

# Buddha's Light in Montreal: A look at the IBPS temple of Montreal

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This project will consist of three parts: the ritual setting, the doctrine and beliefs, and the institution of a Chinese Temple in the Montreal region. The temple, in question in this essay, is the Hua-yen temple. The Hua-yen temple is part of the International Buddhist Progressist Society (IBPS), also known as the Buddha Light International Association (BLIA). The temple is part of the larger institution known as Fo Kuang Shan. Hua- Yen is situated at 200 rue de Castelnau Est, in the Jean-Talon district. For this project, we spoke to Venerable Moon Hung, the nun in charge of the Montreal temple, and to Venerable Yun Dong, a visiting nun from Toronto





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## 1.0 Ritual Setting

### 1.1 Ritual Setting

#### 1.1.1 Organization of Ritual Space

##### 1.1.1.1 Size and Shape of Ritual Space

The first floor of the Center is where the worship hall is situated and where the ceremonies take place. It is here that we find most of the iconography, images, statues and ritual objects, etc. The basement is used as the cafeteria where all the members reunite to eat a vegetarian meal after the ceremony. This is also where the kitchen is situated. The third floor consists of the venerable's quarters. The temple is located in an old apartment building. The ritual room is somewhat of a rectangular shape, with two small ends.

##### 1.1.1.2 Directional Focus

Although the main altar faces west, the participants insist that the display of the room has nothing to do with ritual space, but just how the room is actually made. They also informed us that the direction did not really matter since Buddha is supposed to be everywhere; but other participants do admit that it is preferable to have the main altar facing west, and that the only true requirement is to have the statue of Sakyamuni facing an entrance or a window. We could say that at this center, both requirements are being fulfilled: the main altar is facing some windows and is facing west; and the Guanyin altar along with the Amitabha altar are also facing windows, but towards the north.



### 1.1.1.3 Divisions

Is there a special space for ritual specialists? How is it indicated?

The venerable and her 'assistant' sit in the front of the room, standing on each side of the main altar. The nun stands on the right side, by a big bronze bell, while her 'assistant' stands on the left side, by a big red drum. On occasion, another 'assistant' helps with the musical instruments. She stands on the right side of the room, in retreat from the altar. Although the venerable and her 'assistants' are standing closer to the main altar, they are barely separated from the other participants by a few inches, which determine a row. There is neither an indication nor a symbol that marks their area as special, such as a different colour or a different type of seat.

Division of ritual space can be furthermore divided into formal and informal. The formal ritual space is the actual ceremonial room where the ritual service takes place in the temple. The informal ritual space consists of the dining hall in the basement where the participants meet to eat a vegetarian meal after the ceremony.

Is there a division between participants (e.g. males/females)? How is it indicated?

There is a division between the male and the female participants. The female participants stand on the left side of the room while the male participants stand on the right side of the room. The female participants are more numerous, so they are spread out over four rows of eight cushions (4 x 8). The male participants who are much less numerous, are spread out over three rows of six cushions (3 x 6), and the fourth row only has five cushions (1 x 5). However these arrangements are not always stable. It is possible to add more cushions to either side; however, most often the groups will be mingled. For example, on several occasions, there were more women than men present at the ceremony, so some female participants sat on the right side with the male participants. The reverse is also possible (but it was not seen at the temple). It should however be noted that within this religion both sexes are considered to be equal, which leads to an unfounded reason for this division according to gender.



### 1.1.2 Images, Designs and General Decor

Once we exclude the altars, the general decor of the ritual space is very simple. The door is surrounded with Chinese writing. A tall wooden box for donations is erected by the entrance of the ritual room.

Another small detail that can be observed while entering the room is the color of the carpet, which is red. This is a symbol of wealth.

The back wall of the room contains quite a few posters. Most of these posters list upcoming events at the temple. For example, there is a poster indicating the planned celebrations on May 7th 2000 to celebrate the birthday of the Sakyamuni, the first Buddha. There are also posters indicating classes, for example the schedule of classes given in English about Buddhism and meditation. By the donation box there is a big picture of the Hsi Lai temple, situated in the south of the United States. Most posters are written in Chinese. Even the walls leading to the dining room are covered with more posters, although photographs are more predominant. The photographs illustrate recent events at the temple and activities that took place. For example, there were photographs of the July 1st parade from last year, there were photographs of recent ordinations, and a photograph of our class, when we visited the temple. In the extreme left corner of the room, there is a bookcase where all the prayer and sacred books are held. In top of the bookcase, there is a bust of Sakyamuni. Behind this bust there is a pin-board, where records of specific donations are kept. Small red papers containing the name of the donor and their donations (monetary, material, or food) are pinned on the board.

In addition, there are four jade lanterns placed throughout the room. Two of these lanterns are placed on either side of the Amitabha altar. The other two lanterns are situated on the left side of the room, where the female participants stand. Jade is associated with good luck and also has a particular relation with the deceased. As for the rest of the lighting in the room there are long neon strips, and a glass chandelier at the center of the room.

Behind and on the right of the Amitabha altar, there is a pin-board with small strips of yellow paper. Name of the deceased is written on those strips.

On the right side of the altar of Guanyin, there is another pin-board. This board is also covered with small red stripes of paper. On these stripes of paper, we can find the name of practitioners, along with their wishes. Their wishes extend from employment, marriage to education, etc.

On the left side of the altar of Guanyin, the wall is covered with big red Chinese characters which cite: "do not do any evil, but good deeds instead, through obeying and practicing".

On each side of the main altar, there are golden pillars. These pillars are called stubhas. The top part of the stubha, is narrower than the bottom. A pillar has nine levels. Each level contain small figures. The figures are all Buddhas. When practitioners wish to demand a favor from Buddha, they will donate money (100\$ per year), and their name will be written at the bottom of the Buddha. Favors are usually about health, success at school and success in business. We were further explained that there were nine levels in a stubha because the number nine is considered as a lucky number in Buddhism, because it is the largest yang number in Chinese tradition. Other lucky numbers include, seven (7), fourteen (14), twenty-one (21), forty-eight (48), and one-hundred-and- eight (108).

If we pay close attention to the statues, we will notice that statues representing the Buddhas are gold, whereas the Bodhisattvas are colored. The two guardians standing on the main altar are also Bodhisattvas. Bodhisattvas are not yet Buddhas. They still need to gain more merit and they do so through helping others (meaning mortals) enlighten themselves.



### 1.1.3 Drawings of Floor Plan and Diagrams of Altars

The altars have complex and elaborated décors. Each altar is devoted to different deities and to different purposes, which also explains why each altar is displayed differently. (See Annex 1. for maps)

Diagrams:

1. [Main Floor](#)
2. [Main Altar](#) - where the statue of the Buddha stands
3. [Amitabha Altar](#) - where offerings are made to ancestors
4. [Altar of Guanyin](#) - also known as the Goddess of Mercy, where offerings for wishes and demands are made.
5. [Other diagrams](#) (side altar, wall inscription...)

## 1.2 Ritual Process

### 1.2.1 Ritual Specialists

There is a particular hierarchy in religious functions. On top there are the master/founder Venerable Hsing Yun, in Taiwan. Then there are nuns and monks (or just simply called venerable, for gender partiality) who are the ones who orchestrate the ceremonies. They are dressed in a black robe covered by a yellow-orang-ish colored sash. Then, as we move downwards, there are the practitioners dressed again in a black robe, but this time, covered by a brown sash. This indicates that they have achieved the five precepts and/or the Bodhisattva precepts. Those who follow the precepts will not go to hell, or return as an animal or a hungry ghost. Then, there are the practitioners simply dressed in a black robe. This indicates those who have taken refuge in the Buddha. And finally there are the regular lay people dressed in their regular clothing. This indicates that they have not yet taken refuge in the Buddha.

It should also be noted that the robes are worn only during the chanting and ceremony, and that they are provided by the temple.

The way the participants are seated within the ritual space is determined according to this hierarchy. The venerables are seated in the front of the room, and are the closest to the altar. The first few rows of participants are the ones dressed in a black robe covered with the brown sash. Behind them, in a separate row, there are the participants dressed in the simple black gown. And finally at the back, we find the lay people.

### 1.2.2 Ritual Objects and Substances

Each practitioner is loaned a book during the ceremony. The small orange book contains all the sutras and prayers so that the participants can follow and chant along. Most participants are given a book in Chinese, but there are bigger books available for non-Chinese readers. This book contains the same sutras and prayers, with the Chinese characters, the Chinese pronunciation (in pin yin) and the English translation. This book is more or less disorganized. The different prayers were not put in a particular order. It is also sometimes necessary to pass out a separate sheet, which in the end makes it that much more difficult for a non-Chinese speaker to follow at times.

As for musical instruments, there is a piano in the front of the room but it was never used during the ceremony. The venerable stands beside a big bronze bell, which is normally used to indicate bows and kowtows, as well as to keep rhythm. The venerable also holds a small bell which is used for rhythm, and musical sound. The venerable's assistant, stands beside a wooden shell, which resonates as a drum. The drum is struck to mark rhythm. On occasion, there is a second assistant who stands on the right side of the altar, who strikes on a thin long drum, and a medium size bell.

Once, the venerable in charge of the ceremony was suffering from the flu. She could not sing, so a pre-recorded tape of the ceremony was played instead, so all the participants could still follow the rhythm and order of each chant.

During the meal following the ceremony, the participants are told to eat in silence. There is a television set in the room, which plays Buddhist news, Buddhist storytelling, or videos of past activities that occurred at the center, etc.

Offerings include assorted fruits. The fruits change from week to week (depending on what they find at the market) and the quantity displayed on the altar also varies (depending on the size of the fruit). Usually the colour of the fruits ranges between gold and red, which are the colours of wealth and good luck. In Buddhism, there are ten kinds of offerings (as opposed to Taoism that counts only five):

- |              |                                       |
|--------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Incense   | 6. Tea                                |
| 2. Flowers   | 7. Food (rice usually)                |
| 3. Lamps     | 8. Treasures (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha) |
| 4. Ornaments | 9. Pearls                             |
| 5. Fruits    | 10. Cloths                            |

During one ceremony, long tables were layed out and each practitioner was handed a small bowl which contained a grain of rice, an orchid and a small stick of wood, which was raised at the forehead several times during the service (there was also a particular way how to hold each item). There were also bottles of bottled water, identified as Holy Water by a pink sticker put over the label, which were at the disposition of the practitioners. They are allowed to bring some bottles home for good luck and are encouraged to drink a few sips of that water to help their good fortune.



The practitioners offer food in the morning because that is the time when the deities eat. This is in comparison with the animals who eat in the afternoon, and the hungry ghosts who eat in the evening.

The incense is burned during the ceremony, and is given by every participant to the ancestor altar in remembrance to the ancestor. The scent chosen is sandalwood because it is thought not to have so strong a scent, and because it is believed to be a scent to calm the mind.

In relation to ritual objects, prayer beads are used to provide focus during the meditations (this was a claim by Yun Dong, although we haven't seen any practitioners using them during the Sunday morning

ritual. Practitioners hold the beads in their left hand and use their right hand to count and to move the beads around. With each bead, they pronounced "Nami Amida Buddha" four times.

### 1.2.3 Sequence of Events

#### 1.2.3.1 Words Spoken

##### Content

Since the great majority of the participants are Chinese, the ceremony takes place in Chinese. The ritual consists of a series of prayers, chants and songs. They chant the sutras and the mantras. They also chant Buddha's name (Omi-to-fo).

##### Form (genre, style of delivery)

The whole ceremony is mainly chanted. The purpose of the chanting during the ceremony is to practice concentration. By practicing in harmony and collaboration in the chant, it is believed to help develop compassion and concentration.

##### Source (sacred text, ritual manual, and hymnbook)

As previously mentioned, the ritual manual contains all the prayers and lyrics to the chants. The books are loaned to the participants for the length of the ceremony, and then kept in a bookcase. Essentially, the sacred texts are the sutras, which are the teachings of Buddha. This point will further be explained.

#### 1.2.3.2 Postures, Movements, Gestures

The postures include standing, kneeling, kowtowing, bowing, and sitting cross-legged in lotus position. There are movements when the participants circulate to bring incense to the ancestor altar, or when the participants move in and out of the rows, zigzagging around the rows while chanting the name of Buddha (Omi-to-fo). These movements consisting of circulating around the room are called 'circumambulation'. The participants are expected to imagine that they are traveling around the world, bringing the dharma with them as they travel.

Series of gestures can include a series of three kowtowing-standings, followed by a bow. There is movement during the ritual in order to develop focus and dynamic meditation.



### 1.3 Description of Ritual Setting in Terms of Participants' Beliefs

#### 1.3.1 Relevant Beliefs of the Ritual Community

The participants were very friendly and very eager to speak to us about Buddhism. They spoke about the importance of good deeds, which cancels out bad deeds. They also spoke about the three poisons: anger, greed, and ignorance.

To be a Buddhist is primarily to seek refuge in the Buddha and his teachings. To be a monk of Buddhism is to take refuge in the monastic life and community. It is strongly stressed that everyone can become a Buddhist at any age. Being Buddhist temple, the congregation also relies on the notion of karma, karmic retribution and reincarnation. In short, this could be explained as what one does in this life will determine what life one will have in the next. This also leads to the notion of cause and effect. During the repentance ceremony, the participants began reciting a prayer at a very quick pace. This prayer was recited several times as the ritual process went on. This was the "Dharani of Great Compassion". It is a prayer that must be learned by heart by the followers. Thus prayer can be recited anytime, anywhere. We were told that this was a prayer that can offer us salvation, and that we could recite in the bus or in the subway, or whenever we were in need of protection. (See Annex 3. for excerpt)

Eating together after the ceremony is essentially a Chinese custom. The food that is being served is vegetarian. Vegetarianism comes from the concept of possible reincarnation into animals. Not killing animals is showing compassion. Although not every practitioner is a vegetarian, they are encouraged to eat so while at the temple.

#### 1.3.2 Explanation of Ritual Setting and Process as Expressions of Community Beliefs

As for the ritual sequence, it is very difficult to describe a precise outline of the ceremony. This is due in part because of the fact that every Sunday morning is processed differently. There is a set number of ceremonies, and every week, they are rotated. For instance there were a compassion ceremony, a repentance ceremony, a purifying ceremony, etc. However, every ceremony does contain an element in common: a series of prayers chanted during the offerings at the main altar, and a series of chants for the offerings to the ancestors. These few prayers were repeated at every ceremony.

To simplify the writing of the ritual sequence, I chose to report only one example of a ceremony. The ceremony in question took place on March 26th 2000. This service had some interesting aspects, adding to the movements and to the chanting. On this day, there was also a Buddhist ordination for three westerners. The ritual sequence of this ceremony is also included. (See Annex 4. for ritual sequence and Annex 5. for Buddhist ordination)



## 2.0 Doctrine and Beliefs

### 2.1 Formal

#### 2.1.1 Branch of Buddhism

First, it must be noted that it is being assumed that the beliefs and doctrines supported by the IBPS, the association of venerables, and the BLIA, the association of the lay Buddhists, are basically uniform. There was not enough evidence to sustain an argument whether the two groups had divergent views. The Fo Kuang Shan is essentially part of the branch of Mahayana Buddhism.

#### 2.1.2 Fundamental Concepts or Doctrines

The IBPS centers practice Humanistic Buddhism. Humanism is obviously important, considering that Buddha was himself a human, and because of the present possibility to be reincarnated into humans. Venerable Master Hsing Yun's vision of Humanistic Buddhism is concerned with the welfare of the human beings here in *this world*, here in *the now*, and here in *the everyday*. He wrote: "Humanistic Buddhism must focus *more* on issues of the world rather than how to leave the world behind, on caring for the living rather than for the dead, on benefiting others rather than benefiting oneself, and on universal salvation rather than cultivation for oneself."

Fundamental beliefs of Buddhism are mostly concerned with one's relations with other human beings. The idea of karma also applies here: if you benefit someone else, karma dictates that you are benefiting yourself. Altruism is also an important concept in Buddhism. Buddha's words and actions arose from a deep-seated compassion and concern for others, and his followers should be similarly motivated. Altruism is significant, since we must grow from our compassion for others. Individualistic practices of Buddhism are given negative regards. Along with the Humanistic Buddhism, it is thought that Bodhisattvas, who are on the brink of entering into Nirvana, decide to stay on earth in order to help others become enlightened. Or to quote Hsing's words: "a bodhisattva is an energetic enlightened and endearing person who strives to help all sentient beings liberate themselves." In keeping with the goal of becoming a bodhisattva, there is also a focus on remaining in *this world* to preach the Dharma. An important goal of humanistic Buddhism is to create a *pure land* on earth. The concept of Pure Land is an important concept of Buddhism since it is generally understood as "Buddha's Land", the realm in which a Buddha resides after reaching enlightenment.

Buddha's desire is to save all sentient beings, without exclusion. The compassion of Humanistic Buddhism applies to male and female, young and old, rich and poor, animal and human, Buddhist and non-Buddhist, etc. regardless of nationality. Humanistic Buddhism also expresses tolerance for other forms of Buddhism, as well as other faiths' although this seem to be contradicted in the ordination ceremony, when new members swear to exclusively follow the Buddha's teaching, and no



other religion.

Along with the idea of karma, the Buddhist view of impermanence gives hope that bad situations will eventually turn good. This supports the emphasis on the optimistic view that Humanistic Buddhism has on daily life in this world. A great importance is laid upon lay Buddhism rather than on monastic Buddhism.

The influence of Ch'an (Zen), from Hsing's background, is also evident where daily life is concerned. What is important is experience from actual practice, and not a reliance on written or spoken language. Also, Ch'an masters do not practice meditation to become Buddhas, but to attain an enlightened view of the world we live in, through true understanding of the concept of emptiness (*sunyata*), and the illusiveness of existence. Again, the practice is very much focused on life in this world. "Instead of committing all our energies to pursuing something in the future, why don't we direct our efforts towards purifying our minds and bodies right here and now at the present moment?"

Pure Land Buddhism is also present when we look at the worshipping of Amitabha Buddha. Plus, Hsing maintains strong beliefs on creating a Pure Land on Earth that requires the helping of all sentient beings through the spread of Buddha's words. Worldwide adoption of Buddhist ideals would result in worldwide happiness, and in the end of all conflicts.

In sum, the IBPS and BLIA promote Humanistic Buddhism, which is driven by compassion for humanity, and support everyday application of Buddhism. Pure Land and Ch' an schools of Buddhism are also incorporated into the associations: "If you practice both Ch' an and the Pure Land Dharma methods, you are truly practicing Humanistic Buddhism (. . . ) Pure Land is based on a vow which all of us can take, and by this vow, it is designed to save everyone who is willing to try. Ch' an Buddhism shows everyone how to escape suffering, and no one is ever excluded."

### 2.1.3 Fundamental Texts

There are four main Mahayana texts used at the IBPS temple, according to Venerable Yun Dong. Two of these texts are employed as liturgy: the Lotus Sutra for the morning ritual, and the Amidabha Sutra for the evening ritual. The Lotus Sutra, *Saddharmapundarika Sutra* (Lotus Sutra of the True Law Sutra) is the most venerated of the sutras by the Mahayana sect. It promotes salvation to all those who honour it and to all those who cause it to be known and honoured by others. The Amidabha Sutra, *Sukhivativyuha* (Land of Bliss Sutra) is the least intellectual of the sutras, which is consequently useful for the uneducated and non-intellectual followers. The other two texts utilized at the IBPS temple are the Heart Sutra and the Diamond Sutra. These texts are mainly used for study. "They are concerned with the ultimate nature of reality and the manner in which this can be expressed by the human mind" (Berry, Thomas. Buddhism. New York: Hawton Books, 1967, p.133)

### 2.1.4 Methods of Education or Training, Intellectual or Practical

Intellectual education is offered at the temple four times a week. Sutra studies are available in French, English and Mandarin. Buddhism classes in English are also taught. They use classes and meditation sessions to teach the community. They also use seminars and workshops to discuss topics on Buddhism.

It might also be pertinent to mention that the Fo Guan Shan is affiliated to four universities, fifteen colleges, and a number of high schools and elementary schools. Four year programs are offered at the Buddhist colleges. During these four years, the students will take a variety of courses ranging from history, computer and language classes. But on top of these classes, students also take liturgy, skillful preaching and chanting classes. Furthermore, they learn to play instruments used during rituals. Upon their graduation, the students have the options to go on to higher studies, to join the work force or to apply to a Buddhist order.

Practical means of education vary. In general, we may say that enlightenment can be attained through the performance of rituals. Meditation is another practical mean to achieve learning and enlightenment.

Meditation classes are offered in English. The meditation promoted by the IBPS temple is a combination of Pure Land and Zen methods. Both methods are used since they both lead to enlightenment in different ways. Pure Land methods calms, settles, and removes distractions through devotional practices of Amitabha, whereas Zen's principle of no-thought brings wisdom to practice. Zen meditation methods are used, but not to a strict level.



*Venerable Master Hsing Yun  
 Founder, Fokwangshan Buddhist Order  
 Founder President, Buddha's Light International Association (BLIA)*

## 2.2 Informal

### 2.2.1 Fundamental Concepts or Doctrines

The five precepts of Buddhism are expected to be practiced by all Buddhists, laymen and the clergy alike:

1. I undertake to abstain from destroying life.
2. I undertake to abstain from taking things not given.
3. I undertake to abstain from sexual misconduct.
4. I undertake to abstain from false speech.
5. I undertake to abstain from intoxicants.

These allow for an orderly life by diminishing the amount of inner conflict caused by performing acts that are banned. Usually, the last of these five precepts is considered the worst if it is broken; since when one

is drunk or 'high', one's judgment is impaired, which makes it easier to break the other four. There exist five other precepts, which affect only the clergy;

6. I undertake to abstain from eating at forbidden times.
7. I undertake to abstain from dancing and singing.
8. I undertake to abstain from adorning or beautifying myself with the use of garlands, scents, unguents, ornaments, and finery.
9. I undertake to abstain from using a high or large couch or bed.
10. I undertake to abstain from accepting gold or silver.

These last precepts are severe because they require self-discipline, modesty and the acceptance to live in a state of poverty.

### 2.2.2 Practices

The IBPS organizes spiritual retreats. For example, a be-a-monk-for-one-day seminar is being organized, on the weekends; and in Taiwan, a bigger retreat is being organized for this summer: a be-a-monk-for-56-days. In keeping 'with their humanistic approach, the retreats are open to the general public. Members are invited to join in this retreat, or to take part in study groups. Conferences are also held, where the main emphasis is put on creating an awareness of the situations of Buddhism in various countries and to unite the Buddhists of the IBPS. (See Annex 7 for calendar of activities)

The IBPS also performs other humanistic deeds. For example, it offers scholarships in poor countries. It provides free medical services through the establishment of clinics and medical vans. The society supports orphanages and retirement homes. It also donates time, money, food and clothing to survivors of war and natural disasters.

Outside the ceremonial curriculum, there are also several activities organized by the temple to reunite its community. For example, the first week we visited the temple, after the ceremony, there were cooking classes (how to make dumplings) offered at the temple. The third week we visited, there was a group of participants who were going to a homeless shelter to offer the less fortunate food and warm clothing (other times, they go visit retirement homes). The fourth week we visited, after the ceremony, there were classes on how to write the sutras. And every week since the beginning of March, children and young members of the community were invited to gather and rehearse for the parade planned for May 7th to celebrate Sakyamuni' s birthday, in Chinatown. This is not the only type of parade in which the BLIA has participated in. They have also been presented in the July 19th Canada parade, and other similar events. The BLIA can claim its own little space in Montreal's cultural life.



Ritual practices held at the temple demonstrate adaptation to circumstances. For example, the Ching Ming Festival is a Chinese Festival held in the spring (April 9th). In China, during this festival, Buddhists go to the cemetery to clean their ancestors tombs and to remember them. The temple has a number of Chinese believers, and since they cannot go to China to perform their duties required during the Festival, the temple created a special ceremony for ancestor memorial, to make the Chinese believers to feel like they have accomplished their filial duties.

### 3.0 Institution

#### 3.1 The Temple as a Whole

##### 3.1.1 Organization

Master Hsing Yun is a distinguished Ch'an master and 48th Patriarch of the Rinzaï Ch' an lineage. He was born in 1927 in China. He became a novice monk at the age of twelve years old, and was fully ordained at the age of fourteen. He received formal education in monastic precepts, such as Vinaya, and in Buddhism, while he was still in mainland China.

In 1949, with the civil war in China, he left for Taiwan, where he undertook the revitalization of Buddhism as practiced in the Chinese tradition. He was very successful. He opened numerous temples. There are quite a few publications, which bare his name. He undertook social, educational and cultural projects to spread Buddhism. Through his guidance and through the International Buddhist Progress Society (IBPS) centers, Humanistic Buddhism and Chinese culture have been established through the world. IBPS is the association which groups all the venerables throughout the world. This association groups the 'teachers'. Its headquarter is located in Taiwan.

The Buddha's Light International Association (BLIA) was inaugurated in 1992. The association brings together over 100 establishments worldwide. Through this association, Buddha's teaching has reached the five continents, and therefore signifies how Buddhism has entered a new era.

BLIA is the association which groups all the practitioners of Buddhism. It groups the 'students'. Its headquarter is located in Los Angeles (it is called Hsi Lai). There is no fee to become a member. To be a member, one simply has to become a member of Buddhism (which may lead us to think that there is a certain kind of registration system). The members can have discount on classes given at the center, which goes outside the regular ceremonial curriculum; e.g. classes of meditation in English will cost 50\$ to a member, compared to 60\$ to a non-member (which may lead us to think that members are expected to be more generous with their donations).

Both the IBPS and the BLIA are both part of a larger organization called the Fo Kuang Shan, which means 'Buddha's Light Mountain' in Chinese. Venerable Master Hsing Yun also founded this organization. This organization is also based in Taiwan. And is considered as a very large Buddhist association - Although to my understanding, Fokuang Shan is only the Chinese name for the IBPS (See Annex 8. for photographs of the associations).

Venerable Master Hsing Yun travels around the world to give lectures on Buddhism and monastic teachings. Master Hsing Yun pays for his travel through the money he earns selling his books and with the help of some donation money.

There are over 300 branches of the organization. (There are about 1500 venerables who are part of the organization). Each organization is separated and self-governed. They give monthly reports to the organization's headquarters about the current events and status of the temple.

As it was previously mentioned, the organization is affiliated to four universities. Two are located in Taiwan, one is in mainland China, and the other is in Los Angeles, California. Information about these universities can mainly be found on the internet, and unfortunately, the websites are all in Chinese. The website for the Hsi Lai University in Los Angeles is more accessible. We would imagine that the universities are all alike and similar. Although Buddhism concerns the greatest part of the curriculum, there is also a business organization department, a department of English-as-a-Second-Language, and a department of Continuing Education. If we take a look at the faculty and its staff, there are a great number of professors who teach such subjects as mathematics, philosophy, economics and engineering related courses, etc. Perhaps an important aspect to point out is the fact that the education is free. The university

of Hsi Lai is also approved as a degree-granting institution by the Bureau of Private Postsecondary and Vocational Education (BPPVE). Hsi Lai university currently offers classes in both graduate and post-graduate studies with B.A and M.A degree programs. Doctorate programs are also available.

On top of being affiliated to four universities, the organization is also affiliated to fifteen colleges, and a number of high schools and elementary schools. In addition, the organization counts its own orphanage and clinic. And, the organization has a modern translator that translates all the Buddhist texts into modern language. In fact, most books available at the Hua-yen temple were offered in the English translation.



### 3.1.2 Local History

The Hua-yen temple of Montreal itself was founded in 1992. It was established by six laymen who donated the building to the monastic community. The funding of the temple is entirely based on donations from the followers, and the maintenance of the temple is based on the same donations. The temple receives no government assistance.

As for monastic life, Moon Hung is the only venerable at the temple of Montreal. She is the one in charge of the services and the temple in general. The financial situation of the Hua-yen temple is said to be fairly good and stable. The temple is not excessively wealthy, however is considered better off than other temples, such as Ottawa or Boston, where the Asian community is much smaller. With a larger Asian community in Montreal, it is much easier to get funding. (See Annex 6. for listings of temple's activity)

### 3.2.3 Funding and Maintenance

Donations are principally for maintenance, but when there is enough, the money is always given to others in need. The members of the temple are quite generous when it comes to donations. Before the ceremony, several 100\$ bills were being circulated, as well as 50\$ bills. As previously mentioned, the center keeps record of the donor and the donations. Donations are in terms of money, but also in terms of food for offering or to eat after the ritual ceremony, and other maintenance related materials. The donations are not only recorded into a big book, but are also written on red strips on paper and hung on a pin-board. This could be seen as a way to congratulate the donors for their generous jpgt, but it could

also be seen as an incitement manner to lure more generous donations. For example, if one practitioner gave one dollar, but then notices that his/her neighbour gave three, he/she might feel cheap and be more generous next time and give five dollars instead.

### **3.2 The Community**

#### *3.2.1 Ordained Clergy*

The monks/nuns are the ones who take care and take charge of the temple. They must essentially do everything. They are the ones who take care of accounting and are also responsible for the teaching. The venerables must remain single, observe the strict ten precepts mentioned earlier. These strict measures are mainly due to the fact that they are spiritual teachers. As previously mentioned, there is only one venerable at the temple in Montreal.

#### *3.2.2 Congregation at Large*

Practicing women are much more numerous than men. This is often explained by the fact that Buddhist practice appeals more to women, or by the fact that women are more receptive towards Buddhist teaching. A clear difference of age group can also be defined. Mainly an older crowd frequents the temple. Some practitioners seem to be over 30 years of age, but the majority is well over 50. There are only a few youths under the age of 25. In total, there are approximately two hundred members that frequent the temple.

#### *3.2.3 Senior Lay People*

Since there is only one venerable at the temple in Montreal, it is usually senior laymen who help preside over the congregation. They help organize and support the temple.

#### *3.2.4 Canadian Born Young People*

The youth group is still considered large (it includes both children and teenagers who attend separate ceremonies) and very active. They are mainly involved in activities such as conferences. Usually, the temple elects two leaders, one to instruct the youth group, and another for the elderly group.

#### *3.2.5 Who Has Authority Over What Areas of Decision?*

Each temple organizes its own activities to serve the local community. Each temple is self-organized and independent. As one becomes a member of the BLIA, one is welcome at all the other temples. From time to time, events and activities are organized to encourage the participation of the worshippers from all the different regions. For example, there is a Buddhism Doctrine Exam held across North America, and all members are welcomed to take it. Also, there is the Annual International Conference, which groups delegates from each temple who are welcomed to share their experiences or opinions.

The temples stay in touch and cooperate with each other because of the philanthropic programs and disaster relief programs which often require coordination between the temples around the world. There is a very available repertoire of all the different centers throughout the world. (See Annex 9. for repertoire)

To help the communication among the different associations, there is a journal, presently published in Taiwan, which correlates different good news of what is going on at the different temples in the world. The emphasis is on the word 'good'. Every event presented in the journal is good news. Good news is found

instead of bad news because bad news has a negative effect on people's daily life. The argument we were given by Venerable Moon Hung was that we learn from what we read. If we read about murder in the newspaper, then we are being taught how to kill others. Therefore, if we read about good news in Buddhism then we can truly learn good Buddhist value. The emphasis on positive news is also due to the idea of rebuilding the morality of the modern world - this is another important point supported by Venerable Master Hsing Yun; he tried to adapt his Buddhism to the modern world.

The journal contains a resumé of past events and activities, and also practitioner's (testimony of how their belief and practice of Buddhism has changed their life. The journal also contains small stories, etc. There has been a lot of talk lately of publishing a journal in Montreal, or in North America, to reduce the cost of imports and to have a more local content.

There are also some TV programs that are produced in Taiwan with news broadcast (similar to the journal) and storytelling by venerables (usually aimed at children, who are encouraged to learn and tell stories about Buddhism).

### *3.2.6 Areas of Difference*

The young do not like to chant and want more activities, whereas the old prefer the traditional chanting. The old like the vegetarian food, whereas the young do not. The young are not forced to become vegetarian, but rather encouraged to eat vegetarian (without fuss) while they are at the temple.

The members of the temple of Montreal are mainly from Taiwan and mainland China. It was mentioned to me that there were only a few Hong Kongers because they did not have a strong belief of Buddhism, or simply of religious practice.

Obviously, since the age group is much older, there are only few or almost no Canadian-Chinese as members. Even younger members (meaning teenagers) were born in Asia. Most of the Canadian-born members are still only small children.

There is not much to add, here, concerning the difference between the clergy and the lay people, besides what was already mentioned in section II-Community.

I still would like to make a small comment on language: The language used during the ritual ceremony is Chinese and the language used for communication among members is also Chinese. But, to my surprise, the second language was not English. In fact, it was difficult to find an English speaker who could help us with some translation. The second language most often used was French. Both the young children to the older members (who looked like they could barely stand) spoke French.

## 4.0 Conclusion

Overall, this has been a very challenging research project. It was not a project which one could do the night before, cramming the books for some last minutes notes. It took a lot of time for preparation. We had to visit the temple several times in order to get a real picture of the institution and ritual setting. I myself went every week for a month and a half: Every week, the ritual was different and every week a few more questions would be answered and a few more would surface. It was a true growing process.

There was also a lot of Saint-Exupéry's concept of tamedness. We had to get used to this new setting and the members of the center had to get used to us in return. Plus, there is a need to mention the large language barrier that was present. Venerable Moon Hung spoke only a few words of English, and a translator-member would often be needed to get full conversation with her. Luckily, for a few weeks, a visiting nun from Toronto, Venerable Yun Dong, was able to help since she was more fluent in English.

In the end, I feel like I have taken up a challenge, but there is much more to be said, observed and analyzed.

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## Acknowledgements

Special thanks to my teammates: Lorraine Keenan, Jennifer Moores, Rod Dupéron, Dann Horowitz and Patricia Caviglia. Everyone worked together at putting all the pieces of this big puzzle together. Thanks to the Venerable Moon Hung and the Venerable Yun Dong for all their patience in answering our questions. Thanks to Aaron and Dixon for all their last minute help.



## Note on Sources

Outside all the questions asked to the venerables of the temple and to the practitioners, the internet was used as one mean of sources, although many sites were only in Chinese. Other important sources consisted of the Venerable Master Hsing Yun's publications. A serie of small booklets were available at the temple, in English.

"The Fundamental Concepts of Humanistic Buddhism"

"The Essence of Chan"

"The Amitabha Sutra and the Pure Land School of Buddhism"

<http://www.blia.org> - for info on the BLIA and Yen. Master Hsing Yun's sayings.

<http://www.ibps.org> - for info on affiliated temples, excerpts of conferences and lectures from Yen. Master Hsing Yun; and for contact list throughout the world

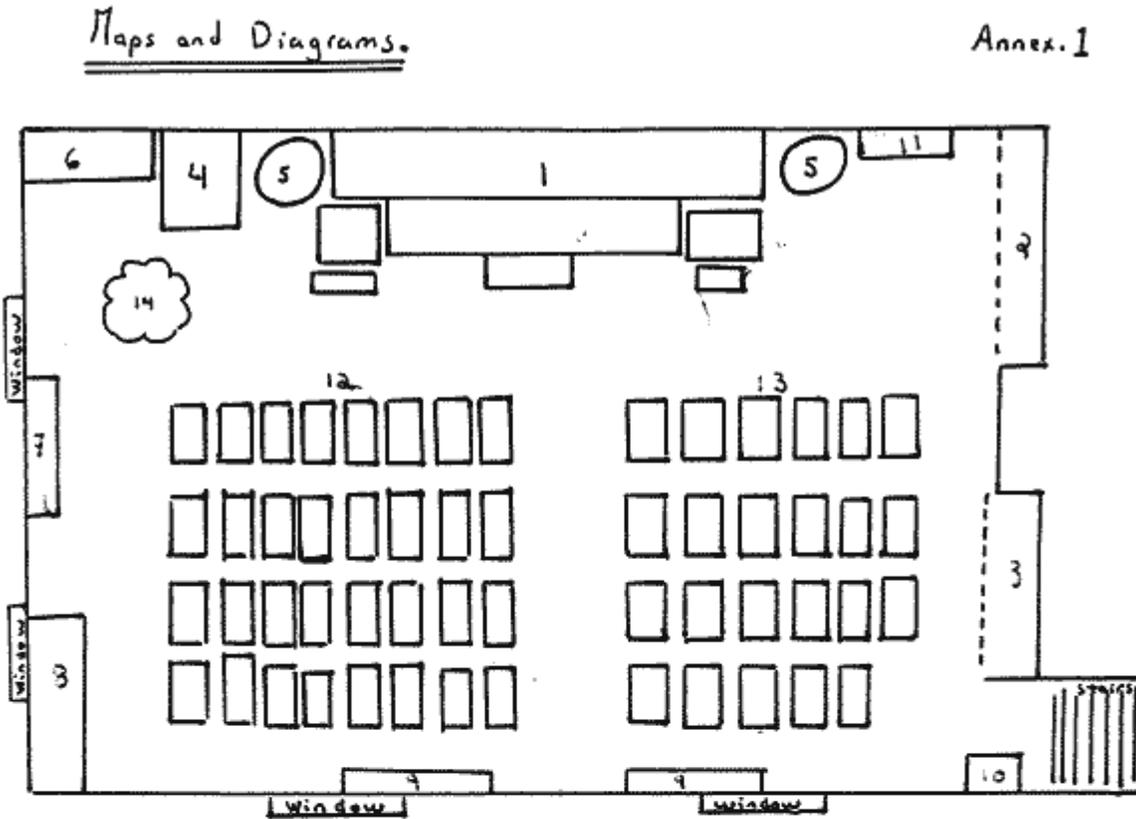
<http://www.hlu.edu/> - for info on Hsilai University

<http://www.hsilai.org> - for info on how to drive to the temple.

<http://www.nhmc.edu.tw> - for info on Nanhua College (but all in Chinese)

List of Annexes: Maps of the Ritual Setting and Diagrams of the Altars

1. Map of the Main Floor



a) Map of Main Floor.

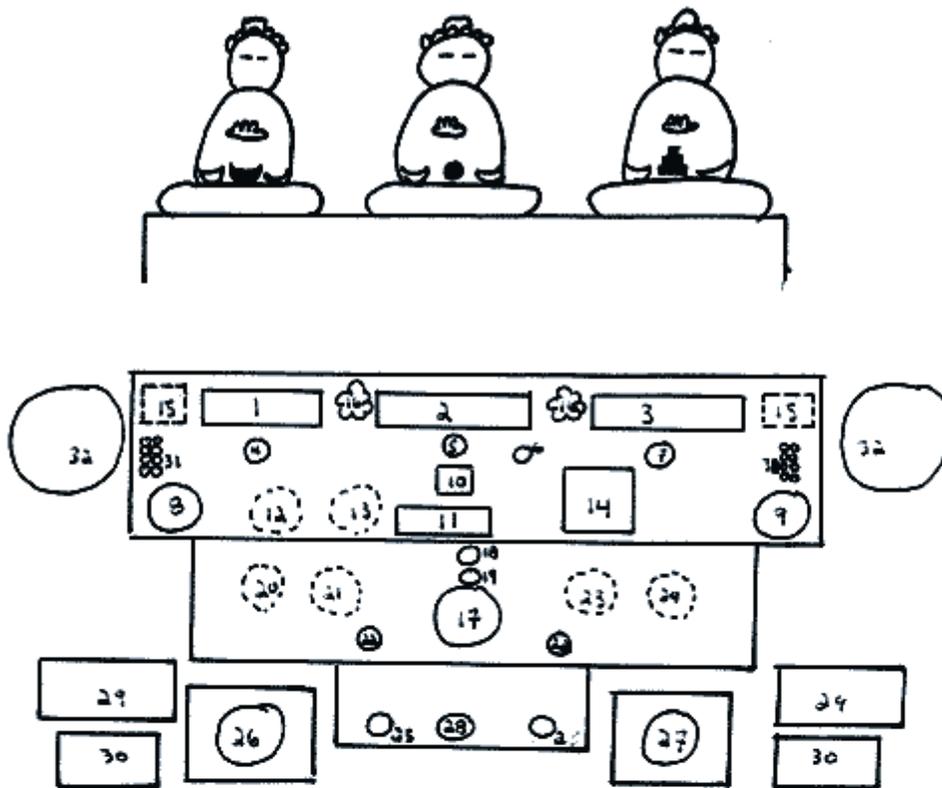
- 1- Main Altar
- 2- Altar for the Ancestors
- 3- Altar of Guan yin
- 4- Secondary Altar
- 5- pillar covered with miniature Buddha, called 'stuphas'
- 6- Book case where all the prayer books are kept
- 7- Glass case where books and bracelets to sell are kept
- 8- Desk where all the paper work is done
- 9- Benches to sit on
- 10- Donation box

- 4- Piano
- 12- Four rows of 8 cushions where the female members stand
- 13- 3 rows of 6, and 1 row of 5 cushions where the male members stand
- 14- tree with oranges hanging on the branches (during the Chinese New Year)



Shrine Spread light Buddha  
 ←  
 meaning "Spreading Buddha's light"

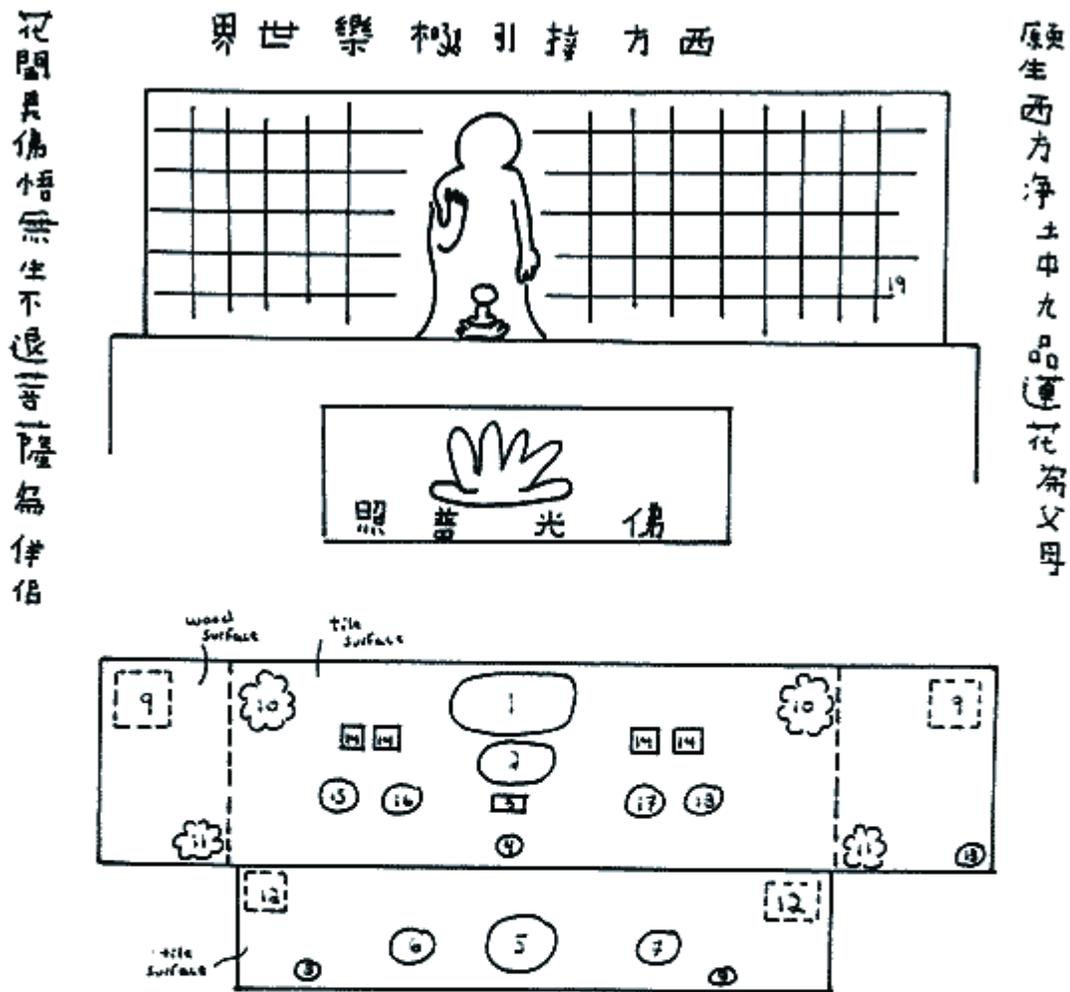
2. Diagram of the Main Altar



b) Diagram of Main Altar

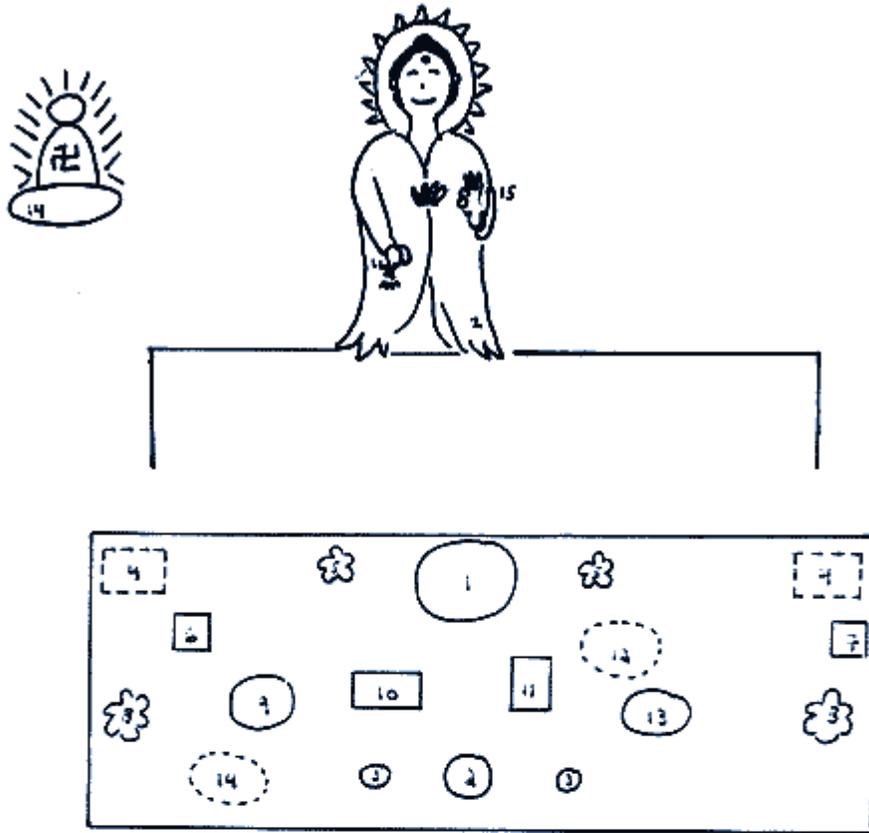
- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1- Amitabha Buddha  | 15- high green plant                                  |
| 2- Sakyamuni Buddha   | 16- big set of lights shaped in red lotus             |
| 3- Buddha of Medicine   | 17- bowl where incense is placed                      |
| 4- crystal ball   | 18- crystal lotus                                     |
| 5- crystal perfume bottle shaped as a pagoda                      | 19- bowl of purified water                            |
| 6- hand of Buddha   | 20- platter of fruit (oranges)                        |
| 7- jade ball  | 21- platter of fruit (bananas)                        |
| 8- Guardian (with red face)                                       | 22- red candles shaped as lotus                       |
| 9- Guardian   | 23- platter of fruit (oranges)                        |
| 10- picture of a pagoda in Taiwan where a tooth of Buddha is kept | 24- platter of fruit (honeydew melon)                 |
| 11- Avalokitesvara Buddha; sarva                                  | 25- bowl of purified water                            |
| 12- platter of fruit (big yellow fruit)                           | 26- drum placed on a red cushion                      |
| 13- platter of fruit (apples)                                     | 27- bell placed on a red cushion                      |
| 14- Book containing the sutras                                    | 28- small container for spiral incense                |
|   | 29- wood table where lotus are placed during lectures |
|   | 30- cushions  |
|   | 31- purified bottle of water                          |
|   | 32- pillars with miniature Buddha                     |
|   | * Table cloth covering the altar's plate              |

## 3. Diagram of the Amitabha Altar

c) Diagram of Amitabha Altar

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1- taller statue</li> <li>2- smaller statue</li> <li>3- picture of Buddha</li> <li>4- bowl with holy water</li> <li>5- bowl where incense is placed</li> <li>6- platter of fruit (banana)</li> <li>7- platter of fruit (oranges)</li> <li>8- yellow candles (lotus shape)</li> <li>9- high green plants</li> <li>10- tall white flowers</li> <li>11- light in shape of red lotus</li> <li>12- small pink flowers</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13- microphone</li> <li>14- Chinese writing describing functions of the altar + blank paper to write deceased name on.</li> <li>15- platter of fruit (small oranges)</li> <li>16- platter of fruit (apples)</li> <li>17- platter of fruit (big oranges)</li> <li>18- platter of fruit (pears)</li> <li>* The cloth covering the altar is yellow</li> <li>19- small red papers with name of deceased or ancestors</li> </ul> |
|--|--|

4. Diagram of the Guanyin Altar

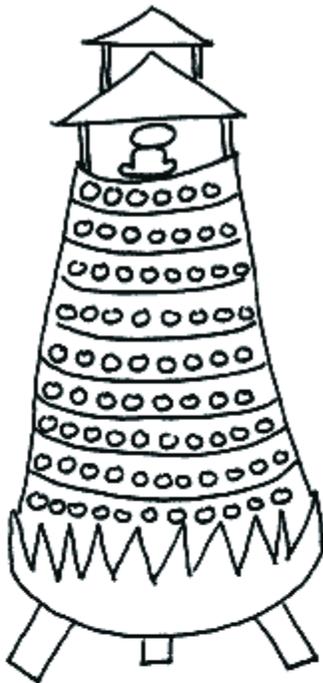


4) Diagram of Guanyin Altar.

- 1- statue of Guanyin
- 2- bowl where incense is placed
- 3- red candles (lotus shape)
- 4- high green plant
- 5- light in shape of red lotus
- 6- bowl of paper, to write wishes on
- 7- bowl of used incense sticks
- 8- long white flowers
- 9- bowl of fruit (apples)
- 10- gold lying Buddha
- 11- Sign (in chinese writing) describing functions of the altar
- 12- white statue of a female deity

- 13- bowl of fruit (oranges)
- 14- small statue of a Buddha (see figure in top left corner)
- \* The table cloth covering the altar is pink.
- 15- Gold ball, in statue's left hand
- 16- gold vase with water pouring out, in statue's right hand

5. Other Diagrams (side altar, stubhas, wall inscriptions)

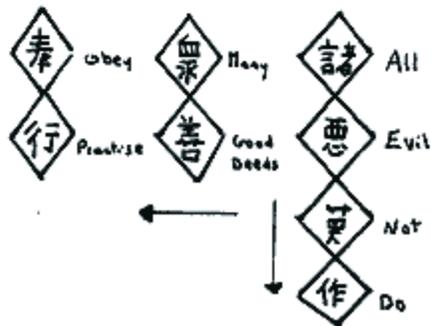
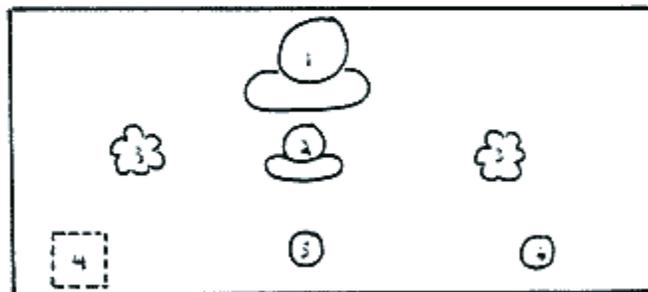


- These pillars can be found on both sides on the main altar and are called 'Stubhas'
- The tower contains nine rows
- Each row contains small buddhas. Each of these buddhas can be found with a name and a wish
- wishes can be of good health, good grades at school, fortune in business, etc.
- One top of these nine rows, lies a Buddha hidden under two roofs.
- The three legs of these pillar are shaped into dragon faces.

Stubha.

Diagram of secondary altars.

- 1- taller statue
- 2- smaller statue
- 3- light in shape of red lotus
- 4- high green plant
- 5- platter of fruit (apples)
- 6- tall pink flowers



writing found on the wall between the ancestor altar and the altar of Guanyin.

wall inscription.