Eminence and Edutainment

Xingyun and Daoxin as Television Celebrities

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INTRODUCTION

At the opening ceremony of the 2012 World Buddhist Forum in Hong Kong, Chinese pop icon Wang Fei 王菲 (b.1969) sang the Heart Sutra (Xin jing 心経).1 Wang is primarily known in the West for her role in the cult film Chungking Express (Chongqing senlin 重庆森林) but in China, she is an iconic star who is accustomed to performing in front of thousands of ecstatic fans. Her performance at the Forum, however, was more subdued. She stood still—and sang with the microphone piously clasped between pressed palms. With rosary beads wrapped around her wrist, she merged her identity as one of China’s best-known Buddhists and most beloved pop artists. Next to her was the ultimate stage prop for a practitioner—a remnant of the Buddha himself. (This piece of bone had been loaned by a temple in Nanjing for the occasion.) Wang also shared the stage with some of the Chinese Buddhist world’s leading figures, like the Buddhist monks Jueguang 覺光 (1919-2014),2 Jinghui 淨慧 (b.1933) and Guodong 果東 (b. 1955).3 Wang was followed by other Hong Kong celebrities—including the singer Shirley Kwan 關淑怡 (b.1966), the geomancer Li Chengze 李丞責 (b.1968), and Sandy Lau 劉倩婷 (b.1986, Miss Hong Kong 2009 and wife of Li)—who sang the Forum’s

2 Former president of the Hong Kong Buddhist Association.
3 Jinghui is a vice president in the Chinese Buddhist Association. Guodong is Abbot President of Fagushan 法鼓山 in Taiwan.
theme-song. The scenes were a convergence of celebrity, religion, and--drawing together Buddhist luminaries from “Greater China”—politics.

This was not the only time that “stars” from Greater China’s Buddhist and celebrity worlds have aligned themselves so fortuitously. In 1999, Hong Kong actor Andy Lau 刘德华 (b.1961), who has appeared in films such as Drunken Master II (Zui quan er 醉拳二), Drunken Master III (Zui quan san 醉拳三) and House of Flying Daggers (Shimian maifu 十面埋伏) included a Buddhist song on his album Love in the World (Renjian ai 人間愛). Martial arts legend Jet Li 李連杰 (b.1963)—known throughout the West for roles in Lethal Weapon 4, The Expendables 1–3, and Hero (Yingxiong 英雄)—has shared a stage with the Taiwanese monastic Shengyan 聖嚴 (1930–2009), and also participated in his campaign to promote Buddhist ethics. In posters and advertisements for the campaign, Li appeared alongside other well-known figures, such as the singer Jolin Tsai 蔡依林 (b.1980), and the Hong Kong actress Brigitte Lin 林青霞 (b.1954). Lau was also one of the original singers of the World Buddhist Forum’s theme song, although he was not personally at the event.

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6 “Wuming wen wuming: dang Li Lianjie yushang Shengyan fashi,” YouTube video, 1:05:05, posted by “allaboutbuddha,” January 10, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGY3vQ5qH5I, accessed May 18, 2016. Shengyan was an influential Taiwanese monastic who founded the Buddhist organisation Fagushan 法鼓山 (Dharma Drum Mountain) in 1989 and made the integration of Chan into daily life the focus of his teachings. Fagushan remains an important and well-known organisation on the island.
7 See the web-page for this campaign at: http://ddmhsif.org/?page_id=3550, accessed May 18, 2016.
8 Brigitte Lin starred in the hit films Police Story (Jingcha gushi 警察故事), Zu Warriors from the Magic Mountain (Xin shushan jianxia 新蜀山劍俠), Swordsman II (Dongfang bubai er 東方不敗二) and Swordsman III (Dongfang bubai san 東方不敗三) and also Chungking Express with Wang Fei.
These lay-Buddhists are undoubtedly “celebrities.” They star in movies, release albums, and advertise products. But what about the monastics appearing alongside them—are they celebrities too? Like their counterparts in the world of cinema and song, they appear throughout the Chinese-language media landscape—including on its most far-reaching medium: television. But do they achieve the same level of recognition as their secular counterparts? This chapter will argue that the Buddhist use of media—in particular, television, is not solely aimed at attaining mass recognition. It instead has two functions. One is to increase their eminence within Buddhist circles; the other is to expand the perimeter of those circles to encompass and transform secular space. To explore this idea further, we will consider two monastics who have graced television screens in China and Taiwan: Daoxin 道心 (b.1982), and Xingyun 星雲 (b.1927). Both use television alongside other techniques to project their Buddhist personalities and message out to the broader public. But whereas their blogs, books and other cultural productions help them to achieve eminence among Buddhists, it is television that enables them to reach a wider audience and push their sphere of influence outwards, transforming secular space according to their Buddhist values.

CELEBRITY, EMINENCE AND EDUTAINMENT

There are many kinds of celebrities—including those that are seen in tabloids, and those seen in temples. But celebrities of all types share certain common features. According to Chris Rojek, “celebrity” entails “the attribution of glamorous or notorious status to an individual within the public sphere.” There is also “an admittedly rather crude equation: celebrity = impact on public consciousness.” Moreover, “celebrities are cultural fabrications” that are “mediated through what might be termed chains of attraction.” ¹⁰ (Those who manage and produce the

celebrity.) \(^{11}\) And finally, “a distinction should be made between celebrity, notoriety and renown.” Renown is “the informal attribution of distinction on an individual within a given social network. Thus, in every social group certain individuals stand out by virtue of their wit, beauty, courage, prowess, achievements or grace.” \(^{12}\)

To achieve renown within their networks of followers, monastics must possess “eminence,” or the “intangible quality” that is “a natural by-product of the monk’s spiritual attainments.” \(^{13}\) The qualities that comprise eminence are depicted in the “Eminent Clerics” series that, since the third century, has lionized Chinese monks and nuns through hagiographies. They were established as being worthy of emulation by virtue of their adherence to the vinaya, their exemplification of bodhisattva ideals, their conformity to Confucian ethics, their spiritual attainments as evidenced through miraculous deeds, and their attainment of the “superknowledges” (shentong 神通). They were portrayed as devoted to their practice and as reservoirs of spiritual prowess. Historically, these figures have been remembered, studied and made into religious authorities. \(^{14}\) Thus, through their eminence, they attain “renown” among their communities of readers and practitioners, while not generally impacting on the “public consciousness” beyond these circles.

However, in contemporary China, monastics have been presented with a new tool for projecting their message. Television allows monastics to expand their circle of renown outwards, beyond the immediate circle of their followers, to potentially attain a greater level of impact on the public consciousness and thus become true celebrities. Alongside the proliferation of television, contemporary China now has a vibrant celebrity culture that can

\(^{11}\) Rojek, *Celebrity*, 11
\(^{12}\) Rojek, *Celebrity*, 12
support this Buddhist move. As Meng Fanhua reports (citing a 1992 report in the *Wenhui bao*文汇报), in the 1980s about a quarter of young Chinese people idolized political activists, but in the 1990s, they became more interested in “singers, movie stars, sports stars and best-selling authors.”¹⁵ Today, according to Elaine Jeffreys and Louise Edwards, celebrity culture is flourishing in China . . . China’s official news service, Xinhua, produces a list of the nation’s top ten sports stars. Major web portals, such as Sina.com and Baidu.com, produce lists of the PRC’s 100 most influential individuals and most popular female singers, male singers, ‘beautiful girls’ (*meinü*美女) and handsome boys (*shuaige*帅哥).¹⁶

Their omnipresence across Chinese-language media landscapes enables celebrities to transcend social boundaries, such as class, and attain widespread recognition. Meanwhile, their public images are carefully managed so as to create a profitable brand that can sell everything from Pepsi (which Wang Fei has advertised) to luxury watches (as Andy Lau has done, for the Swiss brand Cyma).¹⁷

As we have seen, the Buddhist and celebrity worlds intersect. But while enduring celebrities are typically flexible enough to attain widespread popularity, the core aspect of the monastic persona is Buddhism, which does not have immediate universal appeal. Here, the Buddhist concept of expediency— or altering the presentation of teachings to suit the audience—

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-comes in handy. In the age of television more generally, “expediency” takes the form of “edutainment” or “entertainment-education,” which is “is the process of purposely designing and implementing a media message to both entertain and educate, in order to increase audience knowledge about an educational issue, create favorable attitudes, and change overt behavior.”

Examples include National Geographic and Discovery Channel documentaries. While Daoxin’s and Xingyun’s television appearances do not represent organized attempts at projecting programs of education in China, through their presence on entertaining television productions—such as chat shows or in cartoon form—they become accessible to audience-members with no prior connection to, or interest, in Buddhism.

There is nothing new in this; projecting the Buddha’s teachings has always been important for Buddhists, and the primary model for promoting the Dharma comes from the Buddha himself. If we take his sermon in the *Lotus Sutra*, for example, we see there was “a large group of monks, twelve thousand in all”; along with “eighty thousand bodhisattvas”; and an effectively innumerable number of celestial beings. Moreover, the Buddha shone a ray out from between his eyes that illuminated the entire universe, making all beings in the six paths of rebirth visible. The sutra continues to state that: “the monks and nuns, laymen and laywomen, and all the gods, dragons, demon-gods, and others thought: ‘Whom shall we ask about this shining spiritual sign from the Buddha?’”

Clearly, the Buddha wanted to spread knowledge of the Dharma to wherever sentient beings existed. Historically, Buddhists have sought to do this by employing a variety of mediums to expediently project their message. These included palm leaves, stele, woodblock-printing, art and music. In the present day, although television does not enable monastics to

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reach quite as large an audience as the Buddha’s in the *Lotus Sutra*, it does let them beam their teachings to more people than at any stage in history. As Kevin Latham points out,

watching television is the most popular leisure activity in contemporary China. Even in the countryside, more than 90 percent of the population has access to a television set, and in the cities the figure is close to 100 percent. Chinese people watch on average between two and five hours of television every day; it is their primary, most often used, and most widespread source of news, entertainment, and information and constitutes a major feature of most Chinese people’s daily lives.

Below, we will examine how Daoxin and Xingyun have capitalized on this viewership and have crafted different personas and articulations of Buddhism to present their message in ways that resonate with the ideals of education-entertainment and Buddhist expediency. With such a large audience, we would expect Buddhists to make use of the technology. In reality, Buddhist appropriation of television in China is not so widespread as in the more liberal religious context of Taiwan, where Buddhist organizations have built media empires. Nevertheless, Buddhists do appear on television, and as we will see, are able to craft their message so as to promote their eminence, and attain a degree of celebrity.

**DAOXIN: A MODEL BUDDHIST**

Our first example is Daoxin. Born in 1982, he received full ordination in 2000, and graduated from the Jiuhuashan Buddhist Seminary (*Jiuhuashan foxueyuan* 九華山佛學院) in

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Anhui Province before studying at Nanjing University, in the Philosophy Department, for two years. Since then, he’s become known for an approach to Buddhist life he calls “Chan a la mode” (Shishang Chan 時尚禪). According to one of Daoxin’s videos online, fashion and Chan are “two kinds of attitude to life.” Since fashion is a part of life, it provides a context for Buddhist practice and reflection. As he states in the clip: “Chan makes life more fashionable (shishang 時尚); fashion makes Chan more alive (shenghuo 生活).” Daoxin’s “Chan a la mode” is thus an expedient presentation of Buddhism that is directed towards demonstrating the relevance of Buddhist teachings to fashion-conscious urban-dwellers. Commentators have attributed a level of celebrity glamour to Daoxin that rarely befalls monks, noting his resemblance to a film-star—the Hong Kong actor Nicholas Tse 謝霆鋒 (b.1980). Daoxin has also, like Andy Lau, expanded into the realm of Buddhist music, releasing an album in 2008 (the album consists of mantras with modern musical arrangements). He thus directly merges the worlds of celebrity glamour, and Buddhist eminence.

His own fashion consciousness is evident in the persona he projects through the media. As a recent article online noted, his aesthetic and demeanor mirror those of counter-cultural, Anglo-American “hipsters.” Photos of him appearing online show that he embraces the culture and interests of his generation: he is individualistic, internationalized, educated, gadget-aware, and has leisure-time. He frequently appears on his blog wielding the symbols of China’s rising middle class. He can be seen drinking Starbucks coffee, using Apple products, or relaxing. And even though he’s a monk, and monastics are generally expected to eschew adornments, he

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proudly displayed his Bluetooth technology and fashionable cassock in a photo that gained widespread attention online in 2008.  

Daoxin himself belongs to what is called the “post-80s” generation—a cohort that grew up in an era of increasing prosperity and freedom, and China’s “one-child” law. Often only-children who are showered with their parents’ affection, they have embraced consumer culture and technology.  

Daoxin clearly understands this segment of Chinese society. His media presence encapsulates CDs, the internet, and television. Soon after netizens noticed the photo of him sporting trendy accessories in 2008, he began appearing on TV. These TV appearances allowed him to reach a broad audience, and present Buddhism as something that did not conflict with modern life. For example, he has provided advice to contestants on the dating program The Whole City’s Madly in Love (Quancheng relian 全城热恋), and appeared as a judge on the show From Love to Love (Yihu baiying 益呼百應)—which is about funding the dreams of contestants.

Daoxin continues to use social media as a means of remaining in contact with his followers, frequently posting updates. This online presence, and his television appearances, both stem from a desire to connect with the public and spread his Buddhist message. In a 2011 interview, he explained that

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27 See Jeroen de Kloet, China with a Cut: Globalisation, Urban Youth and Popular Music (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 22-24.
31 See, for example, http://t.qq.com/shidaoxin · accessed May 18, 2016.
when you look at how [the character] ‘Buddha’ (Fo 佛) is written, on the side there’s the character for ‘person’ (ren 人). Buddhhas are cultivated from the state of being a human. What does this mean? In other words, humans are the basis. In becoming a human, you become a buddha (rencheng ji focheng 人成就佛成). When you perform your role as a human well—when you’re a filial son, a law-abiding citizen—you’ll guide the social masses (shehui qunzhong 社会群眾) towards goodness.\(^\text{32}\)

Daoxin therefore promotes a form of belief that is squarely focused on Buddhism’s present, practical applications. He continued to add that

I, Shi Daoxin, don’t speak the language of Buddhism (Foyu 佛語), but the language of people (renyu 人語). Why? I’m willing to go and engage with people using words that people can understand. If you’re always speaking in Buddhist words and phrases, people won’t understand. They will very wisely tell you: go off and think about it for yourself. So my style is to use completely new methods to explain the buddhadharma—to use completely new forms of expression to transmit traditional culture. In other words, to use fashionable and artistic methods to transmit Buddhist wisdom.\(^\text{33}\)

These “fashionable and artistic methods” include television.


\(^{33}\) Ibid.
Daoxin’s “Chan a la mode” is clearly meant to be practiced in the context of daily life, but he distinguishes between this and another popular and contemporary approach to Buddhist practice, called “Life Chan” (shenghuo Chan 生活禪). Life Chan is promoted by the monastic Jinghui, who sat on the stage near Wang Fei at the World Buddhist Forum, and again stresses the practical aspects of Buddhist teachings, which enable one to deal with the challenges of daily life. Daoxin, however, orients Life Chan specifically towards the post-80s generation. This expedient presentation of Buddhism makes it more accessible to younger people who lack serious prior contact with it, and is therefore ripe for appearance on television programs that target this demographic.

For example, in 2010 Daoxin was a guest on the show Lady Guagua (Lady 呱呱). Sitting on a sofa opposite the four young female hosts, he answered questions about Buddhism and monastic life. The hosts expressed wonder that a monastic could have an account on Weibo—this was not the type of activity they associated with monasticism. In order to prove that he did, an assistant brought out a “very advanced” (hao xianjin 好先進) mobile phone on which Daoxin proceeded to access his microblog account while they crowded around in amazement. They then took a fun photo together, and uploaded it to the internet.

Next, Daoxin told his hosts how he became a monk—a common topic in his television appearances. He displayed a serious, but amicable demeanor—and a certain charisma--that the Lady Guagua hosts responded to. They freely asked him questions about folk Buddhist practice: what it meant if, for example, when burning hell money, the fire leapt up and burned some of your hair? How does one correctly enter a Buddhist temple? How should one pay their

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35 “Lady guagua 201001018 shishang yiseng--Shi Daoxin,” Sina Video, 24:20, http://tv.video.sina.com.cn/play/21900.html, accessed May 18, 2016. “Gua” is an omanatopoea and refers to a croaking sound, although evidently the name is intended to be a parody of the pop star Lady Gaga’s name.
respect to the Buddha? And, is astrology true? Finally, Daoxin took more photos with the hosts, this time in playful Buddhist poses: reverentially pressing their palms together, and performing various meditative postures. The program finished with him giving a live performance of a song he recorded in 2009—*A Song of Four Seasons* (*Si li ge 四季歌*).37

In 2011, Daoxin was again on TV, this time appearing on the variety program *Everyday, Upwards* (*Tiantian xiang shang 夭天向上*)—this time with five male hosts.38 This particular episode focused on “handsome guys” (*shuaige 帥哥*); other guests included a violinist, journalist and former “Mr Shanghai” winner. When it was his turn, Daoxin walked onto the stage sporting a tan cassock, a fashionable blue scarf, and thick-rimmed glasses (with black rims and blue end pieces), while holding an iPhone. Flanked by two dancing figures wearing conical hats, and while bursts of steam shot around him, he walked down the steps to greet the hosts with one hand reverentially held in front of his chest in a half-mudra. Clasping a microphone between pressed palms and bowing to the audience, Daoxin and his hosts greeted each other with the word *Amituofo 阿彌陀佛* (Amitabha Buddha)—a typical way of greeting among Chinese Buddhists.

Standing with the hosts on-stage in front of a studio audience, Daoxin explained how he came to be a Buddhist and his journey to monkhood. He showed them his ‘trendy’ (*chao 潮*) accoutrements—a bag with the character *wu 無* (lack) on it; an iPhone 4 inside a case resembling a cassette; and an iPhone 3. They asked him if these were things he bought, to which Daoxin replied that they had been given to him—presumably by followers or supporters.

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37 See the blog-post announcing that the song can be downloaded at:

He then announced that he had an online store where he sold prayer-beads and Chan clothing (Chanfu 褔服), and that he hoped he would one day have his own brand of Chan clothes. Daoxin even remarked that he watched Korean dramas—which are highly popular in China. He again sang a song, this time a poem (by Zhang Ji 張繼; 8th century) set to music: Moored at Night by the Maple Bridge (Fengqiao yebo 楓橋夜泊). He later briefly returned with the other guests to answer questions from a group of young women. The question posed to Daoxin was again about fate and prognostication. His answer was that we are responsible for generating our own destinies through karma.

Both Daoxin and his hosts clearly intended these television appearances, which involved singing, the occasional joke, stage-craft and light-conversation, to be entertaining. Daoxin provided Buddhist teachings, but the programs’ format precluded much in-depth discussion. However, in 2009, he was a guest on the popular chat show A Date with Lu Yu (Lu Yu you yue 魯豫有約).39 The host, Chen Luyu 陳魯豫 (b. 1970), is called “China’s Oprah,”40 and has interviewed famous guests including Hilary Clinton and Keanu Reeves. The program, less frenetic that the other two, saw Daoxin sit at one end of a curved couch, opposite from Chen. Behind them was a screen, and in front was the studio audience. With its slower pace, the interview gave Daoxin a chance to speak in more detail about his personal history and approach to Buddhism. After a brief introduction and photo montage, he also revealed the story behind one of the photos that first captured the public’s attention—him standing outside with his hands behind his back, wearing a bluetooth earpiece, sunglasses and a trendy cassock. He said that this was unplanned—and taken by a friend during a hike on Xiangshan 香山 near Beijing. Chen asked him if monastics could wear sunglasses—and he replied that scholastic

monks were “modern” in outlook—or more engaged with society. They used, for example, the Internet, and traveled.

Chen marveled at his star-quality and noted the comparison that had been made between his appearance and that of Hong Kong heart-throb Nicholas Tse. Daoxin explained that he is contacted by a lot of followers online or by phone. This is because they “feel my life is very similar to theirs. I go online and have a [mobile] phone, right? I can also instantly communicate with them on [the internet messaging service] QQ. So, that is to say, they don’t regard me as a monk.” Perhaps agreeing with his adherents, like the other hosts, Chen remarked how unlike other monastics he was. And, as in his other television appearances, Daoxin later sang for the audience—the number chosen was again A Song of Four Seasons. Chen noted that this was quite unlike the traditional Buddhist music they generally heard--it included instrumentation, and a rhythm and melody, more associated with pop music.

While the hosts, and Daoxin, often focused on the “a la mode” aspects of his Chan (it is, after all, novel and includes visual elements making it suited to television), Chen’s lengthier program (it ran for 45 minutes) allowed him to air other qualities that are associated with traditional Buddhist eminence. He told the audience he was actually quiet and introverted. As a child he was a vegetarian, and was always interested in the accoutrements of Buddhist life. He enjoyed the atmosphere of temples and loved visiting them. As a youth, he was “weak of body and often sick” (tiruan duo bing 體軟多病). As a student, he would listen to Buddhist cassette tapes, and start meditating without receiving prior instruction when watching the CCTV production Journey to the West (Xiyouji 西遊記).41 At the age of 12, Daoxin knew that he wanted to become a monk, but met with his parents’ resistance. Finally, they relented when

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41 This was based on a fantastic depiction of the monk Xuanzang’s 玄奘 (602 – 664) journey to collect Buddhist scriptures from India in the Tang dynasty. It was a highly popular television show in the 1980s. Although fictionalised in the novel, Xuanzang himself was a major Buddhist figure who brought many Buddhist texts back to China.
he was 16, and he became a novitiate. Two years later, he was ordained. Daoxin thus had an early affinity with the dharma—evidence of his natural proclivity towards eminence.

“DEPARTMENT-STORE” BUDDHISM: CAPTURING THE MARKET

While Daoxin, as a multimedia monk, is certainly adroit at managing his message and profile, the most prolific use of media to project Buddhist messages in fact comes from monastics in Taiwan. There, at any time of day or night, one can see monks or nuns delivering sermons on Buddhist cable channels that also broadcast news, soap operas, and documentaries—all from Buddhist perspectives. The Buddhist presence on television is complemented by the world of new media on the Internet and older technologies such as radio, all allowing Buddhists to communicate freely with adherents and construct their hagiographic identities in real time.

Taiwanese Buddhist groups such as Ciji, Foguangshan 佛光山 and Fagushan are savvy producers of television programs. But these are just one component of their extensive media empires, which are important drivers of growth. The journalist Erling Hoh has observed that as they grew in size and “attracted millions of followers, Taiwan's Buddhist groups grew into corporation-like organizations, vying for market share and expanding aggressively with slick marketing campaigns.” The historian of Taiwanese Buddhism, Jiang Canteng 江燦騰, remarked that “Taiwan’s Buddhist groups are religious business enterprises,” and that they were “not opposed to this. For them, it is another opportunity to spend money.” The groups embodied what Jiang called “Department Store Buddhism.”

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42 As noted above, Fagushan is a major Buddhist organisation in Taiwan. Zhengyan established Ciji in 1966. It is also widely known, primarily for its philanthropic activities, which it carries out in Taiwan and around the world. Meanwhile, Foguangshan is another significant Buddhist group. It was founded by Xingyun (who is examined below); its main temple, in Gaoxiong, opened in 1967.
According to Hoh and Jiang, Taiwanese Buddhists have embraced an entrepreneurial, capitalist spirit, and that having now attracted millions of followers on the island, it is to China’s still expanding religious market that they have turned their attention. Xingyun, whom we will momentarily consider, is perhaps the leader in this charge.

A variety of products, besides television programs, deepen the presence of Taiwanese Buddhist groups in the media and social consciousness. For example, branches of Ciji’s Jingsi Books & Café (Jingsi shuxuan 靜思書軒) stock gift cards carrying quotations taken from books authored by the founder, Zhengyan 證嚴 (b.1937), as well as paperweights, calendars, reusable cutlery sets, ornaments, and books. In recent years, Xingyun’s own organization, Faguangshan, has offered mobile phone covers, coasters, notebooks and moon cakes.\textsuperscript{46} A perusal through issues of the magazine Humanity (Rensheng 人生), which is published by Fagushan, reveals advertisements for products such as the “Chan cultivation poncho” (which is made of Italian cashmere and included a free cloth bag and “Chan cultivation decorative ornament”—like a key ring—upon purchase),\textsuperscript{47} a “Buddhist recitation machine,” which contains recordings of chants by Fagushan monastics;\textsuperscript{48} a gift set including a Buddha statue, a candle holder, incense, and greeting cards;\textsuperscript{49} meditation cushions;\textsuperscript{50} Fagushan polo shirts;\textsuperscript{51} and a commemorative satchel.\textsuperscript{52}

Such enterprises may bring to mind the growth of a Christian consumer market, with its biblical action figures, pop music, and faith-based self-help books. The soap operas and


\textsuperscript{47} See the back cover of the December 2005 issue of Humanity.

\textsuperscript{48} See the May 2005 edition of Humanity, page 71. These devices are quite common in Taiwan. They contain recordings of Buddhist chanting, and can be left switched on to cycle continuously through the selected chant.

\textsuperscript{49} See the July 2005 issue of Humanity, page 65.

\textsuperscript{50} See the September 2005 issue of Humanity, page 65.

\textsuperscript{51} See the inside back cover of the September 2005 issue of Humanity. They were embroidered with a number of phrases; one of them was “Pure Land in the human world.”

\textsuperscript{52} See page 35 of the December 2005 issue of Humanity.
“televangelism” on Buddhist cable television channels, along with their books and magazines, seem to have, at least in part, roots in Christian predecessors. This perhaps represents what Vincent J. Miller has called “the substitution of consumption for traditional religious practices, and the distribution of religious traditions in commodified form.” However, by allowing practitioners and consumers to integrate Buddhism into each aspect of their lives, it is in keeping with notions of expediency.

Xingyun has been a driver of both trends—the development of a Buddhist market culture, and an increasing focus on mainland China. He has attended all four World Buddhist Forums in China since 2006. Born there in 1927, he arrived in Taiwan in 1949 as he fled the Communists. In the years following his arrival, he vigorously promoted Buddhism on the island in an attempt to show that it could be practiced by ordinary people—not just monastics. This desire to show how Buddhism could form a part of lay-life is an earlier example of the approaches taken by Jinghui (the progenitor of Life Chan) and Daoxin more recently in the PRC. Through the organisation, Fuguangshan, centred on a major temple he opened in 1967, Xingyun has founded a publishing house that issues manga novels, self-help books and annotated versions of the sutras, as well as DVDs and giftware. Fuguangshan has also founded universities and schools, and engages in philanthropic ventures. Like Ciji, they have a cable television station, called “Beautiful Life Television” (Renjian weishi 人間衛視). (Ciji, in fact, has two—one is a high-definition channel.)

Xingyun's emphasis on the expedient use of media platforms is reflected in his suggestion that the Buddhist canon be expanded to include new forms of media. In a 1990 discussion of what reforms should be made, he suggested that

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the literary works of contemporary Buddhists, comics, photographs, engravings, architectural models, music, musical scores for Buddhist chanting, even audio recordings, information stored on computers, essays containing debates and defenses of the dharma, examples of constitutions for dharma assemblies…all of these should be compiled and included [in the canon].

He often made such pronouncements, because

the twentieth century is the era of advanced technological civilization. Buddhism must not just follow the social progress of the era, but must also progress at the forefront of society, striding ahead and leading the trends in modern people’s thought.”

Similar sentiments are shared by Daoxin, although as we shall see, their approaches differ.

Xingyun supports the reunification of Taiwan with mainland China, and his presence in the PRC’s Buddhist milieu has been bolstered by frequent appearances and speaking engagements in recent years. While his publications line the shelves of bookshops there, Foguangshan lacks a television station on the mainland; Xingyun, and Foguangshan, thus use other media channels to disseminate their message. For example, he maintains, like Daoxin, a Sina Weibo account. Posts on the account reflect a general optimism which aims at countering

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the view that Buddhism is a negative, pessimistic religion. One post that appeared on his Weibo account, for example, proclaimed:

Here are the ingredients for a Pure Land in the human world: 1) a warm and loving family (*jiating wennuan* 家庭温暖); 2) a body and mind in harmony (*shenxin tiaohe* 身心調和); 3) a Buddhist life-style (*shenghuo jinghua* 生活淨化); 4) doing things happily (*chushi yukuai* 處事愉快); 5) group harmonisation (*renqun rongqia* 人群融洽); 6) a clean environment (*huanjing jiejing* 環境潔淨); 7) a stable and safe society (*shehui anding* 社會安定); 8) a nation marked by equality (*guojia chengping* 國家承平); 9) peaceful international relations (*guojia heping* 國際和平); 10) propitious buddha lands (*Fotu jixiang* 佛土吉祥).56

Xingyun’s vision for a future Buddhist society, a Pure Land in the human world (*renjian jingtu* 人間淨土), mirrors the “harmonious socialist society” (*hexie shehui* 和諧社會) idea promoted by Hu Jintao 胡錦濤 as an interim goal to reach before communism. His Buddhist message is expediently rendered to reflect the Party’s aim of creating a law-abiding, self-regulating and “harmonious” society.

Xingyun also uses his television appearances in the PRC to air his pro-unification views, thus becoming politically acceptable. For example, in December of 2013 and January of 2014, he was the focus of a two-part documentary screened on CCTV4. The program, entitled *Together Across the Strait* (*Tianya gong cishi* 天涯共此時), focuses on Taiwan-PRC

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relations and issues. In this particular interview, Xingyun sat opposite his host in a wheelchair; beside him was a tea-set, and behind them was a screen on which appeared photos from different moments in Xingyun’s life. He was introduced as a great “educator, architect, altruist and writer,” immediately establishing him as someone of great eminence in the Buddhist world.

The program alternated between his interview with the host, and a documentary-style presentation of Xingyun’s biography, accompanied by dramatizations and photographs. The accompanying music was alternately somber and dramatic. The hagiographical account presented a life marked by hardship, austerity, a sincere desire to serve society, and patriotism. It covered the difficulties he had in pursuing Buddhist proselytization efforts in Taiwan, but also his constant perseverance and innovation. Xingyun was thus established not only as a great Buddhist figure, but also as a promoter of Chinese culture. Swept to Taiwan by historical tides amidst a turbulent history, he faced hardship there--being arrested by the KMT as a suspected Communist spy and facing various political obstacles--while remaining committed to political reunification.

Xingyun also voiced his pro-unification sentiments in a 2014 appearance on the state-owned channel BTV (Beijing Satellite TV), appearing on the program *Yanglan One on One* (*Yang Lan fangtan lü* 楊瀾訪談錄). Yang Lan 楊瀾 (b.1968) has interviewed celebrities such as Will Smith, Tom Cruise, Wang Fei, and Gong Li 鞏俐 (b.1965). Thus, as was the case with Chen’s interview with Daoxin, Xingyun was projected into an alumni of famous guests.

During the program, he voiced a variety of different opinions--some of these were political, but others concerned his perspectives on Buddhism and modern life. He critiqued the

practice, on the mainland, for example, of selling tickets to temples. He discussed the importance of being industrious and energetic while retaining a mind at rest. He denied that Buddhism was a pessimistic and world-renouncing religion, asserting that it actually embraced the world. The show presented Xingyun as having much practical advice for people in the modern age—such as how to deal with busy life-styles—but also as a patriot pushing for peaceful unification. He advocated, for example, more travel between Taiwan and the PRC in the expectation that this would eventually result in one “family” (jia 家).

Xingyun said that one of his great hopes in life was that “the country can become strong. Then, every Chinese will have face (mianzi 面子).” Yang Lan replied that she expected a monastic to say he hoped for more specifically Buddhist goals—such as to attain buddhahood. He replied that

my hope is to again be a monastic in my next rebirth, because I feel that as a monk, I can do a lot. As a monk, I can form many karmic affinities. As a monk, I can enlighten many sentient beings. For example, speaking of attaining buddhahood—attaining buddhahood is too leisurely (anxian 安闲)—too quiet (jing 靜). I momentarily forgot about this. First, I want to perform my role as a human well, and perform my role as a monk well.

Thus, Xingyun’s mainland television appearances devote much attention to his pro-unification views and nationalist sentiments. This stance probably led to his receipt of the 2013 “Light of China” (Zhonghua zhi guang 中華之光) award, given to those by CCTV who have promoted Chinese culture.

However, Xingyun is not always so political—he has produced programs incorporating “entertainment” value as well. An example of this is a cartoon series, produced by
Foguangshan’s television station, and which is based on his book *Between Delusion and Enlightenment (Miwu zhijian 迷悟之間)*. This is not the only Buddhist cartoon in Taiwan—as Stefania Travagnin discusses in this volume, the Buddhist group Ciji has produced a feature-length animated film about Yinshun 印順 (1906 – 2005)—the teacher of Ciji’s founder, Zhengyan. Episodes of Foguangshan’s program typically involve two young novice monks who encounter a dilemma, while a monk—resembling Xingyun, but who is not explicitly identified as such—appears throughout to provide a resolution or moral stemming from Buddhism. The program, intended for young children, presents the monk qua Xingyun as a helpful, friendly, and wise teacher children can turn to in troubling times. This is a different persona for another audience, but one that projects Xingyun’s eminence into another segment of society.

**CONCLUSION: BUDDHIST CHIC, AND BUDDHISM AS CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Daoxin’s media persona incorporates pop-songs and prayer-beads, iPhones and incense, samsara and Sina Weibo. This is “Chan a la mode”—the Buddhist chic: debating Chan in dimly-lit cafes, sharing dharmic philosophies via social media, and using apps to aid one in reciting “Amituofo.” With his emphasis on mind, the moment and modern life, this is Buddhism for the “Me generation” (*ziwo de yidai 自我的一代*)—the individualistic youths who have grown up in China’s age of prosperity. Daoxin’s “Chan a la mode” merges seamlessly

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60 Yinshun was an important exponent and architect of “Buddhism for the human world” (*renjian Fojiao 人間佛教*), which was first discussed by the monastic Taixu 太虛 (1890-1947). This articulation of Buddhism emphasises the necessity of practicing Buddhism during life, rather than seeing it as a way to prepare for death by accumulating karmic merits. Both Buddhists felt that Chinese Buddhism had drifted towards this latter orientation. Taixu, in particular, exerted a great influence on Xingyun.

61 See the description of such an app at: http://itunes.apple.com/tw/app/fei-yi-ban-nian-fu-ji/id315130943?mt=8, accessed May 18, 2016. Note there is also a “Jesus style” (*Yesu moshi 耶穌模式*).

into their lives, allowing for consumeristic lifestyles while redefining consumerism as a site for Buddhist reflection.

His biography, as presented on television, embodies the tropes of Buddhist eminence. It retains the standard features of monastic hagiographies that emphasize the unique features indicative of a karmic affinity with the buddhadharma. However, Daoxin has other opportunities to present wisdom through his replies to the interviewers’ questions. These qualities set him apart from the average person; yet he also presents himself as being quite like his potential followers. He uses the popular QQ messaging service and a mobile phone. He sings, likes Korean dramas, and is prepared to go on game shows. Daoxin is thus both modern and eminent, and presents his Buddhist teachings in a way that is entertaining and packaged for television.

He claims, however, to not seek celebrity status. After mentioning his music, Chen asked him what his “dream” was. Daoxin denied that it was to “develop oneself into a popular star (hongxing 紅星) or celebrity (da mingxing 大明星). I simply want to make more people go and listen to the songs of the spirit (xinling gequ 心靈歌曲), and to make the people of this age understand that this music of the spirit is extremely important.” Nevertheless, the appeal of Daoxin’s “Chan a la mode” may lead him to become ever more popular. Time will tell as to whether he continues on this upward trajectory, eventually attaining true stardom and pushing beyond his core circle of followers into secular space as his television, music and internet ventures develop.

Like Daoxin, Xingyun promotes the message that Buddhism is the natural accompaniment to modern Chinese life, whether the student, business-person, or the gadget-conscious, post-80s professional. Daoxin’s cohort is perhaps younger and more cosmopolitan, while Xingyun, with his loyalty to “China” and “Chinese culture,” targets a less trendy and more conservative segment of society. Xingyun’s Buddhism is more flexible, however,
allowing him to appeal to a wider range of audiences. He appears as a cartoon figure, but also as the figurehead of a Chinese cultural resurgence. In his interviews, Xingyun’s eminence is conveyed through moving photo montages and music, and the story of his ceaseless work to promote the dharma. He presents Buddhism in an entertaining fashion, through animation and dramatized re-enactments. And he establishes it as part of Greater China’s cultural heritage, and a unifying feature across the Taiwan Strait. Xingyun thus becomes more than just a Buddhist figure--but a cultural and political one--allowing him to build on his eminence in the Buddhist world and appeal to greater numbers through television.

Both figures therefore seek, in their own way, to project the message of Buddhism to people through the medium of television. Daoxin’s eminence and embrace of contemporary culture means that he can appeal both to Buddhists and secular youth at the same time. During a video montage later in A Date with Lu Yu, a voice-over asked “why can’t a monk develop together with the times? Actually, a monk’s life, apart from the regulations (guiding 規定) and rules of discipline (jielü 戒律) that he must follow, isn’t any different to the [rules and discipline followed by] the average person of today.” This unique combination means that he is situated to appeal to a broad audience. On the other hand, Xingyun’s political acceptability--as a pro-unification “Taiwanese” monk--as projected through television increases his appeal on the mainland.

The media presence of Daoxin and Xingyun spans different platforms, including the Internet, television and music. These provide a variety of avenues to get to know them, and even engage with them directly. Neither has attained the level of recognition that celebrities in the arts enjoy, like Jolin Tsai or Jet Li. To date, a Buddhist monastic has not advertised Pepsi in the PRC. This points to the obstacles standing in the way of Buddhists becoming genuine stars, rather than just attaining a degree of celebrity. Celebrities whose presence spans across different media platforms, but whose identity is not dependent on Buddhism, can widen their
exposure by appealing to multiple audiences. But Buddhists do stand for something very particular, which creates distance between them and non-Buddhists.

What Daoxin and Xingyun are doing, however, is employing television, alongside other media platforms, to overcome this barrier. This enables them to attain a degree of eminence or legitimacy—as Buddhist figures—by virtue of their media presence and visible following. By engaging continuously with their audiences, they can alter themselves to accommodate their needs and expectations. Moreover, perhaps, by posting vegetarian recipes, modelling fashionable cassocks, appearing in a manga, or on a chat-show, they will encourage their audiences to integrate Buddhist practices and beliefs more fully into their lives. Daoxin and Xingyun have therefore appropriated some of the tools of celebrity, just as other Buddhists have co-opted actual celebrities to draw attention to their causes. These expedient means provide a platform for them to project their Buddhist views, and actively craft their personas to show they are model Buddhists of a modern sort—happily and successfully integrating Buddhism with secular existence. They become well-known models for practice, attaining a degree of celebrity that does not rival that of Wang Fei, but which does allow them to attain recognition beyond their core followers.

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**Online videos**


