular Dharma teacher. Is the potential disciple attracted first and then guided by a particular teaching of the potential master? To return to the present research: Why did Zhaohui and Zhengyan approach Yinshun? And why did Yinshun agree to be their guidance?

As for Zhengyan, who became his ordination disciple, they met casually, or better, to use a Buddhist expression, because of the right yinyuan __, at the Huiri Lecture Hall (Huiri jiangtang ____), Taipei, where she went for buying a copy of the Taixu dashi quanshu _______. Zhengyan (at that time better known with the lay name Wang Jinyun ____) had just been refused to be ordained since she had shaved her hair by herself and did not have an official master for ordination. As she saw Yinshun, she asked him to be her master. Yinshun, unexpectedly, agreed to be her master. According to Yinshun, the reason of his agreement was that she was buying his mentor’s book: the figure of Taixu, the reformer monk in Modern China, the theorist of rensheng fojiao, and one of the teachers of Yinshun, bridged Yinshun and Zhengyan.

An exchange of letters signed the entrance of Zhaohui into Yinshun’s Buddhist environment. Disappointed that his xiao zhiyin was working in the kitchen instead of devoting her time to the study of Dharma, he proposed her to move to the Fuyan Buddhist Institute (Fuyan foxueyuan ____), for both teaching and continuing her Dharma education and cultivation. In this case, significance and implications of the study of the Buddha’s teachings acted as link between the two figures.

In addition, we should investigate how does the chain (are we allowed to adopt the term “lineage“?) continue, and to define if the relationship between Yinshun and his disciples is similar to the relationship between the latter and their own followers. Moreover, we may also wonder if the followers of Zhengyan and Zhaohui are even aware of the existence (and so of the teachings as well) of Yinshun. In other words, in Taiwan today, do we hear about

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14 Pan Xuan (2002), p. 349
15 Pan Xuan (2002), p. 350
Zhengyan as disciple of the eminent Yinshun, or about Yinshun as the master of the outstanding Zhengyan? While in Taiwan, I discovered that most of the times the Taiwanese actually refer to Yinshun as “Zhengyan’s master” and do not do the opposite. Nevertheless, Yinshun’s disciples affirmed to maintain Yinshun’s teachings as fundamentals of their own activism. For instance, in order to express the line of continuity between Yinshun and her, Zhaohui pointed out: ‘The further and new ideas that I have been carrying out later are all rooted in the stream of the master’s thought’.  

Zhaohui’s adoption of the term fapai __ for expressing the link between Yinshun and her may suggest the existence of a sort of “lineage”, of which the initiator is Yinshun and the following generations are Yinshun’s followers.

Therefore, the link between master and disciple implies the issue of the transmission of commitments and missions from the master to the disciple.

Zhaohui affirmed that the teaching of impermanence (wuchang __) is the guiding principle of her life. She read the whole literary production of Yinshun, classified his books and seems to have perfectly understood Yinshun’s teachings. As for how she put the teachings into practice, we can list her engagement in the mission of education (she is teacher and dean of an institute), mission of culture (she is organiser of the annual conferences on Yinshun), mission of social welfare (see Zhaohui’s efforts in LCA, animal rights, women rights).

We can make a parallel between Zhaohui and Zhengyan, Ciji and the four missions: mission of education, mission of culture, mission of charity, mission of medicine. On the other hand, we can single out differences between the activities of the two nuns. Tsai Wen-ting claims: “Today’s nuns are not just full of benevolence and compassion, they can also take on an intimidating aspect”, this statement is well suited to the figure of Zhaohui, because of her singular way to get involved in the society. Zhaohui outstands in Taiwan province and in the worldwide Buddhist sphere for her taking part in demonstrations for the animals rights and the environmental protection. At the beginning of her activism, she was against the snag-fishing, protested against catching and killing animals for entertainment (like the use of animals in circus performance). Finally, her commitment took the shape of the Life Conservationist Association of the ROC, founded on January 6, 1993, by her: this organization is today well-known and highly appreciated on the international stage.

For a better description of her plans of actions and a better understanding of her rule in the worldly Buddhist community, Zhaohui drew up an analysis of the several and different groups of activities aimed to benefit the society and promoted by members of the Sangha. Zhaohui theorised a classification of kinds of organisations based on their ways of acting. First of all, she makes a distinction between “Social Activity” (shehui huodong ______) and “Mission of Charity” (cishan shiye ____), and quoted the Ciji Foundation, founded by Zhengyan, as an example of the category that she called “Mission of Charity”, while the Life Conservationist Association of the

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ROC, founded by Zhaohui herself, as an example of the group that she called “Social Activity”. It’s only right to stress that both the examples here reported by Zhaohui are associations founded and run by Buddhist nuns, in confirmation of these words of Zhaohui: “In the last few years the liberalization of society has provided more space for Taiwan’s bhiksunis to develop”.19 This opinion is shared by Jiang Canteng: “With the liberalization of society, female Buddhists no longer need to play a secondary role”.20

In the opinion of Zhaohui, being actively engaged in the society should have the priority among the responsibilities of the Sangha; actually, she believes that all the religions and all the religious communities have the duty to observe the sufferings and the troubles tormenting the society, and to find in their own doctrines the best way to cure the “ill conditions”. This “getting involved in the humanity” urged by Zhaohui is respectful of the ru shi practice professed by the disciples of the “Buddhism for the Human Realm”.

Zhaohui thinks that standing up for the animal rights is so important as the defence of the human rights is: respecting both the animal and the human rights is necessary for the safeguarding of the society. Her following assertion has to be read in these terms: “A society that does not care the animal rights, does not respect the human rights either”.21 She concludes: “The moral integrity of a country comes out from its attitude towards the animals and its way to take care of the animals”.22

This taking sides of Zhaohui is based on some Buddhist teachings, like the principle of “Equality of all the living beings” (zhongsheng pingdeng _____), the essence of compassion as the best guiding value in the daily life practice, and the Law of Cause and Effect. On consequence of that, Zhaohui asserts: “I think that respecting the animal rights is a necessary step in making harmony and peace in this world”. When she talks about “making harmony and peace in this world”, she refers to the creation of the “Pure Land in the Human Realm” (renjian jingtu), key concept and goal of the “Buddhism for the Human Realm” philosophy.

In the theoretical bases, and in the final aim as well, of the activism promoted by Zhaohui, Jiang Canteng recognised the influence of Master Yinshun: as a matter of fact, besides being the main theorist of the “Buddhism for the Human Realm” propagated in Taiwan today, Yinshun has been her personal mentor.23 However, the way to put in practice Yinshun’s teachings is something peculiar to the figure of Zhaohui.

Zhaohui embarked on her singular career moved by the conviction: “Protecting the essence of life means to appreciate every form of life”,24 and after having personally observed how the chinese people lacked the respect for the animal realm.

‘Zhaohui stated clearly, Yinshun’s teaching of renjian fojiao is the fundamental source of her engagement in movements of social concern’25

20 Ibidem.
22 Ibidem.
23 Zhaohui also wrote a biography of Master Yinshun entitled Renjian Fojiao de bozhongzhe (1995).
As for Yinshun and Zhengyan, a further element that can link these figures is the concept of renjian bodhisattva (renjian pusa____). We may find correspondence between Yinshun’s and Zhengyan’s writings for the definition of the significance of being a renjian bodhisattva. Zhengyan also wrote a book entitled Renjian pusa, published in 1993. The emphasis on the figure of renjian bodhisattva implies attention to the need of practicing the Bodhisattva Path (pusa dao__).

In addition, Zhengyan wrote: “People say that I have created a new sect of Buddhism. That is not true. I am bringing Buddhism back to its original form, which is simple and down-to-earth”.26 This sentence is perfectly in line with what Yinshun highlighted and wrote often as one of the main differences between his mentor Taixu and him. He did not mean to reform the Buddha’s teachings, which was one of Taixu’s mission, indeed he aimed to better explain the Buddhist teachings since, in his opinion, the lack of correspondence between the Dharma and the situation of Buddhism in Modern China was a result of a misunderstanding of the original tenets of Buddhism.

‘The master cultivates compassion and wisdom, so to become the eyes of the blind, the ear of the deaf and the guiding teacher of the human beings [...]. In regards to the doctrine and meaning of renjian fojiao, I, Zhengyan, adopt the appropriate essence and wisdom, practise the correct cultivation, and am wholeheartedly devoted to the mission of compassion and relief [ciji], in order to not be unworthy of the master’s instructions and expectations.’27

First of all, there is the teaching that Yinshun gave to her as he agreed to be her master: “Do be committed to the Buddha’s teachings and to all the human beings” (wei fojiao, wei zhengsheng ________). ‘For Buddhism and for the humanity’: here is the Dharma transmission from master to disciple.

Under another perspective, the relationship between master and disciples should not be read as univocal but as reciprocal and continuous. In other words, there is a continuous exchange between the two sides, Zhengyan and Zhaohui towards Yinshun, as well as Yinshun towards Zhaohui and Zhengyan. Yinshun encouraged the nuns and supported them, but we should also take in consideration how he responds to their activism and practice: wholehearted consent and approval or critical feedback? There is a continuous exchange between the leading figure and the led figure, a form of transmission from master to disciple first, then from disciple to master, and a from master to disciple again, and so on, with the master who keeps giving feedback and supervising his disciples’s practice. The slight changes that Yinshun has made to the theory of renjian fojiao from time to time can be clarified as result of the disciples’ influence on the master.

26 Ching Yu-ing (1995), p. 146
We can also talk of complementarity of roles. In ‘Qili qiji zhi renjian fojiao’ ________, Yinshun stated:

‘Spreading [honghua] the Buddha’s teachings is worthwhile, and to be dedicated to relief work and compassion [ciji] is also worthwhile: Here is the virtuous conduct in the human realm.’\(^{28}\)

Yinshun has been performing hong hua, while Zhengyan (and also Zhaohui even if in a different context) is engaged in ciji: this is a case of complementarity of the roles.

Another of the responsibilities of the master is questioning his disciples’ initiatives. Here is Yinshun’s comment on Zhengyan’s ambitious plan of founding a hospital, of which, however, he was supportive morally and financially:

‘This is a very difficult and complicated thing, it is like as you were willing to devote yourself to humanitarian work, I have told you the same, ask you: Do you have strength and funding sufficient to support your initiative? You must hold resolution and determination.’\(^{29}\)

Finally, the variety of aspects of the master-disciple relationship that I have listed above may be the root of a misunderstanding of the teacher’s teachings. One of the main misunderstandings that we can notice is the fact that some among the Yinshun’s followers might not understand the difference between Yinshun’s thought and position on the one hand, and Taixu’s thought and position on the other hand. How many are taking Taixu’s ideas as leading principles but affirm that they are following Yinshun? This involves hermeneutics, and it may depend on how Yinshun’s first generation of disciples (including Zhaohui and Zhengyan)\(^{30}\) explain Yinshun’s theory. In a certain sense, we may advance a chain/lineage that has Yinshun as the starting point, the Buddhist people as the final point and the first generation of Yinshun’s disciples/followers (including Zhaohui and Zhengyan) acting as a bridge between the two sides.

I. 3 Second Issue: Generational Discourse

As I stressed above, the interaction between master (here intended as initiator of the renjian Buddhism) and disciples (here intended as followers of the master’s theory of renjian Buddhism) might bring some effects to the corpus of renjian fojiao, in terms of moulding (may I say reforming?) its fundamental essence.

Consequently, we may be allowed to talk about a new renjian fojiao, or better, a second generation of renjian fojiao. I am thinking about a “First generation of renjian fojiao ” (di yi dai renjian fojiao ________) and a

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30 For “first generation” I mean the direct disciples of Yinshun, and students of Yinshun (rather than students enrolled in the institutes established but not run anymore by Yinshun, and students of students of Yinshun).
“Second generation renjian fojiao” (di er dai renjian fojiao ________). Or even more, there may be an “Old renjian fojiao” (jiu renjian fojiao _____) facing a “New renjian fojiao” (xin renjian fojiao ______), or indeed, a “Traditional renjian fojiao” (chuantong renjian fojiao ______) dealing with a “Reforming renjian fojiao” (gexin renjian fojiao ______). Recalling the expression “Post-Yinshun Era” (Yinshun houdai _____) that Prof. Lan Jifu coined in contrast to a so-called “Yinshun Era” (Yinshun shidai _____), we are allowed to adopt such a terminolgy.

We should consider Zhengyan and Zhaohui from a different angle, as individuals, figures who were at first indipendent from Yinshun and then encountered Yinshun (and Yinshun’s teachings), “brought” Yinshun into their life and, over all, on their religious (and Buddhist) Path. In other words, they “combined” Yinshun with their life. How Yinshun “changed” their life and how they “transformed” Yinshun’s teachings, in the sense of “adapting” the teachings to their original ideas/purpose of Buddhist practice, and the different historical (sociological and political) conditions where they were/are active are matters of crucial importance.

In this regards, the different times and environments where these figures are active play a considerable role in making the division into two generations. Perhaps everything has one “simple” historical and political explanation. In other words, is that Yinshun was not allowed to do more than writings on renjian fojiao rather than he did not want to do it, while his disciples and students (including the nuns Zhaohui and Zhengyan) could expose themselves more, and actually concretise the principles of renjian fojiao, since they have been living in a different historical moment, political atmosphere and social cultural environment.

Thinking about Zhengyan, the history of Ciji Foundation, and a generational level of analysis, I am tempted to say that the term (significance and implications) of renjian fojiao ______ has been turned into ciji fojiao ______. Terms such as “Ciji World” (ciji shijie _____), “Ciji Spirit” (ciji jingshen _____) have been coined too. In addition, Zhengyan formulated the “Ciji Ten Precepts” (ciji shijie _____) for the Tzu Cheng Faith Corps. The well known expression of Zhengyan “Buddhism is the theoretical principle, while ciji is the concrete action” (fojiao shi li, ciji shi shi _______) signs a further evidence of my statements.

From the description of the meaning of Ciji we can find that Yinshun’s theory is reflected in Zhengyan’s practice, and so we can conclude that “the second generation” of renjian fojiao still embodies the quality of “the first generation” of this Buddhist tradition. The ideal of renjian Bodhisattva and the realisation of a “Pure Land of Earth” (renjian jingtu) are firm points of Zhengyan’s agenda. Reading through Zhengyan’s collections of talks:

‘Tzu Chi commissioners are as compassionate as the bodhisattvas. They serve as the hands and eyes of Kuan Yin, the Goddess of Mercy, who has one thousand eyes to see the suffering people of the world and one thousand hands to help them. Through these commissioners, we can see the enormous power of compassion”31

On her side, Zhaohui:

‘I have been following the master for so many years [...] His world and my world are different. Nonetheless, because of his tolerance and magnanimity, he always listened peaceful and quiet to my analysis on the reasons for participating in marching and demonstrations, sitting protest, anti-nuclear parades, speaking in public for political personages. In my opinion, he is an outstanding open-minded figure, who respects and values the freedom of ideas of any human being.’

II. Political Involvement

‘One is the head of the state, one is a leading authority of Buddhism. No matter if the core of their life is politics or Buddhist teachings, the topic of conversation of these leading figures was tradition and innovation’.

This paper is not meant to give an omnicomprehensive overview of the connection between religion and politics, usually expressed in Chinese as zhengjiao guanxi. Nevertheless, since the recent election and the Buddhist interference that the media reported and discussed, I thought it was inappropriate not to advance an analysis of the recent situation, especially because one of the Buddhists who exposed themselves in public is the nun Zhaohui.

I will start this section reporting on the works of Yinshun that deal with the possible interaction between religion and politics, and then I will pass on what Zhaohui said in response to the Zongtai fact, in order to discover any link between Zhaohui’s position and Yinshun’s thought.

According to Qiu Minjie, Yinshun’s explanation of renjian fojiao was inspiration for the mission of relief (jiuji shiye), environmental protection (shengtai huanbao), innovation in politics (zhengzhi gexin) in the social context. On the one hand, we may notice that the first two missions have been undertaken by his disciples including the nuns Zhengyan and Zhaohui. Zhengyan is the founder of Ciji Foundation, that is especially devoted to medicinal and humanitarian action (the Ciji hospital is its most representative initiative), while Zhaohui is the founder of the Life Conservationist Association, which works for the defense of the animal rights. On the other hand, Yinshun’s inspiration of “political innovation” does not seem to be undertaken by his disciples, and also places Yinshun closer to his mentor Taixu. In a recent work, André Laliberté, after mentioning the accusation of Communist propaganda that KMT moved to Yinshun, concluded: ‘Yinshun thus promoted a return to what he saw

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32 Pan Xuan (2002), p. 357.
34 Qiu Minjie (2000), p. 292. For Yinshun as related to the issue of innovation in politics, see pp. 299-301.
as the fundamentals of the Buddhist tradition and never went as far as Taixu, who has supported radical political trends’.  

The dialogue between Yinshun and Chen Shuibian, especially their previous meeting dated 15 March 2001, may offer further data in support of Yinshun as figure commenting the themes of “politics” and “innovation”. Chen Shuibian affirmed to be indebted to Yinshun’s teaching of the joint practice of Compassion and Wisdom, and to always recall the “concern of compassion” and “truth of wisdom” in his ruling time, in order to control himself and to deal with the nation. In reply to Chen Shuibian, after expressing his shame for the president’s eulogy, Yinshun mentioned the issue of reform and innovation:

‘Reform and innovation are not easy achievements, but the result of a slow action process. Traditions and conventions are accomplished facts, that cannot be eliminated easily and quickly. According to the Dharma, the wordly things cannot be completely perfect, they all have front and back. Many targets may be achieved slowly, little by little.’

Chen Shuibian quoted Yinshun’s Dharma teachings, but especially Yinshun’s conviction that “reforms are not easy to achieve” during some political visits and governmental meetings.

I leave to the audience the decision whether this is a political manoeuvring and exploitation of a charismatic religious leader or the sincere confession of a human being convinced of the validity of compassion and wisdom as leading values in a social and political context.

II. 1 Master Yinshun’s “political writings”

‘In order to benefit and rescue the human beings, the Bodhisattvas can be involved in politics but not necessarily have to be involved in politics’

In 1944 Yinshun gave a speech at the Hanzang Jiaoli yuan on the theme of Dharma as connected with matters such as politics, economics, and so on” (‘Zhengzhi jingji deng yu fofa’), then included in the volume *Fofa shi jiu shi zhi guang*, published in 1973. Part of this speech, as we

find it in its written and published version, concern the interference (intended in terms of positive contribution) of Buddhism (meant in terms of Dharma teachings) to the field of innovation in politics.\(^{38}\)

To summarise the text, Yinshun stressed that the Dharma aims to reform and improve the human life. Purpose of Buddhism is to solve the human sufferings, which are divided into three classes: the suffering that come from the self, those that are originated in the social context, and those that humanity receive from the natural environment. The encounter between Dharma and politics occurs as Buddhism deals with the social sufferings. In this connection, Yinshun explain the twofold contribution that Buddhism can offer: on the one hand, there is the H\_nay\_na Buddhism and the role played by the monastic community, on the other hand there is the Mah\_y\_na tradition and the active engagement (even in politics) of the laity. Monastics and laity have both to combine their efforts in order to realise social improvement.

Yinshun’s conclusion is:

‘Buddhism includes the H\_nay\_na tradition, which focuses on the mind and body purification, on the self, and that affects the society from that side, without being engaged directly in economical and political movements. On the other hand there is the Mah\_y\_na tradition, which seeks and reaches purification and liberation in the world, and can be engaged directly in economical and political movements. The monastics should take the side of the H\_nay\_na Buddhism, while the lay disciples should be engaged in economical and political movements in conformity with the spirit of Mah\_y\_na Buddhism.’\(^{39}\)

According to Yinshun, politics is Dharma, if the spirit of politics closely meets and coincides with the essence of the Mah\_y\_na teachings.

II. 2 The nun Zhaohui: \textit{zhengjiao guanxi} ____ and \textit{jieru zhengzhi} ____

‘Religion and politics cannot be disconnected. Regardless of self-protection or of avoiding any law and policy that could be harmful, Buddhism actively seeks to promote legislation and policy that could protect the living of the weak, in order to realise Buddha’s spirit of compassion. And this all cannot but be concerned with politics.’\(^{40}\)

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\(^{38}\) In addition, Yinshun discussed his viewpoint on Buddhism and politics, Buddhist politics and his Buddhist view on politics in the following writings: \textit{Fofa gailun} ____ (1950), \textit{Cheng fo zhi dao} ____ (1960), \textit{Fo zai renjian} ____ (1971), \textit{Xue fo san yao} ____ (1971), \textit{Qingnian de fojiao} ____ (1973), \textit{Wu zheng zhi bian} ____ (1972), \textit{Jiaozhi jiaodian yu jiaoxue} ______ (1972), \textit{Fojiao shi di kaolun} ____ (1973), \textit{Hua yu ji} ____ (1993, vols. 4-5).

\(^{39}\) Yinshun (1973) \textit{Fofa shi jiu shi zhi guang}, p. 408.

Any writings of Yinshun on politics and Buddhism may recall some influence from his mentor Taixu. Nevertheless, Zhaohui singled out important differences between her view of the Dharma adopted in the society (and in politics), which bases on Yinshun’s position, and Taixu’s idea. And insisted: ‘In connection with politics, Yinshun hold a position different from Taixu’s theory of the relationship between Dharma and politics.’

Since her sharp activism in matters of social concern (such as the defence of women rights and animal rights), Zhaohui has been dealing with the ruling class. Recently, and quite pertinent to the overall theme of this conference, she has intervened, written and spoken (on the mass media) about the relationship between religion (and more specifically Buddhism) and politics, in response to the “Zhongtai Political Declaration Incident” (zhongtai zhengzhi biaotai shijian _____),

Shi Weijue ___, founder of Zhongtai chansi___ (Puli), and belonging to the stream of the “New Religions” (xinxing zongjiao _____) has been accused to attempt to influence his disciples’ vote by appealing on his “supernatural power” (shentong__).

From the 9th to the 11th of March the Taiwanese mass media broadcasted Zhaohui’s own opinion on zhengzhi guanxi, and her critique to Weijue, founder of Zhongtai chansi. Zhaohui criticised Zhongtai for its wealthy and powerful style, and wrongful acting. The so-called “Eight Chief Accusations” (ba da zuizhuang _____) summarised her quite lengthy but well articulated discourse, and covered political and otherwise matters.

According to Zhaohui, Weijue does not conform with the ideal of the Buddhist master. He has pretended to have “supernatural power” (shentong) and is venerated among his disciple as a “divine monk” (shen seng __) and “holy monk” (sheng seng __). Before the elections of 2000, Weijue claimed that in case of non election of one particular candidate, Taiwan, according to his foresight, would have become blood flowed. Quoting Zhaohui’s words, such affirmation disarmed human beings’ rationaly and drove them into panic. Weijue demands to be the “Savior” (jiushizhu __), Zhaohui said, and this is in opposition to the core of Buddhism. In addition, his attitude and attempt to control the disciple’s decisions is in opposition with the ideal of “consciousness” (zijuexing __) that, according to the Buddha’s teachings, the human beings are asked to develop.

Secondly, Zhaohui stated that the Zhongtai Buddhist monastery (and organisation) does not correspond to what a Buddhist complex should be: it is not only example of extravagance and extreme of wealth (in which respect it is not an isolated case in the contemporary Taiwan), but it was build at the same time of the 911 earthquake and, moreover, in the part of Taiwan that suffered most of this natural calamity. Consequently, Zhongtai was often defined “heartless rich” by the public opinion.

42 For further details, see:
43 It is interesting to notice that Weijue claimed to have inherited his vision of Buddhist involvement in politics from Taixu, an affirmation which Zhaohui confuted by stating that Taixu and his political engagement never violated the principle of zijuexing.
In conclusion, according to Zhaohui, Weijue’s disrespect of Buddhist rules and national law can discredit Buddhism and religion in general, for this reason she reacted and decided to take a firm position against him.\footnote{Among the Buddhist figures who stood by Zhaohui in her public discourse there were: Lin Rongzhi____ (Taiwanese Association of Buddhist Temples, Secretary) and Prof. Lin Benxuan____ (Nanhua University). Zhaohui’s discourse was welcomed by the (some at least) Buddhist Taiwanese.}

In any event, Zhaohui’s ideas about the role that the religious (including Buddhist) leaders can (should?) play in politics have been already expressed in another essay, entitled Fojiao yu xiandai zhengzhi de guanbu _________, which explains when and how Buddhism comes to deal with political matters.\footnote{Zhaohui (1992) Ru shi wo si ____, pp. 142-158. Besides that part that focuses on Buddhist involvement in politics, Zhaohui dealt with the relationship between the ruling class and the other religions (such as Christianity and Islam) in different times and areas.} Important here is that Zhaohui recognises that different historical periods and ruling conditions require different level of engagement from the “religious teacher” (zongjiaoshi ____), but she does not deny the relevance and necessity for a religious leader to be involved in politics, following the right measures, the appropriate manners and taking the proper roles. In addition, the chronology of Zhaohui’s speeches on the Buddhist participation in politics also includes a three-pointed discourse dated 2000.

Finally, as any disciple usually does with the own guiding master, Zhaohui reported her position towards Zhongtai and the interviews released to the mass media to Yinshun, whose comment was limited to the sentence: ‘You make yourself too tired, you should take a better care of you!’\footnote{http://www.hongshi.org.tw/new9303-81.htm}

\section*{II. 3 The nun Zhengyan: standing on neutrality}

‘Master Cheng Yen, founder of the Buddhist Compassionate Tzu Chi Relief Foundation, said during a meeting with Tzu Chi volunteers that all candidates and their supporters should respect the results, irrespective of who is victorious. Noting that the people have exercised their rights and obligations in the election, Cheng Yen voiced the hope that all compatriots will love and respect each other. “We all should pray for our nation with a mind of tranquility. Only when our society is stable and harmonious will the people's welfare be improved,” added the leader of the country's largest charitable organization.’\footnote{http://publish.gio.gov.tw/iisnet/20040322/20040322s1.html}

André Laliberté (2004) wrote an extensive article about the ‘neutrality’ and ‘impartiality’ that Zhengyan and Ciji expressed in connection with political matters, that did not imply a lack of support that the nun received from the political authorities while she was establishing Ciji. In addition, it is worth mentioning that Zhengyan was awarded the Second-Class Order of Brilliant Star by the Government in 2003, but she does not seem to lay importance on that, since this event was not reported with emphasis in any of the Ciji mass media. Perhaps, this is a further case of Zhengyan’s refusal of being on the public spot.
III. Renjian fojiao in Taiwan

“Humanized Buddhism is the core of Buddhism”, Master Yin Shun reiterated. His efforts in promoting this idea have yielded fruit. Some of his eminent disciples have gone out into the world to serve all living beings with an otherwordly spirit – Cheng Yen [Zhengyan] founded the Tzu Chi Foundation, Chuan Tao [Zhaohui] is raising public awareness on the environment. Chao Hui [Zhaohui] is promoting the integrity of all lives, etc. All this originated from the day Master Yin Shun started to promote humanized Buddhism over sixty years ago."48

Xingyun __ and Foguangshan, Shengyan __ and Fagushan, Xiaoyun __ and Huafan University (Huafan daxue ____) : there are all different concrete manifestations of the same renjian fojiao.

A lot has already been written and discussed about renjian fojiao, among the Chinese, Taiwanese and well as Western scholarship. As for Taiwan, scholars like Yang Huinan ____, Jiang Canteng ____, Lan Jifu ____, just to list a few of them, have compiled detailed treatise on the different aspects and the many promoters of renjian fojiao. The Western scholarship is indebted to the work of Charles B. Jones: his masterpiece Buddhism in Taiwan (1999) provided a detailed and argumented survey of the development of Buddhist religion on the island, and proposed a series of issues, also concerning the renjian fojiao (“Buddhism for the Human Realm”), that are now topics of further debates. Jones became the initiator of the recent, still in development, stream of Western scholarship researching Buddhism in Taiwan and aiming to write a definition of Taiwanese Buddhism.

On a different level, the Buddhist organisations founded in the name of renjian fojiao and promoting renjian fojiao have all the own publishing house and mass media access. The consequence was the production of a steady number of publications, in the format of short pamphlet or huge encyclopedia, all centred on renjian fojiao but showing clearly a propaganda purpose and not with a critical approach which has been adopted by the scholarship mentioned above.

How can we contextualise Yinshun among all these case-studies? According to the interviews made during my stay in Taiwan, and following the publications of the Buddhist leaders and scholars mentioned above, we found that they all rely on Yinshun as daoshi. Moreover, they all consider Yinshun as the founder of renjian fojiao, the theoretical founder at least. In addition, in recognition of the scholarly contribution that Yinshun made to the Buddhist research, most of the Buddhist institutes (including the Buddhist Institutes of Foguangshan) are adopting Yinshun’s volumes as textbooks.

Buddhism in Taiwan seems to have been subject to Yinshun’s influence, and so to renjian fojiao’s influence, since the latter embodies Yinshun’s teachings as well as Taixu’s ideas and the further development of this tradition on the island.

Conclusion

To conclude, what is this renjian Buddhism? Is it a doctrine? Is it a philosophy? Or may we consider it a new religion? Based on Taixu’s rensheng fojiao, but rooted in the Mahayana tradition (Yinshun would say in the doctrinal tenets of the _gama scriptures), renjian fojiao became an independent form of practice, that involves the monastic community and the laity, and presents itself under different forms and names.49

The shift is a natural consequence of the change of time, and is a quality of renjian fojiao itself. According to Yinshun, renjian fojiao “accords with the Universal Principle” (qili__) and “accords with the specific circumstances” (qiji__). In addition, Xingyun, in his six-pointed description of the essence of renjian fojiao, listed “temporality” (shidai xing__) and “universalism” (puji xing__).50 Furthermore, as for the role that Yinshun in specific may still play in the nowadays Taiwan, the visits made by Chen Shuibian can be signalled as another index of the popularity that the master still has on the island.

Naming can change, but the nucleous essence will keep rooted in any manifestation of renjian fojiao. And the goal is always the same. Zhengyan summarised this last point:

‘Depart for the next incarnation while you are still alive. The Pure Land is here and now. The purpose of moral cultivation is not to go to the Pure Land after passing away, but to go to the Pure Land while alive. It is to become pure and compassionate in one’s present life.’51

49 Besides the ciji fojiao mentioned above, there is the foguang renjian fojiao ______, usually abbreviated as foguang fojiao ____. Foguangshan has made up a whole terminology where foguang replaces renjian. For instance, we may find foguang jingtu ______ instead of renjian jingtu ____, and so on.
50 Xingyun (1995) Renjian fojiao. The other four features of renjian fojiao are: (1) renjian xing ____. (2) shenghuo xing ___. (3) lita xing ___. (4) xile xing ___.