'Recycling the past' Tzu-chi waste recycling and the cultural politics of nostalgia in Taiwan

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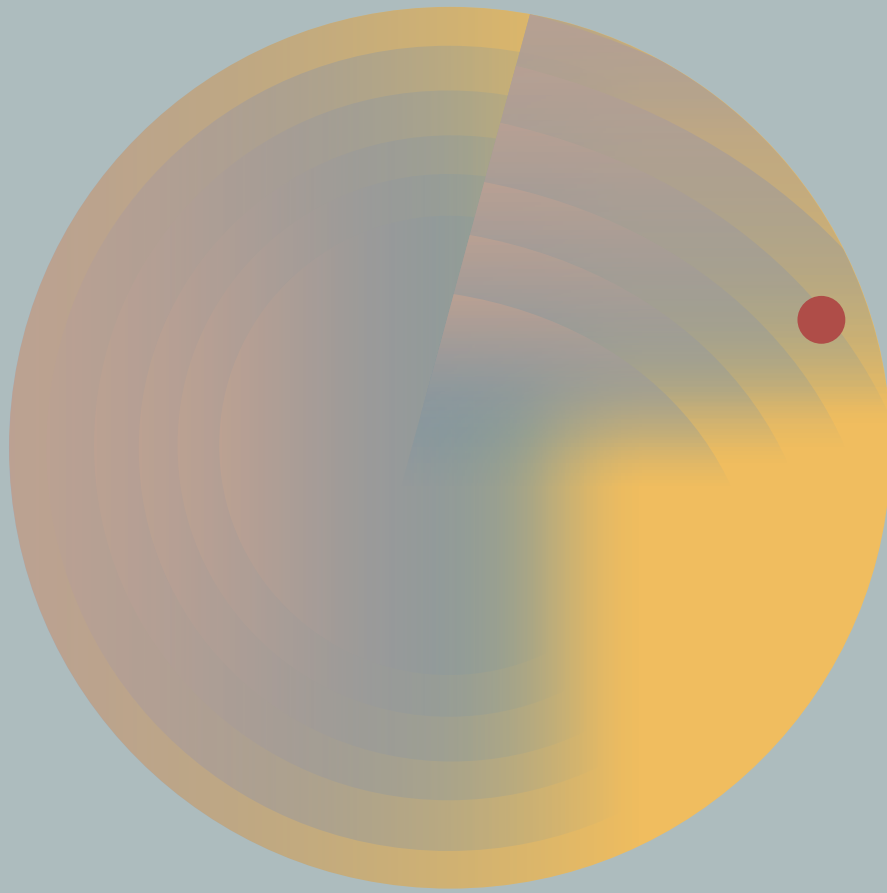The handle https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3209240 holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

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Yun-An Olivia Dung

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**Tzu-chi Waste Recycling and
the Cultural Politics of Nostalgia in Taiwan**

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Chapter One |
Introduction

1. Tzu-chi Recycling in a Nutshell

'What can your applauding hands do? They can sort rubbish',[1] the Buddhist nun Shih Cheng-yen (釋證嚴; 1937-) told her audience on an August evening in 1990. Earlier, on her way to give a speech at one of the 'Joyful Life' seminars in Taichung, Cheng-yen—the founder and leader of the Buddhism-based lay organisation Tzu-chi—had been disturbed by the overwhelming amount of rubbish left behind in the open air market. In response to the audience's enthusiastic applause for her speech, Cheng-yen called for a movement to obliterate rubbish.

That night, a 24-year-old woman in the audience took Cheng-yen's words to heart and initiated a waste-paper collection scheme in her neighbourhood in Taichung. The news quickly spread among Tzu-chi's devotees when the organisation received its first 'environmental donation' from the young woman a month after Cheng-yen's speech. Gradually, the size and scale of the Tzu-chi recycling community grew as the organisation carried out Cheng-yen's wish, and her followers worked towards achieving the goal of 'Preserving the Pure Land in the Terrestrial World' (預約人間淨土[2]),[3] a movement that worked to promote green

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[1] See Appendix, quotation 1.1 for the Chinese text and pin-yin; the English translation is the author's.

[2] yuyue renjian jingtu

[3] Tzu-chi Foundation 慈濟基金會, 'Mo wang *yuyue renjian jingtu*' 莫忘「預約人間淨土」, Tzu-chi official website, 22 September 2009,

consciousness and promulgate community recycling collection across the island through the organisational laity.

By 2018, almost three decades later, the Tzu-chi national recycling scheme consists of 279 recycling stations, 8,536 collection bases, 900 trucks, and a network of cadres and administrators across the nation with nearly 90,000 certified volunteer participants.[4] Tzu-chi recycling volunteers systematically collect miscellaneous recyclables ranging from plastic bags to household appliances from markets, shops, residential communities, and businesses. At the community recycling stations, volunteers and commissioners, mostly women and elderly people, sit on low stools and spend mornings and afternoons dismantling and classifying valuable discards: they remove small metal screws from old VCR tapes, cut blank white paper away from parts tainted with ink, use their feet to compress empty PET bottles, and wash the sorted plastic bags.

The above story of how Tzu-chi began to engage in recycling—the speech is referred to by the title 'Using Applauding Hands to Protect the Environment' (用鼓掌雙手做回收[5])—was almost the standard opening of conversations I had with Tzu-chi commissioners to learn more about the organisation's recycling story. The fabled narrative is also presented in many Tzu-chi productions: almanacs, television documentaries, organisational handouts, and the posters hanging on the walls of recycling stations. On the one hand, the standard prologue, which resembles a conversion narrative, includes organisation-wide tributes to the leadership of Cheng-yen, who initiated the activities that led to the current achievements of Tzu-chi recycling through her accidental but crucial observation and vision to advocate recycling before the state made it a priority in the early 1990s. On the other hand, the story addresses a specific characteristic of Tzu-chi recycling: that it is a semi-spontaneous, self-motivated, and community-based movement.

In the late 1990s, the volume of waste materials Tzu-chi recycled made up more than a quarter of the national recycling total. After the state implemented national

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https://www.tzuchi.org.tw/%E5%85%A8%E7%90%83%E5%BF%97%E6%A5%AD/%E8%87%BA%E7%81%A3/item/8859-%E8%8E%AB%E5%BF%98%E3%80%8C%E9%A0%90%E7%B4%84%E4%BA%BA%E9%96%93%E6%B7%A8%E5%9C%9F%E3%80%8D (accessed 17 September 2019).

[4] Tzu-chi Almanac 2018, '2018 nian ciji quanqiu huanbao zhigong renshu ji huanbao zhan/dian shu'
2018 年慈濟全球環保志工人數暨環保站／點數, 496.

[5] yong guzhang shuangshou zuo huishou

mandatory recycling programmes in the 2000s, the rest of society has caught up with recycling, and the total number of recyclable materials has increased dramatically nation-wide. Consequently, the percentage of recycling Tzu-chi volunteers perform has dropped significantly. Still, Tzu-chi recycled about 100 million kilos of waste material in 2015, some 3% of the national total.[6] Despite the declining share in overall national recycling, the number of Tzu-chi recycling volunteers has continuously grown, and the recycling programme remains one of the major public faces of the Buddhism-based organisation. In the 2000s, the Tzu-chi recycling programme not only spread across Taiwan but also around the world. According to the 2018 Tzu-chi almanac, outside Taiwan, there are a total of 252 recycling stations and 18,688 volunteers located across five continents, with particularly strong representation in South-East Asia and North America.[78] Taken together, a total of more than 100,000 volunteers participates in Tzu-chi recycling.

As part of its mission of environmental protection, the semi-spontaneously formed local community recycling bases are not independent of the headquarters of the Buddhism-based institute Tzu-chi, one of Taiwan's foremost non-governmental organisations. Instead, the task of recycling is closely coordinated with other organisational missions and institutions, in line with the vision of Tzu-chi's charismatic leader, Cheng-yen, and through the networks of voluntary commissioners and the management of the foundation. For example, Tzu-chi's listed company, Da-ai Technology (大愛感恩科技), manufactures a variety of 'green products', such as clothing, blankets, and stationery, made from recycled PET bottles that can be purchased from the Tzu-chi recycling stations. These products are sold in Tzu-chi's shops and used in Tzu-chi's national and international relief efforts and have earned a variety of international 'green design' awards. In addition to material supplies, the Tzu-chi recycling programme also provides financial support to other missionary projects. Today, Tzu-chi uses

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[6] Tzu-chi Foundation, *2016-2017 Sustainability Report* [in Chinese], 77. https://www.tzuchi.org.tw/CSR/doc/2016-2017CSR.pdf   (accessed 17 September 2019).
[7] The overseas development of the Tzu-chi recycling programme is largely the result of the expansion of Tzu-chi worldwide, which has two overlapping aspects: first, missions and missionaries, and specifically their global outreach programmes of international relief; and second, the overseas branches of Tzu-chi devotees.
[8] Tzu-chi Almanac 2018, '2018 nian ciji quanqiu huanbao zhigong renshu ji huanbao zhan/dian shu'
2018 年慈濟全球環保志工人數暨環保站／點數, 496.

the considerable income from the recycling scheme for the operation of Da-ai TV (大愛電視台), a Tzu-chi-owned, non-profit television station.

In 1998, when Tzu-chi launched Da-ai TV, a slogan was developed to epitomise the capacity and impact of the Tzu-chi recycling programme: 'Rubbish becomes gold; gold becomes love; love transforms into a clear stream; the clear stream encircles the world'.[9] The slogan soon became one of the most popular mottos of Tzu-chi recycling. On the one hand, the slogan is a description of the interlocking relations and remarkable achievements of the Tzu-chi conglomerate. Through organisational coordination and volunteers' recycling work, dirty and unwanted refuse is eventually turned into a 'clear stream': the international broadcasts of Da-ai TV, which is considered 'uncontaminated' by commercialisation because it relies not on advertising sales but on the financial resources the Tzu-chi recycling income provides, and the Da-ai blankets made from the discarded PET bottles Tzu-chi recycling volunteers collect, which are issued as part of Tzu-chi's international disaster-relief efforts.

On the other hand, the slogan is a typical institutional representation of the transcendent view through which Tzu-chi takes interprets its recycling practice, a visualisation of the value of transitioning fluidity across materials, labour, finances, information, and emotions. In other words, Tzu-chi's distinctive environmental discourse transforms the mundane act of waste-sorting into a practice of altruism. Therefore, the selfless endeavours of the recycling volunteers create the so-called 'love effects' that work against greenhouse effects; recycling stations become 'places of awakening', and the practice of recycling becomes a spiritual cultivation.

The thumbnail sketch above of Tzu-chi recycling suggests the multi-faceted nature of this religion-based, community-initiated, volunteer-operated recycling movement that has been active in Taiwan since the early 1990s. This overview, however, is rather an institutional account of how the system has developed from its grassroots beginnings to attain a global reach, the timescale that official Tzu-chi depictions claim. The significance and peculiarity of Tzu-chi recycling, nonetheless, lie deeper beneath the glamour of its large scale and kudos and are embedded in broader historical and social aspects of post-authoritarian Taiwan.

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[9] See Appendix, quotation 1.1 for the Chinese text and pin-yin; the English translation is the author's.

2.   Research Inquiry and Objective

This dissertation investigates the relationship between waste recycling and social change, asking how the process of un/remaking materials remakes a society. As a point of departure, this dissertation shares a principal view found in the social science study of waste.[10] That is, waste is a constitutive element and reflects the terrain of modern society. Instead of complying with a prevailing notion of recycling as an environmental solution to the waste issue, or as converting and trading materials in a circular economy—views which are often found in previous scholarly works on Taiwan's recycling—this dissertation maintains that recycling is about people, their relation to materials and environments, their networks of interaction and modes of thoughts. Accordingly, the overriding purpose of this study is to explore the sociological and cultural implications of waste recycling. The core research question is to ask how the waste practice of recycling transforms values in addition to those of discarded materials. The overarching argument of this dissertation will be presented in the next section.

The objective of the dissertation is thus to read the development of post-authoritarian Taiwan through the lens of waste recycling, as well as to understand waste recycling through Taiwan's experience. Taking Tzu-chi recycling as a case study, this research elucidate how Tzu-chi recycling has corresponded and contributed to different social developments in Taiwan in the last several decades of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first century. This dissertation analyses the Tzu-chi recycling phenomenon against the backdrop of wider historical resonances. The social changes examined are those of the national industrial transformation (Chap. 4), an aging society (Chap. 5), a localisation movement (Chap. 6), a religious movement (Chap. 7), and shifts in value orientation (Chap. 8).

While studying the relationship between Tzu-chi waste recycling and Taiwan's social transition, the dissertation as a whole shows the ways in which Tzu-chi volunteers and associated members in Taiwan have managed, understood, represented, and practiced recycling. More specifically, each chapter presents Tzu-chi recycling through a particular focus, although not exclusively and sometimes dialectically, and asks related sub-questions: How is Tzu-chi recycling institutionally managed, and how does it relate to Taiwan's recycling scheme as a

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[10] See Chapter Two for more comprehensive review.

whole (Chap. 3)? Who are the volunteers, why do they volunteer, what are the recycling works, and what knowledge is mobilised to deal with waste materials (Chap. 4 and 5)? How does the Tzu-chi recycling community network form and operate (Chap. 6)? How are waste and recycling represented, and what non-waste goals do such discursive endeavours serve (Chap. 7 and 8)?

For its empirical focus, this dissertation studies the case of Tzu-chi recycling in post-authoritarian, contemporary Taiwan. The case study of Tzu-chi is chosen with the conviction that it is one of the 'rabbit hole' an anthropologist and sociologist seeks: a passageway into the minutiae of a world of peculiar characteristics and unfamiliar semiotics. It is an empirical entry point into broad sociological structural exploration. Tzu-chi recycling is a grassroots movement of community waste disposal carried out by a Buddhist organisation which has almost fully relied on voluntary workforces. The phenomenon flourished and developed throughout the pivotal periods of Taiwan's rapid political, economic, and cultural transformation. The peculiarity of Tzu-chi recycling allows researchers to understand the dynamics between waste and society beyond the commonly recognised environmental movements instigated and led by environmental bureaucratic organisations and academic environmentalists, beyond the institutional responses to environmental disputes from the perspectives of policy analysis and conflict resolution. It further provides international scholarship with insights into waste movements in the context of East Asian developmental states, a region that once occupied the role of global production for industrial consumer goods, particularly in the second half of the twentieth century. Tzu-chi recycling represents a case of a community-based movement, and it is by no means a flash in the pan nor a short-term project. It is a phenomenon which has evolved over the last three decades. Moreover, Tzu-chi recycling is not bound to a specific, local region of Taiwan; rather, it is a nation-wide phenomenon, seen both in urban and countryside areas. Further, the institutional discourse and operational system of Tzu-chi recycling travels internationally through the organisation's global media reach and philanthropic missions. While recognising its international aspect, I should clarify that this dissertation nevertheless focuses on Tzu-chi recycling which has taken place *in* Taiwan. This decision is mainly based on the research aim, which is to approach the complexities and dense local references with ideas about waste recycling that have taken on concrete meanings. This premise assumes that every 'elsewhere' development of Tzu-chi community recycling has its own local context. For this reason, I have avoided presenting case studies of Tzu-chi recycling in a variety of

global places and preferred an approach that carefully presents a single case as an example of broader dilemmas and the complexity of contemporary life in the context of Taiwan.

3. Argument in Brief

This dissertation proposes that Tzu-chi recycling system itself represents a kind of societal mechanism of recycling which not only recycles objects but also non-object forms of discard. As the dissertation will demonstrate, what to be found in Tzu-chi recycling, including people, ideas, and actions, are those of which once lost their place and value in the tides of Taiwan's progressive social change over the last century; and those which represent 'the past' of Taiwanese society are now mobilized and reused with new purposes for further development. It is the assembly of those non-material forms of remain and refuse making Tzu-chi's waste material recycling possible. Further, this research argues that the Tzu-chi recycling phenomenon reflects Taiwanese society's search for certainty and belonging from the past in the face of a precarious and challenging future.

In brief, the main argument of this dissertation is that Tzu-chi recycling is a cultural movement made possible through the enactment of nostalgia. In the cultural politics of nostalgia, the past is a resource for sentimental longing, utopian imagining, as well as coping mechanisms in the face of environmental, social, and cultural consequences caused by drastic social and life changes. Individuals and groups of people are mobilised to take action because of this relationship with their past. While Chapter Two reviews numerous aspects scholars have identified in their conceptualisations of nostalgia, and further articulates a conceptual connection between recycling and nostalgia, in this dissertation, nostalgia, as a shorthand, is referred to as 'recycling the past'. That theme is the source of the dissertation's title because it runs like a thread through the chapters, tying them together as an analytic whole. This dissertation argues that in Tzu-chi, the discarded objects, labour, and skills of recycling, the social network of waste work, and related environmental narratives are the emblem of the participants' nostalgic past and the tool to build an idealised future. The enactment of nostalgia takes place in Tzu-chi recycling, as the dissertation reveals, at three levels: individual, communal, and institutional. Different chapters are each in some way devoted to exploring these different aspects and interpretations of nostalgia, which are associated with, and give rise to, different ways of relating oneself to the past and the present and of interpreting recycling practices. The

objective with respect to this theme is not only to demonstrate how such relations may differ from one another, but also how nostalgic sentiments have been central to shaping Tzu-chi recycling, and more broadly, Taiwanese society.

The remainder of this introduction begins with a brief overview of contemporary Taiwan in the 20th century, during its authoritarian and entering the post-authoritarian periods; this starting point is necessary, as it serves a backdrop to the whole dissertation. In the next section, it outlines the structure of the dissertation and the organisation of its chapters. The third section gives an overview on methods and presents the research design, field methods, and related reflections.

4.   A Glance at Taiwan in the Second Half of the 20th Century

In his article published in 2000, Robert Weller, an American anthropologist who studied Taiwan and particularly its religious landscape starting in the 1970s, described it as a society 'living at the edge' and 'float[ing] in limbo'. Consisting of a main island and several satellite islands and two coastal regions, Taiwan indeed lies at the edge of Asia, sitting at the intersection of China, Japan, and Southeast Asia, a location which has shaped its political history. By the time Weller wrote these descriptions at the end of the second millennium of the Gregorian calendar, Taiwan had just experienced a century of intensive cataclysms; a series of political and economic systems had occurred one after the other, and Taiwanese society was constantly caught in the status of interim. After the second World War, Japanese authorities left Taiwan in 1945, ending its 50-year colonisation that began in the aftermath of the Sino-Japanese War, when China ceded Taiwan to Japan. Several years later, Taiwan became a site of contest in the Cold War, when the Nationalist government of China, Kuomintang (國民黨; hereafter, KMT), lost to the Communists and fled to Taiwan in 1949. Taiwan then entered another phase of provisionality under the rule of the émigré regime of KMT. For its anti-communist military mission, Taiwan was turned into a bastion to reclaim KMT's lost mainland, and Taipei was proclaimed as the temporary capital of China. A temporary 'state of emergency' was declared, essentially the imposition of martial law. A repressive political-economic dominance characterised post-war Taiwan. While the languages used in the past, such as Taiwanese Hokkien and Japanese, were forbidden in the public, and all media were tightly controlled, policies such as land reform were launched in the 1950s so that the landlord class was forced to appropriate and redistribute land ownership (Wong 2016). Patterns of

landholding reversed, and the previous power structure was reconfigured. The past was something to be discarded.

In the 1960s and 1970s, when the idea of reclaiming the mainland became an increasingly distant dream, the KMT regime underwent a gradual transition from militarism to industrial developmentalism (Ho 2010). Taiwan began to (re)insert itself into the global market by taking up the role of manufacturing and exporting. This time, it was not as a global supplier of agricultural products such as sugar, tea, and rice, as it had been during the 19th century and under Japanese rule. Instead, it produced light industrial commodities for the domestic market. The strategy was to rely on cheap and intensive labour forces and to have the market decide which industries would lead the capitalist advance and that the state would choose to invest in and develop. The earlier 'winners' included the classic representative of the cheap labour frontier, the textile industry and rubber and leather factories; there were also the 'newcomers' such as the injected-melded plastic of the petrochemical industry, which made nondurable products, e.g., toys and garments, as well as electronic components and assembly manufacturing (Lim 2014). The political authority relied on indirect scale incentives to grow its industrial base, in contrast to those cases where the state provided direct subsidies and investment to cultivate large conglomerates, such as those in South Korea and Japan; this strategy nonetheless ensured that Taiwan's industrial landscape consisted of small and medium-sized enterprises which were agile, constantly on the move according to market signals, and constantly in the status of pro tempore, for the time being. In the 1970s and 1980s, the national industry continued to change. The capital-intensive and high-tech industries, such as steel, electronic engineering, and semiconductors, for example, took off when the light manufacturing industry gradually shifted its operations offshore, first to Southeast Asia and later to China. The post-war Taiwan heretofore had experienced industrial production growth and capital and technology accumulation within few decades. Education popularised, urban areas became populated, and income was distributed relatively fairly. These experiences later made the island society a textbook example of the first generation of New Industrial Countries and a model of a post-war developmental state, next to similar states such as Singapore and South Korea (Ho 2008; Wong 2016).

Although its economy thrived and society developed, both Taiwan's regime and people had been at the edge of political power. In the late 1970s, the KMT political regime lost its diplomatic recognition, epitomised by the removal of its seat in the United Nations, when the United States normalised relations with Communist

China, the People's Republic of China. As Weller has noted, 'Taiwan was fully in limbo from that point on' (2000, 217). Meanwhile, opposition to state plans and narratives was still not allowed; the president was still elected by the National Assembly chosen in 1947, and political decisions were made by the ruling elite of the KMT regime. With exceptional global economic experience, yet without a place in a world of nation-states, and with financial, social, and educational capital but no right to having a political say, at the same time, Taiwanese society faced overwhelming issues that resulted from its rapid industrial and urbanised development, including environmental degradation, social discrimination, class exploitation, and rural impoverishment. These built on political energies that erupted around the 1980s, a transitional period that scholars often identify as a watershed in Taiwan's democratisation (e.g., Ho 2010; Jacob 2016; Passi 2018). Students, farmers, fishermen, labourers, environmental activists, aboriginals, and feminists marched in the streets for reform and change. In 1986, the first oppositional political party was formed, followed by the lifting of martial law the next year. In the National Affair conference in 1990, the same year Tzu-chi recycling began, one agreement was that the national policy should prioritise the security and well-being of Taiwan's residents over those of mainland China, revealing the mind-set of the ruling party over the last four decades (Jacob 2016). The first popular election of the president was held in 1996 against the background of Chinese military threats; in 2000, when Weller published his article, the KMT regime ended its half-century of rule when the candidate of the oppositional political party, the Democratic Progress Party (DPP), won the presidential election, marking Taiwan's first democratic transition of political power. Within the next two decades, the ruling political party constantly changed between the KMT and DPP, indicating a great political division in this island society.

Accompanying the vigorous democratisation process was the burgeoning growth of civic groups and organisations (Hsiao and Kuan 2016), on the one hand, and an inward-turning indigenisation of cultural politics on the other. When the political view shifted from being China-oriented to Taiwan-centred, identity in Taiwan was in flux. For the first time in a century, local people discussed what it meant to be Taiwanese, what Taiwan represented, and what defined it. The Hometown Literature Movement took off in the 1970s. Writers and poets wrote about the beauty of Taiwan's rural life, placing farmers at the heart of agricultural development as the symbol of a newly established Taiwanese identity, in contrast to the KMT-led industrialisation (Bain 1993). Around the 1980s and 1990s, a

cultural/national identity was established by practicing 'a specifically Taiwanese way of life'; to highlight this, Shelly Rigger writes, it was a practice 'to speak Hokkien without shame, to worship Mazu without apology' (2011, 33). Further, Simona Grano (2015, 41) has argued that, in the indigenisation of cultural politics at the time, the idea of 'the need to protect the native cultural and physical richness of their country and its natural surroundings' was central to the identity of majority of Taiwan's environmental groups and the movement's development. Furthermore, a similar inward-turning indigenisation was observed in scholarly Taiwanese studies (e.g., Murry and Hong 1994; Cheng and Marble 2004; Passi 2018). The scholarship gradually shifted from its earlier tendency of 'looking through Taiwan to see China' to a 'discussion around a common geographical space, the peoples who inhabit it, and the political struggles that have made it into a place of contested statehood, history, and memory' (Simon 2018, 12).

Because of all these fast-paced political and economic changes, the international conundrums, the convergence of fragmented identities, and the development of new systems, as vigorous and remarkable as those achievements may be, Taiwan was not a place to relax and feel certainty. With the constant spectre of political turmoil or economic change and barriers to participating in foreign affairs, the atmosphere was filled with possibilities that fostered a mode of precariousness in the 1980s and 1990s. For example, in a kind of the 'gambler's economy', capital flooded into investments, typically in the stock and real estate market, and entrepreneurs rushed into opportunities for short-term profits (Weller 2011b).

Taiwan's religious life seemed to thrive on this modern tension, secular uncertainty, and risks (Chi 2010). The major growth in different versions of indigenous religion experienced several decades of creative expansion, including a drastic boom in the 1980s to 2000s, and challenged the Western theory of secularisation, which assumes a definite decline in religiosity when a society modernises (cf. Madsen 2007; Chu 2008; Kuo 2012). Varying greatly in religious practices, organisational forms, and the moralities they claim, some religions work to avoid adversity and alteration fate encountering, and others address the individual's spiritual cultivation to withstand a turbulent social milieu. Tzu-chi represents one example of the latter group. The expansion of religion also became part of Taiwan's transforming force, which is seen, for instance, in its intercession in the Taiwanese environmental movement.

During the late 1980s and 1990s, there was a sudden surge of environmental movements in Taiwan, including those related to anti-pollution, nature, and anti-

nuclear demands. For instance, Weller and Hsiao (1998) have noted that, in 1991 alone, there were 278 cases of environmental protest. Given that local temples were historically the nodes of local economic and political networks and centres of local identity in Taiwan (Chi 2018), it is not surprising that religion played a crucial role in environmental movements, particularly those instigated and led by local organisers. Mobilising their symbolic resources and social ties, local temples organised, for example, opposition to a community garbage dump in Kaohsiung County and the polluting facilities of the fifth naphtha cracker plant (Weller 2006; Lu 2016). In those incidents, deity parades and ghost festivals were part of the action repertoire of local environmental mobilisation. Alongside social resources and financial funds, religions also offer environmental movements powerful moral sanctions in local terms (Grano 2015; Lu 2016). In addition to events that local organisers led, the 'knowledge class' also played a key role in Taiwan's environmental movements. The knowledge class includes scientific experts, who often held a Western degree of higher education and who later tended to be environmental bureaucrats in governmental institutes and/or the academic environmentalists in (inter)national organisations. In contrast to local environmental movements, in which the line between culture and environment dissolves 'in the leitmotif of local identity and politics, community well-being, religious beliefs, kinship, and personal networks' (Weller and Hsiao 1998, 106), the attitudes of the experts resonate closely with Western green thinking, which sees conflicts between economic growth and natural environmental protection and approaches the issue by addressing the scientific control of nature.

So far I sketch Taiwan in the second half of the 20th century, outlining its political, economic, religious, and environment-related landscapes during the compressed transitions from an authoritarian party-state to indigenous civil society. The transition offers a social background for the emergence and development of Tzu-chi recycling. It is a period of intertwined opportunities and uncertainties. Whether described as on the edge or in limbo, the island society was in an on-going, precarious process of breaking down and building up its political, economic, and social and cultural systems. From a linear perspective of progress with a forward-looking view, this counts a development towards the future. However, progress produces rejects. By reversing the perspective, we see the discards, what is left behind during such vigorous development. One recalls Walter Benjamin's idea of a 'modest methodological proposal for the cultural historical dialect' in which a system produces itself by separating the 'lively' and 'positive' part of the epoch from that which it casts off as 'abortive, retrograde, and obsolescent' (1999,

459). Nevertheless, both sides represent the system. Questions then emerge: What are the representations of the remains and refuse of Taiwan's drastic contemporary development, and what happens to those discards? As precariousness is a property of an interim status, what are the concrete, material features of Taiwan's contemporary uncertainties? By examining its refuse and discards, this study aims to contribute to the understanding of contemporary Taiwan and its modernity.

5.   Dissertation Structure and Chapter-by-chapter Overview

This dissertation analyses four aspects of Tzu-chi recycling: management, people, community, and discourse. Accordingly, in six substantive chapters, each (sometimes as part of a pair with another) corresponds to one of these aspects and is associated with a specific social development of contemporary Taiwan. This has made it possible to order the chapters from micro to macro, and from individual to communal to institutional. The remainder of the dissertation begins with Chapter Two, *Theoretical Points of Departure: Waste and Nostalgia*, which discusses scholarly literature concerning waste and recycling on the one hand and nostalgia on the other; it explains how each of these two bodies of literature has contributed to the formulation of this dissertation's object of study, research question, and analytic approaches. The main body starts with Chapter Three, *Recycling Scheme: Taiwan and Tzu-chi*, by locating the Tzu-chi recycling programme in Taiwan's national recycling system to illustrate its embeddedness and particularity. Chapter Four, *Disposable and Recyclable Labour*, and Chapter Five, *The Volunteers and their Volunteering*, both concern Tzu-chi volunteers and their waste labour 'inside' the Tzu-chi recycling stations. However, each provides a different yet complementary perspective, one from an economic structural point of view and the other from that of personal lived and living experience. Chapter Six, *(Re)Making the Communities and Locality*, moves the focus 'outside' the recycling stations to look at the development and operations of the Tzu-chi recycling community and local networks of waste collection. Finally, Chapter Seven, *Recycling and Religion: A Humanistic Buddhist Approach*, and Chapter Eight, *The Cultural Project of Recycling: Traditional Order and Nostalgic Environmentalism*, both analyse Tzu-chi's environment-related discourse to examine the representation of waste and recycling from the organisation's perspective. Chapter Seven explores its relation to the organisation's religious identity, while Chapter Eight focuses on the organisation's cultural/temporal belongingness.

From a more detail-oriented perspective, Chapter Three explains the logistical and management scheme of the Tzu-chi recycling programme. The chapter provides institutional background information that is essential for understanding the following chapters. A brief overview of Taiwan's contemporary recycling movement is first illustrated. After, the chapter presents the industrial logistics networks with a comparative sketch of three national recycling conduits: local government, private business, and Tzu-chi. The final part of this chapter investigates five components of the Tzu-chi recycling programme: volunteer types, recycling sites, material classifications, the administrative task force, and institutional partners.

Chapters Four and Five concern the characteristics of recycling labour and the ways volunteers make sense of their recycling engagements with Tzu-chi. Chapter Four begins by highlighting how the existing wisdom of Tzu-chi recycling is dominated by an assumption that emphasises the ideological impetus and a focus on the commissioned volunteers. While weaving together descriptions of recycling works and (non-commissioned) volunteers' stories, Chapter Four elucidates how people's voluntary participation in Tzu-chi recycling is embedded in Taiwan's drastic industrial transformations in the second half of twentieth century. It argues that who and what was considered useful or useless throughout the economic development process are intertwined, and that Tzu-chi recycling is a site which not only recycles waste materials but also discarded labour and skills.

Chapter Five explores the connection between recycling volunteering and waste labour from the perspective of volunteers. It starts with an ethnographic account of one particular day in a Tzu-chi recycling station to ground the imagination in daily events. A discussion follows on the Tzu-chi public crisis in 2014 to address the indispensability of a dialectical view. Next, the chapter focuses on the interactions the volunteers have with waste objects and with one and another. This highlights the aspects of somatic knowhow, tacit knowledge, and the communal working environment in Tzu-chi recycling settings. As remains from the past, these aspects provide a sense of a familiar self with new meanings in an aged society.

Chapter Six turns the attention to the Tzu-chi recycling community and its relation to Taiwan's national community-based movement in the 1990s and 2000s. The main purpose of this chapter is to enhance our understanding of recycling in terms of its cultural meaning, social mechanisms, economic power, and political opportunity in a communal setting. It starts with the background

contexts of Tzu-chi and Taiwan's localisation movements and presents the case study of Jiaoxi Linmei community recycling to illustrate the permeating, bridging role recycling played in both movements. By examining the cultural politics of the movements, this chapter centres a nostalgic longing for locality and further demonstrates that the development of Tzu-chi recycling communities is a realisation of this yearning. It explains the traditional mechanism of social interaction which underlines and fosters Tzu-chi recycling collection. The chapter ends with a twist by looking at the recent development of the Jiaoxi Linmei case. It illustrates how local politics challenge the idealist imagination of locality and how local politics is complicated by the lucrative profits and political opportunities of recycling.

Chapters Seven and Eight both study the ways in which narratives of religion, traditional value, and environmentalism operate in Tzu-chi recycling. Chapter Seven focuses on religion and analyses the institutional narratives, which are inflected by Buddhism. This chapter begins with a discussion of a body of literature which concerns religion and ecology generally, and Buddhist environmentalism specifically, to situate the following analysis in a scholarly inquiry into the role of environmentalism in religion. The chapter then closely reads Tzu-chi narratives to illustrate that the organisation uses Buddhist concepts to articulate its environmental concerns and explain recycling. The chapter further examines Tzu-chi recycling against the backdrop of, first, the tenets and development of the humanistic Buddhism to which Tzu-chi belongs, and second, the development and structure of the Tzu-chi organisation. The chapter thus suggests that recycling is one of many intermediaries for the organisation to achieve its religious goal of secularising Buddhism and revitalising Buddhism's social status in Taiwan.

Chapter Eight continues to read Tzu-chi's environmental narrative yet emphasises the narrative tinged with other classical Chinese philosophical domains, namely Confucianism and Daoism. This chapter then sketches a cultural background of Taiwan's shifts in value orientation to integrate the understandings of Tzu-chi recycling from the preceding chapters. The chapter first introduces the cultural mission of Tzu-chi against the organisation's developmental trajectory and explains its relation to recycling. It then further analyses the narratives according to the proposed conceptual scheme of 'ordered purity' to describe the representations of purity in Tzu-chi's systems of mind, interpersonal relations, and physical organisms (the planet and human body). Highlighting how the narratives manifests a traditional anthropocosmic

worldview, the chapter ends with the proposition that Tzu-chi recycling is a localised product of the organisation's nostalgia, and that its environmental discourse is a result of a culture of recycling and remaking.

The concluding chapter brings this dissertation to a close and summarises the key findings and arguments in three parts: Taiwan and Tzu-chi recycling, how Tzu-chi recycling works, and recycling the past and the cultural politics of nostalgia.

6. Research Methods

This final section of the introduction chapter gives an overview of how this research project was conducted. It addresses several facets of the doctoral project's research methods, including research design, fieldwork and field methods, and reflections on the researcher's positionality. It aims to discuss these in a reflexive manner.

6.1   Research Design and Choosing the Case Study

Research design is largely a process of choosing and adapting methods that are suitable to answer the questions posed. Given that the research questions posed in this doctoral project concern the sociological and cultural implications of waste recycling, asking how the waste practice of recycling transforms values in addition to those of discarded materials, the appropriate methodological choice was to study 'around' the waste recycling and look into the lifeworlds which revolve around and were created by it. I found myself drawn to the humanistic model of social research, which serves as the methodological and ethnographic basis. That is, one of the best ways to study this world is to become closer to it and participate in it directly to enable an exploration of the meanings of the 'field'—a naturally recurring setting—and its behaviour and activities from within (Brewer 2000). This methodological approach reflects the research project's roots in the interdisciplinary field of 'area studies', which draws on a 'mediated research technique or methodology' and depends on 'local insights as a means to modify general, standardised disciplinary research methods' in order to formulate a non-exclusive approach towards the research subject (Bestor et al. 2003, 3).

Overall, this project mainly adopts case-based qualitative methods, with some quantitative data serving as auxiliary and supportive statistical evidence if necessary. Generally speaking, case studies are useful for identifying causal mechanisms, exploring causal complexity, enhancing internal validity, and

generating new understandings (Gerring 2007, 37-63), and they tend to be more appropriate to answering the questions posed in this research. Moreover, case studies enjoy a natural advantage in research with an exploratory feature. In investigating Taiwan's waste recycling, far less scholarly attention has been paid to the non-governmental and non-private-business actors, or to the sociological significance of waste in Taiwan's societal transitioning. This situation leaves many key issues, basic topics, empirical developments, and historical meanings unexplored. With many general questions unaddressed, there is more urgency to examine the scheme, meaning, operation, and relations of Taiwanese waste recycling through case studies rather than focusing only on a specific domain, namely policy, economy, labour, or discourse.

Nevertheless, research design is an on-going process of adaptation and modification that accompanies the research process. The choice of Tzu-chi recycling, as well as the choice of a case-based method to understand the relation between waste and Taiwan, only came in the later stages of the research project. The changing research design and focus was a considered decision made based on what happened in the field, and it reflects the nature of field research. That is, as a mode of inquiry, field research entails more than simply collecting data. Instead, it is an 'informed interaction between data generation and data analysis', which involves a range of on-the-ground practices connected to research design, data selection, information mapping, strategy adaptation, and theory development (Kapiszewski, MacLean and Read 2015, 9-10). In the earlier stage of the project, when I was based in the Netherlands, I primarily relied on online archival research to become acquainted with the topic of waste and recycling in Taiwan; public documents such as government regulations and school policies were the most accessible materials on the Internet. From there, I formulated the initial research design before going into the field to analyse the social-political structure of Taiwan's waste recycling and to map out key stakeholders and systems.

As the preliminary fieldwork unfolded between 2014 and 2015, I discovered something unknown to me: community recycling and Tzu-chi. When I talked to people about my research, Tzu-chi often cropped up in conversations, mentioned by people of different genders and social or economic backgrounds, within or outside of the field of waste and recycling. By then, I decided that the most useful course of action was to understand the field as it presented itself and thus included Tzu-chi as one of stakeholders representing community recycling. Nevertheless, as the research continued, I learned how much the organisation had

spread into all corners of the recycling world, confirming its centrality. This turning point led to the decision to pursue this centrality. At the beginning of the second round of my fieldwork in 2016, I sought a case of (non-Tzu-chi) community recycling to continue my initial research plan. However, the community I found, Jiaoxi Linmei, ultimately had a developmental background in Tzu-chi recycling (see Chapter Six). From then on, Tzu-chi became the core of the project.

When shifting the main focus, I made a methodological choice to study 'up' into the Tzu-chi recycling world. Instead of studying Tzu-chi institutional publications and interviewing the organisational representatives before (re)entering the field, I decided to first continue my participant observation approach to focus on recycling practice in everyday settings. This decision was first made considering the growing argument in the social sciences that static interviews are insufficient, and that a methodological approach which locates conversations within on-going, situated actions is to be encouraged to focus on 'doing' as well as 'saying' (Schatzki 1996; Savage and Burrows 2007; Evans 2011b). Second, when reading the existing literature about Tzu-chi, it occurred to me that the studies on Tzu-chi are mostly informed either by observations made at an institutional level or by the accounts of commissioners. I sought to explore the perspectives of the community volunteers first before 'moving up'.

6.2   Fieldwork and Field Methods

The empirical materials that inform the analysis in this dissertation are drawn from a broad ethnographic study that I undertook between 2014 and 2018. The fieldwork was divided into three parts. The initial fieldwork ran from November 2014 to June 2015, when I undertook preliminary research, mainly in people's homes and at two schools in Taipei. At the same time, I visited people and organisations in Taiwan, both governmental and non-governmental, that were relevant to the issues of waste recycling. Additionally, I conducted interviews with a variety of local private collectors and participated in their works (i.e., collecting and sorting rubbish, traveling to recycling yards and shops to sell the materials). The second round of fieldwork was mainly conducted between April and July 2016, when substantive investigation into Tzu-chi recycling took place. In this period, I volunteered on a regular basis at a Tzu-chi recycling station in Taipei; I visited people and sites and participated in the activities of Tzu-chi recycling at different locales across Taiwan and one in Hong Kong. Additionally, I conducted

an ethnographic study at a community association with a recycling programme in Yilan County. The last round of fieldwork was in January 2018, when a limited number of complementary interviews and visits were performed.

During my fieldwork, I introduced myself as a PhD student in the Netherlands and described my research, which studied Taiwan's recycling movement from a cultural and social perspective to those with whom I made contact. The self-introduction was supplemented with a document summarising the research summary, including the statements on the principle of anonymising sources and providing contact information. Consequently, all the respondents in this dissertation are referred to by pseudonym the researcher assigned, or simply by their roles in relation to Tzu-chi. The majority of communication in the field was done in Mandarin Chinese, the official language of Taiwan; a certain portion, though, particularly with Tzu-chi volunteers, was in Taiwanese Hokkien, a language spoken natively by about 70% of the Taiwanese population.

Throughout the fieldwork, I used the combined field research 'tools' of participating, observing, conversing, and the close reading of documentary sources as my ethnographic methods. The data-collection process was performed mainly through participant observation at a number of Tzu-chi recycling sites and events in Taiwan. In addition, my toolbox included interviews, accessing archives and digital data, searching for online resources and journalistic reports, and gathering pre-existing sources and materials. These different data-collection techniques were profitable when combined with each other in terms of cross-checking evidence, enhancing data quality, and enabling me to understand and analyse the information. The precise procedure for applying these methods was not fixed at the start of the research process; rather, it evolved through a process of negotiation with the practical situations encountered in the field. For example, the decision to study Tzu-chi's archival collection was made after I had conducted participant observation at a Tzu-chi station and held an interview with a commissioned volunteer. At the time, I found it difficult to understand the recurring yet specific Buddhist interpretation of environmental degradation the recycling volunteers mentioned, and it became clear that it was necessary to understand the institutional dimension of Tzu-chi's Buddhist environmental view. The ethnographic fieldwork follows a 'snowballing method'. With each informant I encountered, I tried to let him or her introduce me to more potential respondents, including co-workers, friends, and acquaintances; that is, each respondent could also be a gatekeeper or liaison in my recruitment chain. The

chain ended when no more interviewees could be introduced, or I ended it when there was little prospect of finding new information.

In Table 1.1, I list the major events of my participant observation of Tzu-chi recycling. Methodologically speaking, participant observation often represents a foundational method, 'a starting point', according to Schensul and LeCompte (2013, 83), for ethnographic research. My adoption of participant observation was confined to the basic idea Musante has suggested, namely, that 'participant observation is a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning both the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and cultures' (2015, 251). To define an ideal and suitable participant observation, I kept Evans's reminder in mind: 'the success of participant observation [...] depends upon a profound level of introspection on the part of the researcher with respect to his or her relationship to what is to be (and is being) researched' (1988, 197). The participant observations were conducted in a total of three rounds of fieldwork in Taiwan. To keep records of my observation, in addition to on-site written notes, I relied on a technique to record myself, narrating my observations and informants' responses to a digital recorder during or immediately after participation for 'freshness'. The written notes and recorded narratives were used for subsequent review and transcription.

Table 1.1 The Major events of the author's participant observation on Tzu-chi recycling

No.	Date	Place	Event
1	8-Nov-14	Kaohsiung	participated in an environmental education event at a Tzu-chi district environmental station, the event including a lecture on waste pollution and classification, a group exercise on waste sorting and a tour of the station
2	8-Apr-15	Taipei	visited a community recycling station in Xinyi district, Taipei
3	8-Apr-15	Taipei	participated in recycling at a Tzu-chi's mobile recycling site at a communal park in Xinyi district, Taipei

(continued)

No.	Date	Place	Event
4	13-Mar-16	Rotterdam	attended in a Chinese New Year celebration event held by Tzu-chi branch in the Netherlands
5	15-Apr-16	Taipei	began my volunteering in the Ba-de district environmental station in Zhongshan district in Taipei
6	16-Apr-16	Taipei	visited an Earth Day festival event where Tzu-chi had a booth advocating the organization's environmental education
7	17-Apr-16	Taipei	attended an environmental education event held at a congregational centre on the issues of environmental degradation, waste classification and making soap from food waste
8	28-Apr-16	Yilan	visited the Linmei community association in Jiaoxi township
9	16-May-16	Yilan	visited a Tzu-chi community recycling station in Jiaoxi township
10	16-May-16	Yilan	visited a Tzu-chi environmental park in Zhungwei township
11	22-May-16	Yilan	visited the Linmei community association, participated in its recycling activity
12	23-May-16	Hualien	visited Tzu-chi headquarter and the exhibition of Tzu-chi's organizational missions, including the recycling programme
13	24-May-16	Hualien	visited a Tzu-chi environmental park in Hualien City
14	26-May-16	Taipei	visited the main office and the research and development department of the Da-ai company
15	29-May-16	New Taipei City	attended the annual event of the Tzu-chi recycling programme, 'the Northern region environmental volunteer improvement day'
16	29-May-16	New Taipei City	visited a Tzu-chi district recycling in Sangchong District, New Taipei City
17	5-Jun-16	Yilan	visited the Linmei community association and its recycling site

(continued)

No.	Date	Place	Event
18	5-Jun-16	Yilan	visited a Tzu-chi recycling community recycling station in Jiaoxo township
19	21-Jun-16	Hong Kong	attended a presentation of Tzu-chi environmental education given by the representative of Tzu-chi recycling in Hong Kong
20	21-Jun-16	Hong Kong	visited Tzu-chi recycling station in Kowloon Refuse Transfer Centre
21	9-Jul-16	Taipei	attended the bi-monthly meeting of the environmental admin of Tzu-chi's Taipei First Unity
22	15-Jul-16	Taipei	ended my volunteering at the Tzu-chi Ba-de recycling station
23	14-Jan-18	Taipei	visited the Tzu-chi Ba-de recycling station
24	16-Jan-18	Taipei	visited a Tzu-chi environmental park in Neihu district, Taipei
25	22-Jan-18	Hualien	visited a Tzu-chi environmental park in Hualien City

While the majority of the data collected in the first fieldwork session does not represent the central analytic focus of this dissertation, it nonetheless provided me with foundational information about the official recycling regulations, industrial logistical scheme (see Chapter Three), private business operations, and daily practices and narratives of recycling in household and school settings. Having noted the role of Tzu-chi in the recycling system, in the first round of fieldwork, I then undertook a day of observation at a Tzu-chi district environmental station in Kaohsiung, participating in one of its community environmental education events. The event was introduced by one of my early respondents, who was a staff member at a national environmental NGO and who's relative was a Tzu-chi commissioner. In addition to the event participation, I visited two other Tzu-chi recycling sites in Taipei at this preliminary stage. One was a mobile recycling site at a community park, and the other was a community environmental station. A Tzu-chi commissioner, who was a neighbour of my

acquaintance, introduced and accompanied me on the visit to the community environmental station.

During my second period of fieldwork, between April and August 2016, more extensive investigation was conducted. This primarily included my regular volunteering in a Tzu-chi recycling site in Taipei, the Ba-de District Environmental Station, and my visits to the Linmei community recycling in Yilan County. Additionally, I attended several gatherings and environmental activities held by Tzu-chi congregations at different locations.

First, during my approximately three-month participant observation at the Ba-de recycling station in Zhongshan District, Taipei, I volunteered on average two to three times per week, at least once on a weekday and once on the weekend; I spent between four and five hours there, from 9 am to 2 pm. As an inexperienced recycling volunteer, I was initially assigned to the area of plastic-bag recycling and later to those for paper, PET bottles, general classification, and finally electronic appliance dismantling. While learning and performing the work, I cultivated relationships with the volunteers, both non-commissioned and commissioned, and conducted interviews over working and lunch breaks. Given that the interactions and conversation with the volunteers at the Ba-de station took place in an informal and working setting, in principle, I introduced myself without providing the research summary document unless the volunteers showed interest in learning about my research; this included the environmental administrator of the station. I chose the Ba-de station as the site for volunteering because of its 'ordinary' nature and convenience. I use the term 'ordinary' to signal that the site was chosen for no particular reason other than that I sought to encounter a variety of people and volunteers without recourse to the categories of social/sociological analysis. The area in which the site is located—which I assessed based on my local and residential knowledge—is a mixed neighbourhood with newly developed high-rise condominiums and classic walk-up apartments,[11] filled with both modern commercial offices and traditional markets and vendors. This decision was also made out of practicality. Considering the planned frequency of my volunteering, the Bade station is one of the closest Tzu-chi recycling sites to National Taipei University, where I was based during my fieldwork.

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[11] Walk-up apartment buildings were the first type of multi-storey, multi-family housing in Taiwan; they originated in the 1960s, and they still dominate urban regions, including the Taipei cityscape, today (Lin and Chen 2015).

Second, I visited the Linmei village in Yilan County to understand the development and operation of its community recycling programme. I first learned of the village at a conference at Academia Sinica Taiwan in April 2016, when an attendee suggested Linmei as a possible option to study community recycling. Later, the presenter introduced me to a professor who had conducted long-term research at Linmei. Thanks to the professor's introduction, I gained trust from and access to the community association, which was followed by a series of observations of community activities, including its recycling, and access to official documents and digital data. Prior to the visit, I acquainted myself with background information about the Linmei community and its recycling through the Internet. This was when I realised the association between Linmei community recycling and Tzu-chi recycling in Yilan. To pursue this discovery, I visited several Tzu-chi recycling sites in Yilan that were led by the members of the Linmei community association, who were the key connections between Linmei and Tzu-chi.

Third, I conducted participant observations at organisational Tzu-chi recycling events. This included a large-scale, one-day volunteer gathering in New Taipei; its activities included religious rituals, lectures held in Taipei on environmental issues such as degradation and global warming, and volunteer testimonies. I also attended a bi-monthly meeting of the environmental administrators of Tzu-chi Harmony commissioners. I learned about both events from my participation at the Ba-de station. At both, interviews were conducted with community volunteers, commissioners, and environmental admins. Some were followed by a phone interview in July 2016. Aside from the organisational events, I visited several Tzu-chi recycling sites of varying sizes both inside and outside Taipei. When time allowed and the situation was suitable, I asked to recycle with the volunteers while talking to them. This effort helped create interactions with the informants, making the observation more situated, as well as easing the disruption created by my presence and observation.

In addition to the interviews conducted in situated circumstances of participant observation, which were mostly in informal settings, such as while working on waste or touring the sites, several additional 'formal' interviews were conducted. I use the term 'formal' to describe interviews conducted in a 'sit-and-talk' situation and which were semi-structured with open-ended questions designed in variable order for the research questions of interest. The 'formal' interviews were conducted with the official and working staff of the Tzu-chi headquarters, regional environmental cadres of Tzu-chi recycling, ordinary commissioners, and

representatives of a partner company of Tzu-chi recycling. The majority of these interviews were conducted with one individual respondent, with some exceptions in which groups were interviewed. The exceptions included an interview with three working staff members of the environmental protection team of the Tzu-chi Foundation, one with four regional environmental cadres (after the volunteer training event), and one with two representatives of Tzu-chi's partner company.

Aside from interviews and observational notes and transcriptions, I gathered a variety of Tzu-chi's institutional publications in order to gain insights into the structure and development of the organisation and its recycling engagement, as well as the institutional narratives on environmental issues and recycling practices. In table 1.2, I list the institutional publications I collected. Some of them are digital, while others are hard copy documents. This includes two full-length books on Tzu-chi's environmental mission authored by the founder, Cheng-yen, and published by the Tzu-chi Culture and Communication Foundation; one full-length book on Tzu-chi recycling volunteers authored by a journalist and published by a non-Tzu-chi institute; and one short children's book on Tzu-chi recycling volunteers published by the Tzu-chi Culture and Communication Foundation. I also obtained a 48-minute documentary video on the development of the Tzu-chi recycling project that the Tzu-chi Culture and Communication Foundation produced to celebrate the 25-year anniversary of the mission; this video was published on the YouTube channel of Da-ai TV.[12]   In addition, I accessed 27 related articles and information from two webpages affiliated with the official Tzu-chi website. One is a specific webpage dedicated to celebrating Tzu-chi recycling's two-decade anniversary,[13] and the other is the subpage of the Tzu-chi official website designated to provide information on Tzu-chi's environmental mission.[14]

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[12] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uTvIjYob5dc (accessed on 18 Oct 2020).

[13] http://www.tzuchi-org.tw/projects/vege/index.php (accessed on 18 Oct 2020).

[14] https://www.tzuchi.org.tw/about-us/2017-11-20-01-15-13/%E7%92%B0%E4%BF%9D (accessed on 18 Oct 2020).

Table 1.2 List of the collected Tzu-chi institutional publications

No.	Publication item	Date of publication	Source type
1	*Yu Diqiu Gong Sheng Xi* (與地球共生息)	Mar-06	book, hardcopy
2	*Qing Jing Zai Yuan Tou* (清淨在源頭)	Dec-10	book, hardcopy
3	*Huanbao ren huishou wu* (環保人回收物)	Apr-13	book, hardcopy
4	*Granny Bottle* (瓶子阿嬤)	May-15	book, hardcopy
5	*Single-mindedly Protect the Earth:25 Years of Tzu Chi's Environmental Protection (*一念心護大地 - 慈濟環保 25 年*)*	22-Aug-15	video, subtitled in Chinese and English
6	*Huanbao* (環保)	–	website page (in Chinese)
7	*Tzu-chi huanbao 20* (慈濟環保 20)	–	website page (in Chinese)
8	*Tzu Chi Almanac*, 1991 - 2004	1992 - 2005	annual publication (in Chinese), hardcopy
9	*Tzu Chi Almanac*, 2005 - 2018	2006 - 2019	annual publication (in Chinese), digital file
10	*Tzu Chi Monthly*, no. 290 - 625	1991 - 2017	monthly magazine (in Chinese), digital file
11	*Tzu Chi Bimonthly*, 2013 - 2017	2013 - 2017	Bimonthly magazine (in English), digital file

Moreover, the collection also included a total of 28 issues of the Tzu-chi Almanac from 1991 to 2018, 336 issues of the Tzu-chi monthly Chinese magazine from

1991 to 2017, and 18 issues of the Tzu-chi bimonthly English magazine[15] from 2013 to 2017. I accessed all the issues of the almanac from the official website of Tzu-chi,[16] with the exception of the Tzu-chi almanacs between 1991 and 2004, which were not digitalised. Instead, I gathered and made copies of these issues from the archive of the National Central Library of Taiwan. I assembled the digital files of the Tzu-chi Chinese and English magazines from the website of the Tzu-chi Culture and Communication Foundation.[17] Given the large number of issues of and articles in Tzu-chi's magazines, I specifically searched for articles containing six keywords and their related terms: recycling (回收[18]), waste (垃圾[19]), disposal (廢棄[20]), environment (環境[21]), environmental protection (環保[22]), nature (自然[23]), and earth (地球[24]). In addition to the listed publication items in table 1.2, I also tried to collect various forms of organisational materials of Tzu-chi recycling, including meeting notes, training materials, activity flyers, and internal reports.

Finally, for the data on the Linmei community recycling, in addition to participant observation, I conducted interviews and collected various forms of information materials. I interviewed two former chairmen and the current chairman of the community association, as well as the former and current team leaders of the community recycling programme. I also talked to the professor who introduced me to Linmei to obtain a fuller understanding of the developmental trajectory and the social relationships among the villagers. As part of the fieldwork, I gathered event leaflets, programme booklets, project proposals, diary logs, photo albums, and digital files of presentations. I accessed the official website of the Linmei

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[15] Although the magazine was originally bimonthly, between 2013 to 2017, it was issued each season.

[16] https://www.tzuchi.org.tw/about-us/%E6%85%88%E6%BF%9F%E6%AD%B7%E5%8F%B2/%E6%85%88%E6%BF%9F%E5%B9%B4%E9%91%91 (accessed on 18 Oct 2020).

[17] Tzu Chi Monthly (1991-2007): https://web.tzuchiculture.org.tw/tpenquart/default/product/mon.htm, Tzu Chi Monthly (2007-2017): https://web.tzuchiculture.org.tw/index.php?s=2, Tzu Chi Bimonthly: https://web.tzuchiculture.org.tw/index.php?s=5 (accessed on 18 Oct 2020).

[18] huishou

[19] laji

[20] feiqi

[21] huanjing

[22] huanbao

[23] ziran

[24] diqiu

community association[25] and used the archive of the National Central Library and the United Daily News Group databases[26] to search for related journalistic reports. One of my data-capturing strategies was to ask for each of these kinds of materials at each stage. For instance, after an interview, I normally asked the interviewee whether she or he could show me some examples or materials related to the information they mentioned. Then, when they opened a folder or cabinet, I asked whether I could read more. After reading, I asked if I could take pictures of these printed materials or if there was a digital version that they could share with me.

6.3   Uncertainty and Positionality of the Researcher

In this final section, I reflect on the uncertainty in locating the subjectivities which appeared in the process of changing the dissertation's focus and working in the fieldwork situation. This is similar to an unpacking process to reconsider the positionalities of placing *self* and *the other* in the process of studying and representing a 'local' issue in a 'foreign' setting. Throughout the reflection, I consider that, rather than asking *who* is self and *who* is the other, in the era of academic globalisation, the question perhaps can be changed into *when* is self and *when* is the other. While contemplating the dilemmas I experienced, it is not my intention to fall into the rhetoric of self-indulgence or disciplinary insecurity. Rather, it is an attempt to recognise an open and relational self, sense of politics, and the labour of emotion involved in this research project. Since the discussion is a process of reflection on the inter-subjectivities of the researched, the researcher, and the researching environment, I quickly note that I was born in 1986 and raised in Taipei. I received my bachelor's degree in sociology in Taiwan before moving to the Netherlands for my graduate school study in 2010, and I have lived there since then. I was raised by a Christian family yet became largely agnostic after my undergraduate study.

In the earlier stage of this project, the research inquiry was to examine the socio-political structure of Taiwan's waste recycling. Learning about the Tzu-chi organisation and its recycling communities, its scale and diversity, and the number of related publications and commodities was rather a shocking process. Being unfamiliar with Buddhism and feeling overwhelmed by the scale of the organisation, I was initially reluctant to study Tzu-chi. Additionally, the

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[25] https://www.lm.org.tw/ (accessed on 18 Oct 2020).
[26] https://udndata.com/ndapp/Index?cp=udn (accessed on 18 Oct 2020).

prescribed assumption at the time was that religion and community-based recycling work such as that of Tzu-chi did not fall within the jurisdiction of my research on the 'macro' landscape of Taiwan's recycling movement. After my first visit to the Tzu-chi community recycling station in Kaohsiung in 2014, I wrote the following in my fieldwork diary:

> Tzu-chi is overwhelmingly massive. Every station has its local community collection and sorting system. They process objects I haven't seen in other recycling yards (e.g., plastic bags and toys). There are numerous types (hierarchies?) of volunteers. […] When the volunteer was explaining to me recycling with Buddhist(?) concepts (the disharmony of the Great Four), I was lost. I had no clue what they are talking about and if that was even Buddhism. My influent Minnanese contributed to the embarrassment. […] My age, the ways I dressed and asked questions all made me an outsider. […] I'm not sure that adding all this to my already too-much-going-on research table is a smart idea. (November 07, 2014).

Despite the initial resistance to including Tzu-chi as a focus of my study, it is not merely the case that my conception of the field has since expanded as a result of a commitment to take seriously the particularity of its systems, practices, discourses, participants, and networks. Fundamentally, the very micro/macro and soft-/hard-core dichotomy on which my initial position was premised was undermined by the fieldwork experience. At a later stage of the research project, another form of uncertainty emerged. It was related to Tzu-chi's public crisis, which took place in 2014 and 2015. By the time of my second round of fieldwork in 2016, Tzu-chi had just experienced three waves of public crisis and received irate public criticism because the organisation was involved in and at the centre of several national scandals and controversies, including a developmental project in a conservation area, a food safety issue, and the recycling economy (for more detail, see Chapter Five). Despite their wide support and many devotees, the public gradually began sharing critical and rather negative attitudes towards Tzu-chi, particularly the younger generation; they perceived Tzu-chi, whose members include numerous business elites and governmental officers, as a corrupt religious corporation that gained its secular power and financial profit in the name of religious and philanthropical acts. Tzu-chi recycling, in this interpretation, could be seen as an activity that celebrated the organisation's complacency rather than as evidence of an efficient environmental solution.

In addition to media reports and online discussions, it was not rare to encounter this perception of Tzu-chi during my fieldwork. For instance, I attended the Earth Day festival event in Taipei in 2015, in which more than 20 non-governmental and not-for-profit environmental organisations participated. Each had its own booth to advocate its objectives, including Tzu-chi. During my conversation with a Tzu-chi commissioner, one young-looking woman approached Tzu-chi's booth. After listening for several minutes, the young woman stopped the volunteer's presentation on Tzu-chi's recycling achievements and spiritual environmentalism. She then questioned whether the volunteer was aware of the recycling industry's 'ugly truths': without sufficient technology and financial incentives, recyclable materials were eventually incinerated, despite all the recycling efforts. 'These are all useless,' the woman concluded dismissively as she looked at Tzu-chi's flyers. Before the volunteer responded, the woman left. Moreover, during my second round of fieldwork, I noticed that the onsite experiences were slightly different from those I had in the winter of 2014 and spring of 2015. The volunteers became more sensitive to my purpose and institutional identity. During one visit, during an introductory tour of the site, a volunteer suddenly walked in and whispered into the ear of the commissioner giving the tour; later, the commissioner asked for identity clarification (even though I always provided my card and a sheet explaining my research in advance). It was not difficult to feel the sense of distrust. Occasionally, the volunteers stopped talking when I took out my camera, or they restated that the pictures were Tzu-chi's property. Their caution regarding representations seemed rather unusually formal to me given my knowledge of the Taiwanese community culture. After I became more acquainted with the volunteers, they joked about how they had suspected I was a journalist or told me stories of how their words were twisted by 'fake researchers'.

Because of these experiences, when interviewing the institutional representatives, the assumption was that access to the informant and information would be challenging. Surprisingly, the opposite was true. Facing great public pressure and many work tasks, the cadres and administrators had few opportunities to express their feelings to people who understood their work well enough. They wanted their voices to be heard and backed by scholars, which they think could help counter public opinion (however, I always responded by doubting how much I could help). The rather open responses from the interviewees were due to my volunteering engagement, which gave me some grounded insights into the work and system prior to the interviews. For my respondents, this was proof of being taken seriously, which led to a trusting attitude and inclusion when, for example,

they stated, 'You volunteered, so you know'. Furthermore, when in a rather alarming field situation, I gradually learned that emphasising my Dutch experience and institutional affiliation, as well as my ignorance about yet interest in Buddhism, significantly lowered the volunteers' and the staff members' guard, and they began to describe me as the 'faith seed' to spread Tzu-chi's philosophy into the younger population and foreign regions. The volunteers from different sites referred me as 'the young lady from the Netherlands' during my volunteering work. In other words, in the process, my relative identity shifted from one kind of *the other*, as the younger generation who could be hostile to Tzu-chi, into another *the other,* as a foreigner who could be their international ambassador. In other words, my 'foreign' and 'non-religious' otherness eased my transition into becoming *oneself.* Nevertheless, most of time, I found it difficult to adapt to Tzu-chi's 'traditional' manners and language, and the fact that I am not one of them was still obvious.

Outside the fieldwork, the fluidity of subjectivities took on another form and other directions. While presenting my shift in focus to Tzu-chi to my Taiwanese friends and academic fellows and scholars, often, the reaction I received was the expectation that this research would criticise Tzu-chi for its 'failing' public role and deconstruct the organisation's political economy. Another possible reaction was the assumption that switching to the Tzu-chi case was a 'career tactic' to write 'something that interests Westerners'. When my Taiwanese 'fellows' learned of my interest in Tzu-chi's community culture and the Buddhist environmental discourses, there were sometimes jokes about 'whitening research' or warnings about Tzu-chi's unreceptiveness and being careful to avoid being 'brainwashed'. In those conversations, I felt a sense of becoming a 'betrayer' to my young and critical Taiwanese pupils and of losing 'local authenticity' in their eyes. Nevertheless, to a certain degree, the assumption that a study of Buddhism-based community recycling would interest international scholarship was correct. During presentations at international conferences, seminars, and workshops, I received more reactions, comments, and questions, often on Tzu-chi's cultural and religious discourses on environmental issues and recycling in comparison with other sections of Taiwan's recycling industry, governmental policies, and community recycling systems. One European scholar encouraged me to focus on the case of Tzu-chi, saying, 'We hear relatively similar issues regarding waste here and there, but this is something different'. Despite knowing that the scholar had a point, in those situations, the expectation was nevertheless that my local knowledge of the mysterious Eastern religion could offer an alternative

environmentalism to global society, but my research inquiry was to contextualise Tzu-chi's recycling movement in the social, economic, and political changes of contemporary Taiwan.

In other words, by noting different scholarly interests throughout the research project, I found myself caught between two 'choices,' two sets of dichotomised assumptions, concerning what the research *should* be about. At one end, there was the 'hard-core political-economic approach', the 'anti-Tzu-chi', 'critical approach,' and 'research for oneself (i.e., the Taiwanese)'. At the other end, there was the 'soft-core cultural approach', which was 'pro-Tzu-chi' and concerned 'mystical Eastern religion' and 'research for the Others (i.e., Westerners)'. Each side has received both criticism and support from different groups. Even though these labels appear to be rigid, they nonetheless represent broader social contexts in which the conflicting perceptions of Tzu-chi recycling and my study of it should be further located and considered. These reflections reveal the fluidity of inter-subjective positionality; the question of who is the local and who is foreign no longer has a definite answer. In the era of academic globalisation, the normative division between self and the other does not necessarily resonate with the geographical categories of, in my case, Asian and Westerner. I can be the other as the younger generation, the Western-trained scholar, or the 'local' student from Asia. The researcher's subject positionality is open for interpretation and dependent on those who are 'researched', both inside and outside the field.

Chapter Two |
Theoretical Points of Departure:
Waste and Nostalgia

This chapter provides an overview of some of the theoretical points and scholarly discussions that have influenced this dissertation as a whole. There are two main bodies of literature, the first of which concerns waste. This literature's primary contribution is in framing the object of study and determining how it is approached: as an inquiry into Taiwanese society through waste recycling and vice versa. This body of waste literature predominantly includes works from scholars in the fields of sociology, geography, anthropology, political science, history, and cultural studies. Despite its wide variety, the scholarship shares a key view that waste is socially constructed, that is, 'what people define as waste varies with time, space, culture, and social group' (Gille 2011, 833). In this review of relevant works of waste scholarship, I first discuss those which examine waste in terms of its material agency and symbolic meaning before moving to those focusing on the theme of recycling. The second body of literature explores the topic of nostalgia, and it provides theoretical concepts and orientations as analytical tools to make sense of the tendencies I observed. In this part of the review, I examine works on nostalgia as a cultural phenomenon related to modernity, the dialectical dynamics between restorative and prospective aspects of nostalgia, and finally its relation to environment-related changes.

Before continuing, I should mention that, in certain chapters, a summary of the literature on Tzu-chi recycling or religious environmentalism is necessary to

provide information on less-studied and lesser-known matters. As those bodies of literature are necessary but do not give the dissertation its overall analytical thread, they are referred to as the need arises.

1.   Waste Studies

Often, in scenarios such as public debates and discussions on policy reform or environmental risks, the images of waste that most readily come to mind—trash, discards, leftovers, refuse, rubbish, junk, or garbage—are those of household rubbish or the mass solid waste of the population. Dirty packaging materials are scattered on beaches, or they float in the ocean or clutter municipal sewage systems; heaps of cheap, broken consumer durables pile up in unrecognisable strange lands. Waste, in this imagination, signifies humankind's alienated and abusive relationship with nature and emblematises a society's perplexities regarding its disposability. Waste is thus a self-evident problem waiting to be solved and eradicated. The social relevance of waste is therefore mainly identified with and motivated by the (negative) consequences of discarded materials. Accordingly, works in the social sciences mostly discuss waste in terms of metric tonnes and targets, in relation to its management, its disposal technology, and related policy. The issues of waste thus predominantly belong to concerns about environmental policy and urban planning, while the fields of technical and environmental engineering address the materials of waste and its treatment.

The literature on Taiwan's waste shares this trait and similarly positions waste as a challenge to material and environmental engineering, on the one hand, and subject to policy operationalism and economic rationalism on the other. This includes studies of waste reduction (Lu et al. 2006; Su et al. 2010), the not-in-my-backyard environmental movement against waste disposal sites (Shen and Yu 1997; Chiou et al. 2011), the environmental justice movement (Fan 2007), renewable energy utilisation (Tsai and Chou 2006; Tsai 2016), waste composition and material characteristics (Chang et al. 2008; Chang and Hsu 2008), waste reuse and recycling technologies (Wei and Huang 2001), waste treatment schemes (Tsia et al. 2007; Young et al. 2010), waste governance (Wong 2017), waste policy transformation and evaluation (Liu 1999; Chen and Huang 2003; Weng and Fuijwara 2011), economic incentives in waste management (Fan et al. 2005; Yang and Innes 2007), and the recycling businesses and industry (Hsu and Kuo 2002; Wen and Lo 2007; Terao 2008).

The problematisation of waste as contaminating and hazardous and the operationalisation of waste as a management target preclude the possibility of alternative understandings of the complexities of our relationships with waste and the consequences of waste. In a framework where 'waste can only be bad' and 'make us feel bad' (Hawkins 2005, 9), the cultural studies scholar Gay Hawkins has argued, the 'ecologically destructive practices' of waste disposal which constantly 'resource to guilt or moralism or despair' (*ibid.*, ix) could result in an unintended consequence: people's experience of 'moral fatigue' and an overburdened feeling leading to inaction (*ibid.*, 12). In this register, scholars in the social sciences and the humanities have endeavoured to explore how and why 'waste matters' by suspending judgements of waste as a threat from multiple vantage points. Rather, waste is considered a massive and quintessential part of contemporary society, a multi-faceted and dynamic category with socially generative capacities. The scholarship examines the material agency as well as symbolic meanings of waste, asking what defines waste and also examining other questions: How does waste both express social values and changes and sustain them? What specific capacities and affordances characterise waste materials? Who works on waste, and what do they become together in specific entanglements of power, labour, and possibility? How does specific waste circulate and with what significance for national and global processes?

With regard to how waste shapes a society, sociological works on waste and wasting focus on the ways in which waste and its materiality are organised and sustained through social, economic, political, and technological relationships. In this framing, waste is a contested social process where different social institutions determine what 'things' are valuable and that what we do with waste is subject to different, sometimes conflicting, regulations and valuation systems. As the sociologist Martin O'Brien has described, the social afterlife of things is both a 'site of political-economic conflicts' (O'Brien 1999a, 271) and the 'intersection of different interests' (2007, 108). O'Brien's thesis on 'rubbish society' (1999a, 1999b, 2007) is an important point of departure in this literature. For O'Brien, the industrialised societies of our contemporary world are 'rubbish societies', societies with 'modes of self-understanding whose political, social, and cultural systems are infused by a relationship to waste and wasting' (1999b, 272). To a degree, this perspective resonates with Ulrich Beck's idea of 'risk society', which suggests that, in the most developed societies, political concerns are more associated with the distribution of 'bads', that is, environmental and health risks, rather than the ones of 'goods', such as income and assets (Gille 2011, 834).

However, O'Brien has noted that those rubbish societies are paradoxically marked by a sense of denial that waste is a basis on which industrial societies develop and change. In analysing complex social arrangements that involve a broad range of institutions, regulations, and technologies in the circulation and transformation of wastes, the concept of *waste-regime* the sociologist Zsuzsa Gille (2007; 2010) has proposed offers a macro-level framework to study the sociology of waste: its production, representation, and politics. Based on her study of waste history in socialist and capitalist Hungary, Gille demonstrates how waste is 'not a residue but constitutive of the social' (2010, 1060). Rather than something that moves across pre-existing spatial scales and social networks, rubbish as discarded objects actively constructs them, shaping the material-social order and relations.

Approaching the topic from more of a micro-level, other studies analyse the active connections between humans and wasted material, arguing that both are mutually produced and changed. To animate the connection between the social and the physical aspects of waste, Hawkins (2005) draws on Bill Brown's perspective on the relational dynamic between persons and things, including its emphasis on habits, material perception, and the constitution of subjectivity, to articulate a vision of waste practice as a process of self-making. She contends that, on a daily level, dealing with trash implies an organised sequence of material practice that involves certain knowledges, bodily techniques, and assumptions of classification. It is a social performance, Hawkins posits, in which 'we decide what is connected to us and what isn't' (*ibid.*, 4). It is a practice to establish a sense of order, the ordering of self. In other words, interactions with waste in all its various forms are 'deeply implicated in the practice of subjectivity' (Hawkins and Mueck 2003, xiii).

In the recognition of the self's creation in and through relations with waste matter, the anthropologist Josh Reno (2009) provides an example based on his ethnography at a large Michigan landfill in the United States. He has presented scavenging and dumping as a form of masculinity and social class expression for the male workers. On the other hand, focusing on the entanglements among women, the state, and waste in Japan, Rebecca Tompkins (2019) has argued that waste-related tasks have been a gendered vehicle for Japanese women to demonstrate and shape their civic roles. Examples of such cases include organising waste campaigns during wartime or a voluntary recycling association in the present. In the case of the Netherlands, Ruth Oldenziel and Milena Veenis (2013) have explained that the development of the glass bottle recycling scheme

in the 1970s was the result of a group of Dutch housewives who mobilised their wartime saving habits. This analytical thinking provides an inspiration for this dissertation to explore the relations of waste practice, identities, and past experience in the analysis of Tzu-chi volunteers. Addressing the role of history, Oldenziel and Veenis have suggested that the understanding of a contemporary waste-related activism should not be read solely as a result of identity performance, which, in their case, is gender. In their view, it is necessary to explore what this identity means as part of a longer tradition and broader culture of the given social context, as well as the habits and value systems associated with this identity that give rise to the forms and meanings of a waste practice. In the case of Dutch glass bottle recycling, it was the endeavour of a generation that grew up with the tradition of wartime preservation and the thrift culture of post-war recovery; this experience was mobilised in relation to their gendered task of housekeeping and a new purpose in affluent, environmentally aware societies. The Dutch recycling movement of glass bottle, in this view, is a historical continuum and shift of individuals' previous relation with materials grounded in and inspired by their gender identity.

The contingency and performativity of waste matter, however, is related not only to the political process of societal organisation and self-narrative, the aspects this chapter has addressed so far. It also concerns the (re)production of a specific group's deprivation and exclusion. In tracing the emergence of large-scale production and the systematic treatment of waste in northern European cities in the late 18th century, which saw intensified urbanisation and industrialisation, the historian Martin V. Melosi (1981) has noted that this period is when the traditional approach to dealing with waste as a practice of household thrift, reusing, and recycling became a public affair, leading to the professionalisation of urban waste disposal. Since then, waste has been banished from the sight of middle- and upper-class citizens and left to regions and people on the fringe. The structural tendencies serve to the alignment of the casting of certain materials, people, places, and conducts, those who/which threatening to the accumulative logic of capitalist value production and security state apparatuses (Bauman 2004; Gidwani 2013). From there, the idea of a 'social residuum' was formed to refer to people who were thought to be beyond redemption or transformed to serve in the new social imagination (Alexander and Reno 2012, 7). Class, race, ethnicity, religion, or life experience could all be indicators of who should hold badly paid, stigmatised waste jobs, whether it is Roma in eastern Europe (Gille 2011),

unemployed homeless people in the United States (Gowan 1997), or Coptic Christians in Egypt (Furniss 2010).

In other words, with the capacity to consolidate social order, power, scale, and hierarchy (Murdoch 1998, 329), we see the material agency of waste, an agency that call the societies and people to undertake practice and have a specific way of living. As waste matter circulates and transforms, it mixes with people and places. As a material thing, wase not only enable but also invite actions (Olsen 2010; Metcalfe et al. 2013). As Olsen argues, 'things make a difference … they are real entities that possess their own unique qualities and competence which they bring to our cohabitation to them' (2010, 156).

The discussion so far has aimed to emphasise the agency of waste and its constitutive significance in shaping social worlds. However, it also reveals the symbolic capacity of waste. If waste practice and management consolidate the social order, then the reverse is also the true: the logic of the classification system produces waste, and sociality foregrounds our interactions and experience with waste. In short, waste is more than a social process; it is also a mirror or intermediary through which to reflect on ourselves. What one puts into a trash bin reveals details about that person, about one's bodily conditions and commodity fetishes, emotions, and income. Following a similar logic, through the lens of waste, we see a society's underlying principles: its values, norms, taboos, and beliefs.

This symbolic conception of waste is the legacy of the anthropologist Mary Douglas's classic *Purity and Danger* (1966). Douglas examined many kinds of beliefs about pollution, and her definition of dirt remains fundamental for approaches to waste in human science (Neville and Villeneuve 2002; Scanlan 2005; Knechtel 2007). Douglas showed that, for something to be filthy, polluting, or dangerous, it must violate some ideal sense of the ways things ought to be. In her words, 'dirt, then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements' (1966, 36). In her view, dirt is a matter of an 'in-between' state, an object berefting of its systemic functionality that has yet to be removed and allocated to its subsequent cultural and political 'place'. Dirt is thus not outside of the order but endangers it, while making systems of order visible. In a contemporary setting, waste substances function in a way that is similar to a revelation. As the rejected, waste materials represent a basic cognitive and existential dilemma (Moser 2002).

So far, the discussion has presented the agency and symbolic aspects of waste. The analytical approach in this dissertation has been shaped by the dialectical relation between two 'contrasted' aspects, as the waste scholarship often frames it, that distinguish their own approaches: the material context versus the symbolic-structure account (Reno 2015), the action-oriented versus the symbol-oriented approach (Furniss 2010), or 'making us who we are' versus 'telling us who we are' (Evans 2011a). My goal in this dissertation, however, is not to align with a dichotomous 'side'. Instead, the analysis moves between the two to consider waste both in terms of its practical value in a system of agency and sign value in a system of communication/disclosure. One way to do this is by changing the analytical views between those of the actors, namely the volunteers, communities, and the organisation of Tzu-chi recycling, and those of the economic, political, and cultural frameworks of Taiwan. This is seen, for example, in Chapters 3 and 4, where I discuss the relation among the recycling practice, objects, and volunteers from the perspectives of economic structure and individual life-course.

Concerning the symbolic aspect of waste, two points deserve additional emphasis here because of their influence on the ways in which the following chapters explore what waste represents as well as what represents 'the wasted' in Tzu-chi recycling. The first is that waste objects embody insights and memories regarding the cultures and circumstances that produce them; the second concerns the metaphorical conception of waste.

The first proposition could be perhaps best explained by a mention of 'garbaology', which applies the methods of archaeology to the study of garbage. Garbaologists have treated waste sites as archives of history with 'lodes of information' (Rathje and Murphy 2001, 4), while historiography has taken up rubbish as an object of knowledge, techniques, and relations—records and reminders of previous and existing social worlds. Waste is thus 'a mess with a message' (Yaeger 2003, 114). For Walter Moser, this way of positioning discarded artefacts indicates an exploration of the memory component of waste. By referring to Douglas's view on dirt as matter in a state of 'in-between', Moser has suggested that, in those transitional moments, 'the waste-object still conserves all memorial capacities with regard to the system to which it once belonged'. As long as it remains in between, the 'memory-identity' of discards can be revived. For Moser, this memory component of waste objects turns a scientific curiosity about human discards into an exploration of 'the temporal dimension of the cultural phenomenon designed by memory' (2002, 98).

The second point regards waste as a metaphor, an attempt to de-materialise waste and address it as a cultural conceptual category. In *Purity and Danger*, Douglas conceives of society as a system presupposing the distinction between positions inside and outside, and she postulates that all aspects of such a system—economic, social, medical, or religious—work in an integrated manner. For her, the distinction between the interior and the exterior is fundamental to give rise to gestures of inclusion and exclusion in any system so that what has lost value and utility can be branded as 'waste' and 'impure' and therefore rejected. Waste, as a symbolic idea, thus signifies an ontological as well as semantic negativity that grounds cultural categories of efficiency/inefficiency, usefulness/uselessness, order/disorder, and productive/unproductive (Gille 2011). In other words, with moral overtones, waste as a cultural concept encompasses a series of identifications: the bottom, the intruders, the outmoded, the unproductive, the decayed, and other failures to observe social and cultural prescriptions concerning value systems. The objectification of waste is thus not only discarded material but also includes people, belief, place, norm, and language.

However, its exclusion renders waste's potentiality, which 'symbolises both danger and power' (Douglas 1966, 95). As Moser reminds us, if order implies restriction, waste, a status of 'in-between' which spoils the pattern, thus 'represents, in terms of the system, a potential source of revitalisation' (2002, 91). Hawkins and Mueck have described this transient power of waste as a process of 'redemption', showing that something of declining worth, which was once regarded as impurity, can find itself newly valued once it crosses the fringe zone (2003, xi-xii). Through these processes, rubbish can become a source of energy, profit, or form of art. One of the first analyses of waste along these lines was the anthropologist Michael Thompson's book *Rubbish Theory* (1979), which centred around the process of value change in society. Thompson offers an approach that is synchronous with Douglas's yet concedes a historical dimension of the systems under biographical histories to 'stuffs'. According to Thompson, every system (in terms of value change) has a history, which is the biography of concrete objects. For him, the biography of every artefact is articulated in three stages, characterised by changes in what value the object opposes: from 'transient value' to 'zero value' to 'permanent value.' Thompson hypothesises that the process of value change necessarily involves the category of rubbish, the stage of 'zero value', and thereby affirms the condition of 'worthlessness' as playing a dynamic role in the loss and regeneration of value. This complexity of waste, its possibility of value transformation, is nevertheless displayed vividly in the process of recycling.

1.1   Literature on Recycling

Recycling is by no means a contemporary invention. In the 19th century, it was common for paper to be made from recycled rags (Evans 2011a); for centuries, across different societies, the results of human digestion, night soil, have been systematically collected for agricultural fertilisation (Kawa et al. 2019). In their study of the history of recycling in Europe, Oldenziel and Weber (2013) trace the term 'recycling' to the 1920s technology of returning production residues to the refinery process in the oil industry. While 'recycling' appeared to be more of an engineering term in the early 20th century, waste utilisation was instead referred to as 'salvage', 're-use', and 'recuperation.' According to Oldenziel and Weber (2013), the 1960s and 1970s are an anchor point in recycling history; the once-technical term acquired a particular meaning in the affluent, post-modern environmental era, and it became tinged with economic, political, social, and environmental meanings. In today's terms, 'recycling' involves two types of work: the ordinary reuse and appropriation of used objects and the technical transformation of materials to substitute the use of virgin materials in further rounds of commodity production.

In recent decades, recycling has risen to the top of the global political agenda (Alexander and Reno 2012). Moral norms, such as environmental citizenship, and legal sanctions play an important role in encouraging individuals, households, and institutes to dispose of things in ways that make use of recycling infrastructures. In this political and moral framework, the act of recycling is mostly portrayed as a green conscious engagement rather than an economic process or waste labour (Wheeler and Glucksmann 2015). Further, one aim of the recycling movement is to have an alternative solid waste treatment beyond building repositories and incinerators (MacBride 2010). However, as Samantha MacBride has critically noted in her research on the recycling industry and policy in the United States, this kind of recycling political agenda nevertheless emphasises 'consensus over conflicts, and an implicit theory of social change rooted in notion of education and moral/psychological growth rather than in state regulation and structural reform' (*ibid*., 4). Additionally, what is left out in the public image of recycling is its economic nature in relation to the global production chain. In addressing the economic aspect of recycling on a global scale, Nicky Gregson et al. (2013) have addressed not the material or behaviour but the *system* which allows this transition; they have therefore defined recycling as a 'reflexive intervention in economic activity which extends the boundaries of markets, by internalising

objects formerly externalised as wastes and by attending to the temporal properties of materials' (2013, 1). In this regard, waste scholarship has endeavoured to reveal the sheer scale of the global trade in secondary materials. Scholars have noted that the 'global destruction networks' of recycling (Herod et al. 2013) not only disclose the unequal relationship between rich and poor areas of the world, but also reveal the newly emerging economies in post-colonial and post-socialist contexts, where there has been an increasing demand for materials for infrastructural expansion, energy, and consumer goods (Lepawsky and McNabb 2010; Norris 2010; Crang et al. 2013; Wang et al. 2020).

Meanwhile, accounts of the technical aspects of recycling have been the subject of industrial analysis approaches, including life cycle, material flow analysis (MFA), and industrial ecology. Following the hypothesis of constant reconfiguration in physics and the principles of the conservation of energy and mass balance in closed systems, these approaches trace material and energy movement and transformation. To their credit, the materialist analysis systems provide abundant data with apparent and computational measurements of matter circulation and environmental impacts, which are useful for policy and management use. However, when mapping datasets of global waste flows, the modelling of input-output obscures what lies behind their production, their entanglements with local politics, economies, boundaries, regulations, and people. As Alexander and Reno have noted, these are 'among the very things that determine where and how materials move' (2012, 13). For example, by examining the global trade flows of used clothing and end-of-life merchant ships, Mike Crang et al. (2013) have highlighted how the flow is coordinated by highly complex and brokered forms of governance. Instead of being dominated by large transactional corporations or apparent governmental institutions, Crang et al. suggest that the key role is that of small-scale businesses, who act as intermediary agents to bridge the societal embeddedness of local actors and expertise, a process which is largely grounded in ethnic familiarity and traders' trust relations.

If recycling is a process of transforming the zero-value of unwanted objects into production resources, then it essentially reflects the nature of value creation, recovery, connection, and exchange (Alexander and Reno 2012). As Gavin Bridge (2009, 1220) has claimed, '[r]esources are not, they become.' Regardless of the waste stream involved, this 'becoming' process is, in Reno's words, an 'open-ended transformation made possible through the productive combination of human creativity, the material vitality of wastes themselves, and the physical surroundings where they come to rest' (2015, 562). In other words, the work of

unmaking is an appreciation for the capacities of things, not only for 'what it is' as a discarded object but for what it 'might become' (Gregson et al. 2010, 853). Such waste labour is the result of an entanglement among bodies, knowledges, technologies, infrastructures, and substances whereby some elements are assembled, and others expelled. In this sense, recycling is similar to any productive activity. However, in addition to multiple, mutable, and even conflicting forms of value that are unmade and remade at any one moment (Alexander and Reno 2012, 24), a focus on recycling affords a confrontation of a waste practice as a way of managing loss that 'involves not destruction, but restoration, care, and mindfulness'. It is the 'arts of transience', according to Hawkins (2001, 19), by which people creatively reuse materials and remake their own lives and relationships.

In short, recycling as a determinant process reveals the complexity of the paradigm of waste to address its ambiguity and the power that arises between value and void, end and origin, as well as its possibility of making through unmaking and redemption through restoration. This dialectical modality of value and process inversion is central to the orientation of this dissertation. The dissertation further develops this insight in relation to a temporal aspect and the rhetoric of recycling as redemption. This is connected to earlier discussions on the symbolic aspect of waste.

In the introductory chapter of *Waste-Site Story: The Recycling of Memory*, Neville and Villeneuve postulate that, if waste materials are the 'remnants of the past', recycling thus is a 'mixing of temporalities' (2002, 7). Similar to Moser's articulation on the 'memory-identity' of discarded objects, Neville and Villeneuve propose that the relation between disposal and recycling serves as a vantage point to reflect upon the relation between memory and forgetting. According to them (as well as Moser), if what waste recycling presuppose is not materials' transformation or destruction, but rather the operation of recovery, it implies 'an intrusion of the past into the present' (Moser 2002, 102). Recycling thus represents the paradigm of cultural production today: it is an embodiment of the world in which we are living, one of 'heterogeneous temporalities in which past and present, the traditional and the technological sophisticated overlaps' (Neville and Villeneuve 2002, 6). Following this line of thought, this dissertation considers such 'memory recycling' an implication of nostalgia—an operation of collecting and utilising the once-discarded yet desired past. Furthermore, the rhetoric of recycling is often tinged with connotations of redemption. In the language of recycling, materials are 'salvaged', while polluted lands are 'saved' (Alexander and

Reno 2012, 26-27). Through the entanglement of discarded materials, people, and places, restoration not only extends the useful life of objects but the lives of those rejected, recovering their 'usefulness' of being social citizens and commodity producers, to include them again in developmental schemes. As the following chapters show, this redemptive rhetoric of recycling, together with waste metaphors, takes on meaning in the volunteers' self-narratives, community operations, and institutional motifs of Tzu-chi recycling.

2.   Literature on Nostalgia

Nostalgia is a composite feeling of loss, attachment, and yearning. Contrary to our intuition, the term 'nostalgia' did not come from literature or politics but medicine. Etymologically derived from the combination of the Greek *nostos* (home-return) and *-algia* (specific pain), the term was coined by the Swiss physician Johannes Hofner in the 17th century to a diagnose medical disorder often associated with prolonged and involuntary absences from home, particularly among war soldiers (Pickering and Keightley 2006, 921-2). By the end of the 19th century, however, the formerly 'geographical condition' caused by 'the gap between where we are and where we once were and/or where we want to be' (Bonnett 2016, 2) took a temporal turn, involving a shift from a longing for a place to a yearning for a different time. Today, nostalgia in ordinary parlance is invariably connected to sentimentalisation and an idealised version of the proximate past in comparison to a dissatisfied present, which is often coupled with an indifference towards the future. It involves an awareness of the distance between now and then and a sense of feeling oneself to be a stranger in time (Lowenthal 1989; Boym 2001; Pickering and Keightley 2006; Bauman 2017).

Seeing nostalgia as 'a result of a new understanding of time and space', the scholar of literature and art Svetlana Boym, whose work *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) has been influential in the study of nostalgia, has explained that nostalgia as 'a historical emotion' has become the 'symptom of our age' (2007, 8). She writes: 'The 20th century began with futuristic utopias and dreams of unending development and ended with nostalgia and quests for restoration' (Boym 2010b). Nostalgia is everywhere and is often the subject of the study of mass culture. Nostalgia is seen in its institutionalised form as heritage museums, analysed as in terms of its appearance in different media, tourism experiences, and other forms of cultural commodities (Lee 2006; Davidson, Park and Shields 2011; Niemeyer 2014; McClinchey 2016). Comparable observations of a 'global epidemic of

nostalgia' (Glazer 2005, 36) indicate that the prevalence of the appeal to a glorious past has accompanied numerous global political movements, such as the 'Velvet Revolution' in Eastern Europe and the end of Soviet Union (Boym 2007, 10), and it has become a prominent feature in recent Western European and U.S. politics (Demos 2018), for example in the case of the Brexit referendum and, in the United States, Donald Trump's presidential election campaign in 2016.[27]

Scholars have nevertheless identified a low reputation associated with nostalgia, a kind of the 'negatively the othered' (Pickering and Keightley 2006, 920) and the 'political sinister' (Natali 2004, 19) based on a series of oppositions: conservatism and progressiveness, servitude and freedom, myths and truths. The retrograde is faulted for its inaccurate view of history and the attempt to attain what is empirically untenable. For Marco Piason Natali, the struggle between the past and the future reveals the political tension between the political left and right. He has noted that, while 'the very word used to refer to the left in English and other European languages—variations of *progress*—emphasises commitment to the future', the adversary of the left—*conservative* and *reactionary*—'suggests devotion to the past' (*ibid.*, 13). In postulating the idea that nostalgia as a chronic facet of socialist and revolutionary thought has in fact been fundamental to the political left, one defender of nostalgia, the geographer Alastair Bonnett (2010; 2016), has raised the question of whether nostalgia is more sentimental than the 'wishful vision[s] of future […] that are so prominent within progressive politics' (2012, 10). He points to the fact that the criticism of nostalgia reveals the disjuncture between private and public expressions of nostalgia. While personal attachments to the past are 'valued as signs of humanity and character' (2016, 15), in public, nostalgia is associated with a defeatist attitude of melancholy, a regressive stance with utopian impulses. Both Natali (2004) and Bonnett (2010) have suggested that the notoriety of nostalgia as counter-productive is rooted in 18th- and 19th-century liberal ideology and its dialectical reasoning. According to Natalie, this is seen, for example, in the writings of Immanuel Kant and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, as well as the comments Karl Marx made in 'The Eighteenth Brumaire' in 1852: 'The social revolution of the 19th century can-not draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped off all superstition about the past. […] the revolution of the 19th century must let the dead bury their dead' (1979, 106).

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[27] See for example Flinder (2018), Novack (2016), Gaston (2018).

Paradoxically, however, nostalgia arises in modernity. As Bruno Latour has noted, like 'two symmetrical results of a single conception of time,' modern ideas of progress and newness and the anti-modern claims of recovery and tradition appear to be 'twins who failed to recognise one another' (1993, 76). Regressive yearning emerges because of the sense of disorientation and the rupture of an experience of continuity in the face of relentless social uprooting and moving forward. In other words, the longing for the past appears in the departure from it (Davis 1979; Blunt 2003; May 2017). This cultural paradox of '*in and against* modernity' that is characteristic of nostalgia, Bonnett contends, is the key aspect of nostalgia's power, as it 'transgress[es] and affronts modernity's hubris' (2016, 6). For Boym (2001; 2008; 2010a), nostalgia is a manifestation of the 'off-modern' tradition. According to her, the 'off-modern' perspective proposes a non-linear conception of cultural evolution through trial and error, offering critical reflections on the modern condition and deterministic narratives of history. Using Walter Benjamin's expression, Boym (2010c) has written, it is '*to brush history against the grain* [...] to understand the preposterous aspects of our present'. Focusing on a variety of 'off-modern' art works, Boym nevertheless notes that, for off-modernists, those who are often in marginal cultural positions or who are displaced, 'creative rethinking of nostalgia was not merely an artistic device but a strategy for survival' (2007, 9). In this register, nostalgia functions as a countering force and defence mechanism which 'not only search[es] for ontological security in the past, but also as a means of taking one's bearings for the road ahead in the uncertainties of the present' (Pickering and Keightley 2006, 921).

To open up a 'different conceptual territory' (Natali 2004, 23) to articulate the active and productive potential of nostalgia and to move beyond the premise of the past as something to be discarded, scholars have pointed to nostalgia's double-side nature. One side is retrospective, and the other is prospective. Boym (2001) has proposed a typology to distinguish these two aspects as restorative and reflective nostalgia. Emphasising that these distinctions are not absolute binaries, she explains that restorative nostalgia implies a utopian imagination which 'attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home', while reflective nostalgia thrives on the longing itself, suggesting an invitation to recall and dwell on the ambivalence of human belonging (2007, 13). Similarly, Natali highlights the differences in responses to the loss by referring to Sigmund Freud's ideas about mourning and melancholia. In contrast to a pathological melancholia, which is a refusal of loss, Natali views mourning as a 'healthy response' 'working through'

of acceptance to the realisation that 'the lost object of affection indeed no longer exist[s] and that no amount of effort will make it return' (2004, 19).

According to these scholars, to have productive and positive nostalgia, the value transaction of memory is key. While nostalgia can stop this transaction, the recognition of the rupture between past and present itself can also become a bridge to bring the past and present into dialogue. In this register, nostalgia functions as an initiating mechanism to reconfigure the past towards action, 'as a mode of assimilating this to the rapidly changing modern environment' (Pickering and Keightley 2006, 923). This 'remaking process' of memory and the past 'involves a back-and-forth movement through time as we compare our past and present selves, by which we construct a culturally appropriate sense of a coherent self' (May 2017, 402). In this register, the past becomes a *recycled* resource to 'insert itself into a present sensation from which it borrows the vitality' (Bergson 1988, 240, cited in Boym 2007, 16), becoming the elements and basis for 'renewal and satisfaction in the future' (May 2017, 404).

For the sociologist Vanessa May, using nostalgia as a technique to construct a continuous self not only suggests that 'time itself is a source of belonging and an interpretive resource' (*ibid.*, 406), but also, as her research endeavours to show, it reveals different forms of temporal belonging. Based on her study of written accounts from the British Mass Observation Projects, May elucidates the key functions of memory in relation to temporal belonging by drawing on Henri Bergson's (1988, 80-81) identification of two types of memory. 'Memory-in-action', explains May, is 'memories that are imprinted in our body and enacted in the present, for example in the forms of habitual practice'; 'memory-image', meanwhile, can pull us back from the present and send us 'traveling down "the slope of our past" when recollecting past events' (2017, 403). According to May, memories-in-action imply a temporal belonging in the 'here and now', while the memory-image indicates one in the past, or in May's words, 'from afar'. The distinction between a recollection of the past that is an embodied habit in the present and a recollection of the past as a recalled representational image is particularly useful for this research to identify different forms of nostalgia in Tzu-chi recycling at individual, communal, and institutional levels. It provides an analytical approach to allude to the embodiment of the temporal belongings in the process in which the past is deployed and assembled. However, it should be noted that May's notion of belonging from afar does not exclusively mean a desire to return to the past, nor is it the kind of restorative nostalgia in Boym's usage. As she explains regarding one of her three types of belonging from afar, *temporal*

displacement and *place nostalgia*, 'memories of past belonging can be used to create a sense of belonging *in* the present, if not *to* the present' (*ibid.*, 409).

2.1   Literature on Environmental Nostalgia

Few scholarly works have explored the relationship between nostalgia and environment-related changes (Mukta and Hardiman 2000; Albrecht 2005; Davis 2010; Bonnett 2016; Iambacher 2017; Askland and Bunn 2018). With regard to environmentalism as an effort to restore what once flourished in nature, some scholars have proposed that nostalgia has long been fundamental to the environmental movement, and that, because of its 'affective and cognitive aspects', it has been 'one of the most potent rhetorical tools for green politics' (Davis 2010, 265; Iambacher 2017). To elucidate the pertinent role of nostalgia in the development of environmental imagination, Mukta and Hardiman have written, 'in seeking to counter the grand narrative of capitalist "progress" with an alternative narrative of its own [...] visions of a better, more sustainable ecological future are tied to a variety of interpretations of the past' (2000, 113). For many ecological thinkers, from Aldo Leopold to Rachel Carson, the loss of familiar experiences of and in environments—the sound of birds, the quietness of the woods, the surrounding farms, and the closeness to the sea—point to an alienation of people from nature. This ecological nostalgia, Mukta and Hardiman have argued, indicates a strong, continuing tradition in ecological theory of 'locating the organic Arcadia in peasant society', a tradition that is tinged with 'Edenic motifs' (*ibid.,* 113-115). For example, in *Toward an Ecological Society* (1980), Murray Bookshin has posited that the previous harmony between humans and nature, an organic society in which people participated in various natural cycles, was broken up and gave birth to hierarchical and, ultimately, classed societies, leading to the present state of crisis. A redemptive struggle, therefore, becomes a return to an organic society with smaller-scale agricultural production, or, for some deep ecologists, even to the time before the Neolithic revolution and agriculture, when humans were hunters and gathers and were a 'real' part of the wilderness (Mukta and Hardiman 2000; Bonnett 2016). In this register, as Jeremy Davis has advocated in his articulation of the notion of the 'nostalgia of sustainability', 'nostalgic imaginings are not, then, just a regulative ideal for ecological praxis. Nostalgia is called upon as an ethical principle' (2010, 262).

In the view of Mukta and Hardiman, however, these ecological nostalgic arguments run the risk of 'tip[ping] over into a celebration of a mythical past' and often 'depend for their force on a contrast of between a degenerate modern Western civilisation and its "Other"—which is seen in a historical past or a timeless past-in-present' (2000, 120; 123). Taking the example of forestry preservation and destruction in traditional Indian society as a clash of disputed history, Mukta and Hardiman note the long history of forestry destruction before Western civilisation was introduced. Nostalgic ecological thinking nonetheless prefers a depiction of an 'essentialised and idealised' organic society as a past Eden, ignoring historical evidence as well as the fact that this peasant society was also highly class based and patriarchal. According to Mukta and Hardiman, this resonates with what they have described as 'reversed Orientalism', that is, 'the traits of a supposedly degenerate "Oriental mentality"—e.g., spirituality, religiosity, closeness to nature' that is similar to the use of a "primitive" Other, now valorised in this construction of the virtues of ecological sustainability' from critics of modern society (*ibid.*, 120).

This research takes Mukta and Hardiman's warning seriously in analysing how nostalgic imaginaries of the environment are deployed and presented in the Tzu-chi setting. However, the study attempts to advance and complicate our understanding of how this essentialised nostalgic ecological view works 'on the ground'. The effort is two-fold. First, the idea of 'reversed Orientalism' is particularly revealing when examining how Buddhism becomes tinged with environmentalism in both the fields of religious practice and academia, an issue that Chapter Seven explores. Nevertheless, while Mukta and Hardiman stop at the point of identifying this 'problematic' tendency, as if it entailed a 'second round' of 'othering' and exploiting non-Western civilisation for the purpose of finding an alternative solution to modern capitalist progress, this dissertation asks how this tendency is in turn used by 'the other', 'the Oriental', for their own political agenda: the development of a local identity, for example, and particularly in the case of Tzu-chi, of religion. Second, without denying the essentialist and idealist approach which can be found in ecological nostalgia, this research recognises an underlying paradox of Mukta and Hardiman's critical view of it; that is, that the view itself is an essentialist one. In articulating the issues of nostalgic ecological theory, the problematic remembrances of the environmental past the scholars use are those of a distant past and are associated with an organic society far removed from industrial modernisation. In those scenarios, the ecological past from afar thus appears in the form of a 'memory-image', with 'pre-fabricated'

representations with only a 'single plot of story'; it resonates with Boym's 'restorative nostalgia' typology, which sees itself 'as truth and tradition' rather than nostalgia (2007, 13-14). An emerging question, then, concerns the kind of ecological nostalgia derived from the memory of the environment from a proximate past, one that a person once experienced and lost within his or her lifetime. In this kind of ecological nostalgia, the experiences of and in the environment are closely linked to subjectivity and reside in the understanding of one's body, senses, social relations, and worldviews. As the following chapters demonstrate, in the case of Taiwan, where a transition from an agricultural society to a highly technological one occurred within less than a half century, the remembrance of a society's relation to nature in the context of a peasant society is not through images of 'old tales' but a lived past. Thus, rather than simply exploring the problems of utopian restoration in ecological nostalgia, the aim here is an endeavour to expand the focus to the entanglement and multiplicity between the environmental movement and the homesick yearning for the remembered experiences of and relationship with nature. It explores what ecological nostalgia tells us about a sense of belonging in the complexities of a temporal and spatial rupture and continuum, as well as examining what happens when the 'imagined tradition' of idealist and essentialist ecological nostalgia encounters 'realistic' and 'contingent' age-old customs in everyday life settings.

The environmental philosopher Glenn Albrecht's notion of *solastalgia* and its related discussions are useful in addressing these questions in the following chapters. Albrecht proposed solastalgia as a concept to understand the connection between environmental changes and human distress. He explains that solastalgia, which resonates with the characteristics of nostalgia, is a form of place pathology, 'the pain or sickness caused by the loss or lack of solace and the sense of isolation connected to the present state of one's home and territory' (2005, 44-5). Drawing on Mitchell's (1946, 4) observation that, 'divorced from his roots, man [sic] loses his psychic stability', and through his analysis of environmental change in the Hunter Valley and drought-affected areas in South Australia, Albrecht argues that the most poignant moments of solastalgia occur when one experiences the sense of homeless while still at home. He contends: 'It [solastalgia] is when there is a recognition that the place where one resides and that one loves is under immediate assault (physical desolation). It is manifest in an attack on one's sense of place, in the erosion of the sense of belonging (identity) to a particular place and a feeling of distress (psychological desolation) about its transformation' (2005, 45). The concept of nostalgia is particularly central to

Albrecht's theory as a 'ghost reference' (*ibid.*). However, according to Albrecht, in contrast to the 'dislocated spatial and temporal dimension of nostalgia', solastalgia is 'not about looking back to some golden past'; thus, those who suffer from it might actively 'engage in collective action that provides solace and communion in any given environment' (*ibid.*, 44-5). A number of studies have adapted the concept of solastalgia. For Askland and Bunn (2018), because of its diagnostic quality, the concept develops into a measurable proof of mental illness to identify environmentally induced distress. Subsequently, as a technical term, the concept gains the specific intent of political intervention and has the possibility of being legitimated and requiring greater institutional intervention by entering political discourse.

If solastalgia is a morph of nostalgia, then Albrecht's theory of place-based distress moves the concept of nostalgia from a temporal orientation (back) to a spatial one. However, according to Askland and Bunn, to better understand the phenomenological basis of place-based distress, the focus needs to extend beyond the transformation or degradation of the local environment and link its spatial, or 'placial', dimension to that of temporality: 'Not just the scars on the physical and social landscapes that underpin this experience', Askland and Bunn argue, 'but also a temporal rupture, manifesting as dissonance between past experiences, present realities, and future ideas of sociality and sense of self in place' (2018, 18). Drawing on Connor and Marshall (2016), Askland and Bunn propose that solastalgia emerges in the nexus between the bio-physical world, social networks, and meanings, and 'it is through the continuous dialogue between the three that the premises for human-nature relationship are established' (*ibid.,* 20). Based on their research in a historical village in Australia that is surrounded by open-cut mines, Askland and Bunn contend that solastalgia is not only a form of mental distress but an ontological anxiety because it is a trauma of losing a sense of *the* place where human beings find the strongest sense of ontological security: home. Askland and Bunn have explained that what 'home' indicates is beyond domestic design and practice; it is a concept which encapsulates the bodily experience of place through a temporal narrative of continuity, and 'it is both a place and a state' of familiarity and predictability. Accordingly, home is a temporal construct. Home, the place for which nostalgia yearns, is established in relation to and through the past present, and at the same time, it is embedded in the fabrics of social relation and materialised in habitual practice and embodied knowledge. Askland and Bunn thus conclude that the notion of solastalgia, the ontological anxiety caused

by environmental changes, concerns 'the disruption and distress caused by dissonance in temporal as in spatial terms' (*ibid.,* 21).

3. Concluding Remarks

The overriding purpose of this study is to explore the sociological and cultural implications of waste recycling to ask how the waste practice of recycling transform values in addition to those of discarded materials. For its empirical focus, it examines the case of Tzu-chi recycling in post-authoritarian, contemporary Taiwan. As a point of departure, this research first adopts a 'background theory novelty' by drawing on the literature of waste studies, which scholarly examinations of waste have recently developed. As Chapter Two shows, the scholarship in waste studies shows a paradigm shift, looking beyond the conventional wisdom that positions waste as an environmental and social problem that needs an instrumental and scientific solution. Instead, this dissertation is in line with the effort to formulate a new relationship between society and waste based on the view that waste is a constitutive element and reflects the terrain of modern society; further, as a practice, it is a process of self-making. From there, the dissertation establishes its research objective of exploring how the remaking of waste recycling (re)makes Taiwanese society. However, the fact that 'observations are theory-laden does not mean that they are theory-determined' (George and Bennett 2005, 20-21). Rather simply drawing insights from scholarly literature on waste studies, this thesis uses Tzu-chi's case to reflect on the theoretical division between material agency and the contextual symbols of waste by examining the unique meaning associations and operational mechanisms of Tzu-chi recycling. With this effort in mind, the review of waste literature explores waste material's capacity to embody meanings and temporalities, making it a conceptual category, a metaphor which can imply something beyond a material object. Based on this conceptual proposition, this dissertation examines what 'discarded waste' *other than waste objects* Tzu-chi recycling recycles. In reviewing theoretical orientations towards waste recycling, the chapter addresses a key aspect of the concept of recycling: value transformation, bouncing in between value and void, end and origin. Furthermore, the review highlights the scholarly account of the recycling rhetoric, which is often tinged with redemption through restoration, and an articulation of the temporal mixture. Recognising this tendency, this dissertation thus articulates a conceptual imagination of the relation between recycling and nostalgia when analysing Tzu-chi recycling. With its review of the concepts and debates in the

literature on nostalgia, this chapter clarifies numerous aspects scholars have identified in their conceptualisations of it. These occur through spatial and temporal terms and restorative and prospective orientations, and they are intertwined with modernity and the changes it entails. These aspects provide theoretical tools that are helpful in approaching the empirical materials collected through fieldwork. Drawing on these concepts, the chapters which follow consider how the sentimental yearning for a sense of belonging occurs in Tzu-chi's recycling movement.

Chapter Three |
Recycling Scheme:
Taiwan and Tzu-chi

1. Introduction

In approximately the 1990s, recycling as we know it today swept into Taiwan as a social movement, and successive endeavours have been implemented and contributed to the ubiquitous practice of recycling. As the primary waste treatment, the Taiwanese recycling movement developed an institutionalised system solidified by governmental legislation, municipal practices, educational curricula, and a thriving industry. Building upon pre-existing traditions of scrap collection, a commodity chain of 'resource recovery' was formed by the amalgamation of governmental administrations and market operations and was enforced by the national waste management.

Gradually, recycling discarded materials became a part of the Taiwanese daily routine, and Taiwan became a recycling society. According to official statistics from the Taiwanese government, the success of the recycling movement was a recycling rate of over 60% in 2016,[28;29] giving Taiwan one of the three highest

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[28] Environmental Protection Administration. 2019. Environmental Statistic Search Net (環境統計搜尋網): General waste, recycling rate. Taipei, Taiwan: https://stat.epa.gov.tw/ (accessed on 18 Oct 2020).

[29] The environmental organisation Taiwan Watch, has questioned the officially stated recycling rate, however, and suggested that the number was inflated by counting a large proportion of the general waste collected by private businesses as industrial waste. The

national recycling rates worldwide [30] . In the accompanying media reports, scholarly publications, and governmental policy documents, this achievement is commonly hailed as having been made possible by the collaboration between the government and citizens—the result of a series of waste-management developments starting in the 1980s. Recycling, in this framework, is often represented as the keystone of environmental reform, an embodiment of a growing expression of civic society, environmentalism, economic incentives, and technological innovation that has transformed Taiwan into a 'waste reduction miracle'[31] and 'the world's genius of garbage disposal'.[32;33] The celebration, nevertheless, often conceals the multifaceted nature of the Taiwanese recycling system and overlooks the roles of the non-governmental and non-industrial players, such as Tzu-chi.

Begun in the early 1990s, Tzu-chi recycling parallels Taiwan's recycling movement. Compared to the general political-economic system of Taiwanese recycling, the religious background and voluntary operation of the Tzu-chi recycling scheme stand out as a particular case. However, with its intact logistics system and elaborate management scheme, the national programme of Tzu-chi recycling and its local operations are not a detached case. Instead, they are part of the Taiwanese recycling system and movement.

In this chapter, the management and operation of the Tzu-chi recycling programme is introduced. To understand the saliency and particularity of Tzu-chi

'reduced' general waste total therefore contributed to a higher recycling rate, which, according to the organisation, only totals about 40% in reality. See: Lai, Pin-Yu 賴品瑀. "Fenmu Suoshui, Fenzi Xubao: Huantuan Tibao Taiwan Huishoulu 58% Tiancai Jiaxiang" 分母縮水、分子虛報 環團踢爆台灣回收率 58%「天才」假象[Shrink Denominator, Exaggerating Numerator: Environmental Group Revealsthe Facade of Genius 58% Taiwanese Recycling Rate]. *Taiwan Environmental Information Center*, December 9, 2017. http://e-info.org.tw/node/208921 (accessed on 17 Oct 2020).

[30] Stocker, Mark, "Taiwan shi Shijie Qian Sanming de Ziyuan Huishou Daguo, Weishime Guoji Xingxiang Shizhong Mei Genshang " 台灣是世界前三名的資源回收大國,為 什麼國際形象始終沒跟上? [Why does the international image of Taiwan does not match the fact that Taiwan is one of the top three international recycling countries?], *Tianxia Duli Pinglun* 天下獨立評論, August 5, 2017, https://opinion.cw.com.tw/blog/profile/416/article/5954 (accessed on 17 Oct 2020).

[31] Maynard, N., 2018. "Taiwan's Waste Reduction Miracle." *The News Lens*, January 24, 2018. https://international.thenewslens.com/article/88257 (accessed on 17 Oct 2020).

[32] Chen, Kathy. 2016. "Taiwan: The World's Geniuses of Garbage Disposal." *The Wall Street Journal*, May 17, 2016. https://www.wsj.com/articles/taiwan-the-worlds-geniuses-of-garbage-disposal-1463519134 (accessed on 17 Oct 2020).

[33] For example, see Hsiao et al. 2002; Tsai and Chou 2004; Chen and Huang 2003; Wong 2017.

recycling, it is first necessary to contextualise Tzu-chi recycling in Taiwan's recycling system to explore its relation to the other players. Thus, this chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section provides a brief overview of Taiwan's contemporary recycling movement. The second section describes the Taiwanese recycling system via the industrial logistics network and compares three recycling conduits: local government, private business, and Tzu-chi. In the final section, the discussion focuses on the Tzu-chi recycling programme and thoroughly examines five aspects of it: volunteer types, recycling sites, material categories, the administrative task force, and institutional partners. In doing so, this chapter serves two purposes. The first is to highlight that the development of Tzu-chi recycling is rooted in the pre-existing traditions of recycling practice and industry in Taiwan, and that it is part of the national recycling movement as a whole. Second, the chapter provides a more general organisational background of the Tzu-chi recycling programme, which is necessary for discussions in the following chapters.

2.   The Taiwanese Recycling Movement

Prior to 1984, when there were only a few crude incinerators which had been built under Japanese rule (c. 1895-1945), more than 97% of Taiwanese waste was disposed of on open land.[34] Between the early 1980s and late 1990s, though, the amount of solid waste on the island exploded and almost tripled, reaching a peak in 1998 (Zhang 1994; Chen and Huang 2003).[35] However, the composition of the waste had gradually shifted from predominantly organic matter to less decomposable manufactured goods.[36]

Facing the piling up of rubbish by riversides, in mountain valleys, and on the street corners of cities, the governmental waste management policy exhibited three major turning points between the 1980s and the 2000s.[37] The first was building

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[34] Environmental Protection Bureau, Taiwan Province Government. 1986. 'Taiwan sheng doushi laji chuli jihua' (台灣省都市垃圾處理計畫). Taipei, Taiwan.

[35] In 1980, the total volume of waste treated was 3,190,100 tonnes (Lin 1985); in 1998, it was about 8,880,487 tonnes (Chen and Huang 2003).

[36] Yu-lan Chien (2000). "A study of Fee-Charging Techniques of General Solid Waste Disposal" (C00063) [data file]. Available from *Survey Research Data Archive*, Academia Sinica. doi:10.6141/TW-SRDA-C00063-1.

[37] Environmental Protection Administration, Executive Yuan. 2012. 'Feiqiwu guanli jishi, 1987-2012' (廢棄物管理紀實). Taipei, Taiwan: https://www.epa.gov.tw/DisplayFile.aspx?FileID=EF308C741FCC0CCD&P=0ebc861f-620b-413b-9633-b14665724256 (accessed on 17 Oct 2020).

sanitary landfill sites in the 1980s. However, while the construction of monitored landfill sites was underway, waste generation overwhelmed the capacity of the existing sites, and the smells, smoke from fires, and pests that resulted from open and illegal dumping became a major public health problem for local residents and governments, as well as a source of public conflict. [38; 39] The Taiwanese Environmental Protection Administration (TEPA), which had held Cabinet status starting in 1987, began to favour incineration as the solution to the disposal problem, leading to a second turning point. Accordingly, in 1994, the policy plan 'One City, One Incinerator' (一縣市一垃圾焚化廠[40]) was announced. However, the rise in environmental awareness and growing social movements halted the multiplication of incineration plants (Tseng 2001; Chen 2003), and by the late 1990s, the focus of Taiwanese waste governance shifted from 'the logic of disposal' to 'the logic of diversion' (Bulkeley and Gregson 2009). Consequently, recycling as a waste-treatment method has been favoured by the government and related systems, and this preference is reflected both in widespread support from the general public and in material responses. The recycling policies were developed accordingly.

The current Taiwanese recycling system has as its backbone two governmental regulatory frameworks: the national 'Four-in-One Resource Recycling Programme' (資源回收四合一計畫[41]; hereafter, the Four-in-One programme), which was launched in 1997, and the National Recycling Act, which was passed in 2000. As a 'revised' version of the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) model, the Four-in-One programme [42] is a 'two-part instrument' environmental tax policy (Wen 2005) in that the central government, through the Recycling Fund Management Board (RFMB), collects a presumptive tax from manufacturers and importers of selected recyclable products; this tax is used to subsidise recycling

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[38] Kong, Wei-Qin 孔維勤. "Garbage War" [垃圾大戰 *laji dazhan*]. *Family Monthly* 家庭月刊 12 (1982): 82-89.

[39] Pan, Ting-Song 潘庭松. "*Zai Neihu Laji Shanshang Taoshenghuo de Renmen*" 在內湖垃圾山上討生活的人們 [The People Who Work at Nei-Hu Garbage Mountain for Their Livelihood]. *Renjen Magazine* 人間雜誌 1 (1985): 1-48.

[40] yi xianshi yi laji fenhua chang

[41] ziyuan huishou si he yi jihua

[42] The 'four' in the Four-in-One programme refers to the four stakeholders recognised by the state who jointly constitute the main participants in Taiwanese recycling: 1) households and communities as the material providers, 2) municipal refuse collection teams as the formal collectors, 3) recycling businesses as the market operators, and 4) the governmental agencies of TEPA and the Recycling Fund Management Board (RFMB) as the administrative and financial managers.

businesses, including the collector and recycler (see figure 3.1).[43]
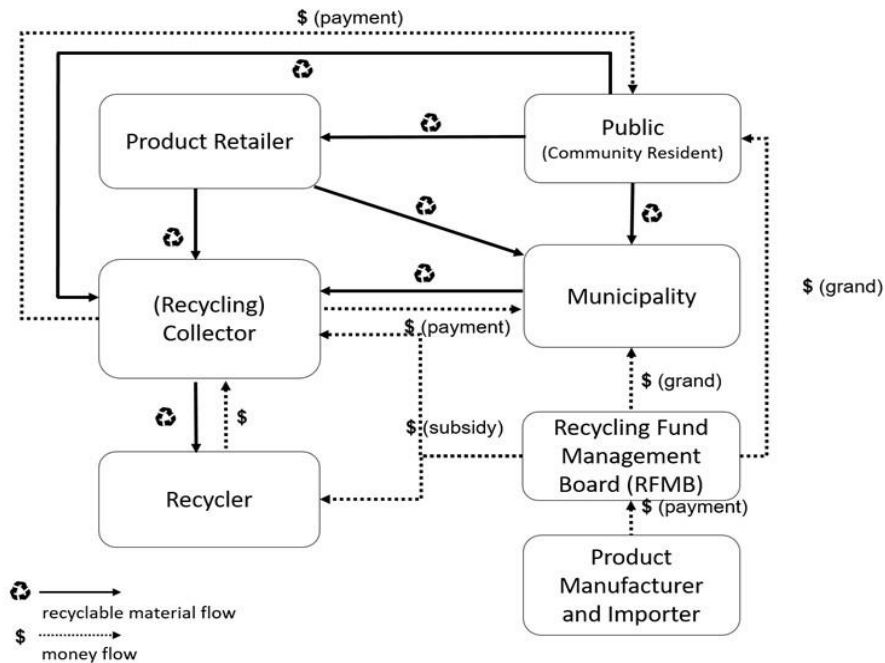
Figure 3.1 Four-in-One Resource Recycling Programme (source: TEPA;[44]   redrawing by the author)

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[43] However, not all recycling materials receive subsidies. There are officially two types of recyclables in Taiwan, 'general recyclable waste' and 'regulated recyclable waste', and each is managed by different governmental authorities. The general category is regulated by the Waste Management Department of TEPA and is exempt from the management of the RFMB, which manages the regulated category. In principle, the four-in-one programme can be seen as governmental intervention in order to provide economic incentives in the secondary materials market of 'less wanted' and 'environmentally harmful' recyclable-waste materials, such as coffee cups and light bulbs. Materials that already have relatively mature recycling markets, such as paper and lubricants, do not receive government subsidies and are fully dependent on market mechanisms. These items are categorised as general recyclables in official regulations. With or without subsidies, both recyclable categories move through the recycling business network of collectors. It seems that the national system combines and creates an adequate balance between governmental regulations and market mechanisms by dividing the two categories of recyclables. In reality, however, the division between the general and regulated recyclable waste is often determined by whether the RFMB can successfully identify the relevant manufacturers and importers from which they need to collect recycling fees. In other words, if a particular waste material is not desirable in the secondary materials market, and yet there are no corresponding manufacturers to pay the recycling fee, under the four-in-one programme, the waste material still cannot be included in the list of regulated recyclables.

[44] EPA, Executive Yuan. 2012. 'Ziyuan huishou guanli jijin guanli weiyuan hui 14 nian jishi' (資源回收管理基金管理委員會 14 年紀實). Taipei, Taiwan.

Figure 3.2 Recyclable Classification and Municipal Recycling Timetable of Taipei City (source: Taipei City Government)

Moreover, under the National Recycling Act, Taiwanese citizens are required by law to separate recyclable resources and food waste from general waste and to allocate them to the appropriate categories (figure 3.2); failure to do so results in the imposition of fines. At elementary and junior high schools, students are trained to classify recyclable materials into various categories via school programmes that follow national guidelines. Gradually, recycling has become part of the Taiwanese daily routine. The musical tunes played by the municipal refuse and recycling trucks as they collect rubbish are a signature sound of Taiwanese contemporary culture. [45] The recycling movement has recently begun to transition to the development of a 'circular economy'[46] as a response to the global/European political-economic agenda, and this transition received a welcome boost from President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) in her inaugural address in 2016, which included the development of a circular economy as one of her seven primary national policies.

3.   Recycling Industry and Network

Although the scale and omnipresence of the recycling practice seen in Taiwan today are a more 'recent' product of the contemporary waste-management policy, waste recycling, as the process 'by which previously used objects and materials are converted into something else, rather than discarded' (Alexdander and Reno 2012,1), is by no means recent or novel. Du Ya-ling's research on the traditional Taiwanese scrap collection system provides some local historical background on the matter. Du notes that the pre-existing scavenging system in Taiwan can be traced to the period of Japanese rule, when collections were mainly of the 'by-products' of agricultural society, such as chicken feathers, pig bones, and rags. Until the 1970s, the traditional scrap collection system (傳統拾荒系統[47]) mainly

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[45] Bush, Jessica. "Taiwan Has Found a Brilliant Way to Get People to Recycle More." *Buzzworthy,* 30 August 2017. https://www.buzzworthy.com/taiwan-garbage-disposal/.

[46] According to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, a representative global organisation advocating a circular economy, a policy ideal that contrasts with a linear, extractive industrial production model of 'take-make-waste'. On the foundation's official website, the statement defining circular economy concept notes that this model is 'underpinned by a transition to renewable energy resources' and aims to 'decouple economic activities from the consumption of finite resources'; the circular model is thus built based on three principles: 1) design out waste and pollution; 2) keep products and materials in use; and 3) regenerate natural systems.

[47] chuantong shihuang xitong

revolved around three waste materials: paper, glass bottles, and scrap metals such as copper and tin (2000, 22-23).

By the 1970s, the traditional scrap collection system had shifted from small-scale to industrial in the context of the global oil crisis and the series of intensive national economic development projects and mega-infrastructure building plans. For example, the shortage and surging market price of petroleum as the raw material of the petrochemical industry made plastic recycling widespread;[48] the high demand for building materials led, for example, to prosperity for the various non-ferrous scrap-metal recycling (廢五金回收[49]) plants around Kaohsiung Port, which became the centre of the world's shipbreaking industry in the 1970s and 1980s (Terao 2008). The 'recovery' of the international price of raw materials in the 1980s, however, affected the secondary materials market. Moreover, the saturation of Taiwanese recycling businesses slowed the development of the industry (Du 2000, 24).

It was not until the late 1990s that the Taiwanese recycling industry was 'revived' through its new role as the solution to the environmental waste problem. Accordingly, recycling firms have ballooned in number from around 100 in the 1980s to about 2,000 in the 2000s (Wen and Luo 2007); a national system of resource recovery was thus formed primarily through the combination of governmental administration and market operations. In the system, domestic recyclable rubbish—those discarded materials collected from the public, including residents, communities, and commercial enterprises, excluding industrial and construction sectors—travel through two main types of conduits in the first round of collection: the governmental and the non-governmental (see figure 3.3).

The governmental channel generally refers to the municipal refuse collection system, the local government refuse and recycling trucks travelling through the streets on a fixed schedule; the non-governmental conduits are operated primarily by two types of groups: 1) those who collect and process recyclable materials as their livelihood and 2) those who use recycling activity and income for other social purposes, such as Tzu-chi.[50] While local government recycling

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[48] Interview with a wholesaler representative of plastic recycling at New Taipei Area (Jan 23, 2018).

[49] fei wuchin huishou

[50] Fang (2001) has identified three primary motivations for Taiwanese scrap collectors to engage in recycling: livelihood, physical exercise, and altruism. Fang considers Tzu-chi volunteers to be altruist collectors. In addition to these three motivations, Gong (2006) adds

teams and refuse trucks are the most visible and audible collector group in the city, the non-governmental collectors nevertheless handle the majority of waste recyclables in the first round of collection.[51] Combined under one single official category, the 'collector' (回收商[52]), in the governmental Four-in-One recycling programme, in reality, the non-governmental collectors consist of an array of the original players in the traditional scrap collection system and emerging ones, including Tzu-chi. Across the industrial chain consisting of both public and private downstream, intermediary, and upstream collectors, recycling work is structured in four stages: collecting (from the public), sorting, baling, and resourcifying.
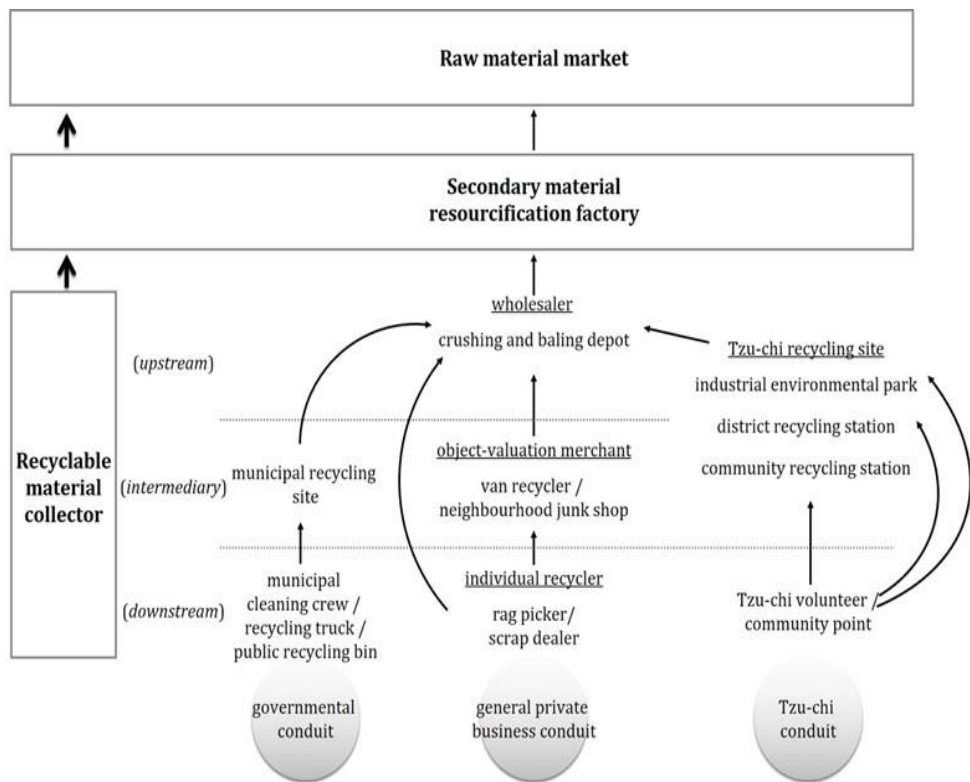
Figure 3.3 Key recycling collector groups and their material exchange relation (source: the author)

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that another group of collectors engages in recycling due to their excessive tendency for object acquisition.

[51] According to TEPA statistics, the private sector collected a significant proportion of recycling, some 84% of total recycling volumes since 2008, compared to 50% in 2000.

[52] huishou shang

Figure 3.3 is a sketch of the key recycling collector groups. The figure provides a comparative account among actors from three types of recycling collection conduits: the local government, general private business, and Tzu-chi. While the details of the Tzu-chi recycling system are discussed in the next section of this chapter, Figure 3.3 mainly provides an industrial background of the commodity chain of the resource recovery of the Taiwanese recycling system to locate Tzu-chi in the system and in relation to other main actors.

The first round of domestic recycling collections is conducted by the *downstream* collectors or placed at collecting points. In the governmental conduit, these are primarily the cleaning crews of local governments and public recycling bins; in the general private conduit, the downstream collectors are generally two types of individual recyclers: rag pickers (拾荒者[53]) and scrap dealers (販仔[54]), such as cart recyclers, contracted cleaners, or residential community recycling rooms; in the Tzu-chi conduit, they are Tzu-chi recycling volunteers and community collecting points.

Recyclable materials assembled by downstream collectors and at collecting points are sent to the intermediary section, where the sorting process takes place. In the governmental conduit, the main sorting takes place at local governmental recycling sites. In the general private conduit, the intermediary section, as the *middlemen* of the recycling business, is often referred to as 'object-valuation merchants' (估物商[55]), a working title used in the traditional scrap collection system, including van recyclers and neighbourhood junk shops. In the Tzu-chi conduit, sorting and classifying work happen inside a variety of Tzu-chi recycling sites, including smaller-scale ones like community recycling stations, medium-scale district stations, and the larger-scale environmental industrial parks.

Finally, there are the *upstream* 'wholesalers' (盤商[56]): the crushing-baling recycling depot, which is in charge of stowing specific waste material items, such as paper, glass, and plastic. In principle, all the recyclable items travelling through the governmental, private business, and Tzu-chi conduits are ultimately conveyed to different privately owned crushing-baling depots before being transporting to 'resourcification' factories to be converted into secondary materials.

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[53] shi huang zhe

[54] fan zi

[55] gu wu shang

[56] pan shang

Figure 3.4 Municipal recycling truck
(photo by the author, 2016)

Figure 3.5 Scrap dealer (cart recycler)
(photo by the author, 2016)

Figure 3.6 Community recycling room
(photo by the author, 2014)

Figure 3.7 Van recycle
(photo by the author, 2014)

Figure 3.8 Neighbourhood junk shop
(photo by the author, 2015)

Figure 3.9 Crushing-baling depot
(photo by the author, 2014)

So far, this description shows that recycling has a long history and a well-formed industrial network in Taiwan, and it highlights the parallel stand of the Tzu-chi

recycling processing chain in the current industrial scheme. Similar to how sorted rubbish travels through the commodity chain of private businesses—from rag pickers to scrap dealers, to middlemen or 'object valuation merchants', and to wholesalers at depots—in the Tzu-chi conduits, most discarded materials travel through a chain of volunteering sites: individual volunteers, community points, collection vans, and environmental stations. Three additional notes should be added to the simplified version of the recycling industry presented in Figure 3.3. First, it is possible for the public to give their recyclable materials directly to the intermediary collectors of private businesses. For example, residents sell their recyclables at neighbourhood junkshops; schools hire van recyclers to collect sorted materials. Second, some resourcification factories have their own collecting systems that are independent of the private business chains sketched above. Third, few Tzu-chi larger recycling sites have a storage capacity comparable to that of a crushing-baling depot. In those cases, resourcification factories collect specific items directly from Tzu-chi sites without going through wholesalers.

From the perspective of the secondary material market, the downstream and some intermediary collector groups of the government, private businesses and Tzu-chi are in principle competitors with one and another, as they are different points of entry to the industrial recycling chain. They not only compete over the clients of upstream wholesaler to whom they sell recyclable materials, but also the material suppliers to become the divestment conduit the public chooses. They also compete over the 'ideal' recyclable materials, those with higher monetary value, such as copper; those with a more stable market demand, such as paper; and those that are easier to collect and transport, such as PET bottles in comparison with glass. The competitive nature of the material market once led to a public debate in Taiwan regarding to whom the public should give or donate their disposed materials (see Chapter Five). However, different collector groups can also develop into a more collaborative working relationship. For instance, local governments have asked Tzu-chi recycling communities to assist with local governmental collections, material auctioning, and public education.[57] Another example is that, when a van recycler could not find wholesalers to sell the plastic materials collected from schools, he contacted Tzu-chi recycling volunteers for

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[57] Tzu-chi Almanac 2015, "ciji daidong qingjing yuantou pingdong jumin xiangxie xiangying" 慈濟帶動清淨源頭 屏東居民相偕響應, 222-225.

suggestions and later had the Tzu-chi community collect the materials instead because of that Tzu-chi recycling site's storage capacity (see Chapter Six).

In short, the interdependencies of different collector groups and their competition form an entrenched infrastructure through which recyclable materials travel. Tzu-chi, as one of the exemplary organisations in the private sector, does not depart from the set-up of the local recycling networks but rather actively participates in the system.

4. Tzu-chi Recycling Programme

After situating Tzu-chi in terms of Taiwan's recycling system, this section enters into the world of Tzu-chi recycling itself. By examining the institutional management of the recycling programme, it asks how the programme is coordinated and operated; who manages it and performs the work? Further, how is the programme situated in the Tzu-chi organisational structure?

The Tzu-chi recycling programme is officially a part of Tzu-chi organisation's environmental protection mission (環保志業[58]). Registered as one of the four subordinate projects of the Tzu-chi charity mission and its foundation (see Chapters Seven and Eight), the environmental protection mission of Tzu-chi has several projects. [59] In his doctoral dissertation on the Taiwanese Buddhist environmentalist movement, Lin Yih-ren (1999) has identified three projects of the Tzu-chi environmental mission: recycling, tree planting, and public space cleaning. In addition to Lin's list, until around 2010, Tzu-chi volunteers, often those in the recycling programme, sold reclaimed and recovered discards at Tzu-chi associated shops, the xifu wu (惜福屋), which means 'cherished blessing shop'. Additionally, the organisation has become more engaged in advocating vegetarianism and more general environmental education in recent years. Despite the presence of different environment-related projects, the Tzu-chi environmental protection mission mostly revolves around recycling. This is illustrated by the synecdoche of referring to recycling as *zuo huanbao* (做環保), meaning 'carrying out environmental protection' in both the institutional discourse and vernacular narratives.

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[58] huan bao zhi ye

[59] In addition to environmental protection, the other three subordinate projects of Tzu-chi's charity mission are international relief, bone marrow donation, and community volunteering, In addition to Tzu-chi's charity mission, the other three major missions are medical care, education, and culture. See Chapter Seven for further discussion.

The Tzu-chi recycling programme differs from the Tzu-chi organisation's other major missions of medicine, education, and culture, which have independent missionary institutes with hired professional operators working outside the Tzu-chi headquarters, the Tzu-chi Charity Foundation (慈濟慈善基金會[60]; see Chapter Seven). Instead, the management and operation of the Tzu-chi recycling programme depend on local volunteers. The only employed associates of Tzu-chi recycling are the administrative team at the religious division of the Charity Foundation. Moreover, rather than being institutionally owned, the majority of the recycling stations are located in private spaces offered by Tzu-chi followers or members. In other words, Tzu-chi's community recycling is largely locally initiated, managed, and operated. However, the local recycling communities are closely coordinated by both the administrative task force as well as volunteers at local level with those of the other Tzu-chi missions and institutions through the Tzu-chi laity system and the missionary management of the charity foundation.

For a more systematic understanding of the Tzu-chi recycling programme, the remainder of this section is organised into five parts: volunteer types, recycling sites, material categories, the administrative task force, and institutional partners. Some of the discussion covered here corresponds to the content of other chapters, but it is included here to serve as a point of entry to sketch the general organisational background.

4.1   Recycling Volunteers and Cadres

The operational work of recycling—collecting, sorting, dismantling, packing, and selling discarded materials—and the site management and volunteer recruitment are performed by Tzu-chi volunteers. Different kinds of Tzu-chi volunteers engage in the organisation's recycling works with different task assignments. The task division, however, is not clear-cut, while the differentiation of the recycling volunteers is more related to their affiliation with the Tzu-chi organisation as a whole. To explain the different types of Tzu-chi recycling volunteers, it is necessary to first briefly introduce the types of Tzu-chi volunteers.

There are three types of Tzu-chi volunteer: commissioners, certified community volunteers, and uncertified community volunteers. First, *commissioners,* which consist of (female) commissioners (委員) and (male) compassion faith corps (慈

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[60] Ciji cishan jijinhui

誠[61]), are the religious followers and the primary, most devoted agents of Tzu-chi.[62] To become a Tzu-chi certified commissioner, an individual must follow a two-year training course designed to ensure that the trainee experiences the work of Tzu-chi in a total of eight missionary projects, including conducting home visits and volunteering in schools and at recycling stations. In addition to the organisational missionary activities, commissioners attend local Tzu-chi congregations, where regular social events and Buddhism-based self-improvement classes are held. In addition to the training process, the primary requirement to become a certified Tzu-chi commissioner is to abide by Tzu-chi's 10 commandments. The commandments consist of two parts: the first five follow the basic lay Buddhist precepts: no killing, stealing, adultery, lying, or alcohol. The remaining five emphasise the importance of complying with the societal rules and forbid addictive behaviours such as smoking, opportunistic investments such as gambling, and, interestingly, political participation, such as involvement in protest activities. [63]

The commissioner has three uniforms: one formal, consisting of a traditional Chinese *qipao* for female commissioners and a Western suit for male commissioners; one casual, consisting of a blue polo shirt and white trousers; and one working, consisting of a grey polo shirt and white trousers (figure 3.10). The hired staff members of the Tzu-chi Charity Foundation are all commissioners. Within the organisation, the commissioners are the group that is most likely to refer to themselves and each other as *cijiren* (慈濟人), meaning a Tzu-chi person. To a great extent, c*ijiren* is, if not an optimal abstract based on the image of the organisation's founder and leader Cheng-yen, an embodiment of the leader's philanthropic teachings and inspirations incorporated into one's religious beliefs through secular engagement and concrete actions. Tzu-chi commissioners are coordinated through the Tzu-chi laity system, the 'Four Dharma, Four Sects, Four in One ' (四法四門四合一;[64] hereafter 'Four-in-One'). The 'four' in the 'Four-in-

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[61] ci cheng
[62] The different titles for female and male commissioners are due to male practitioners not being admitted until 1990. To avoid complications, hereafter, I use the term 'commissioners' to refer to both female commissioners and members of the male compassion faith corps.
[63] No smoking, drugs, or betel nuts; no gambling or opportunistic investments; must show filial piety, be soft-spoken and have a gentle expression; must abide by traffic regulations; must not participate in political activities or march in protests (不抽煙、不吸毒、不嚼檳榔、不賭博、不投機取巧，孝順父母，調和聲色，遵守交通規則，不參與政治活動、示威遊行 liu: bu chouyan, bu xidu, bu jiao binlang; qi: bu d bo, bu touji quqia; ba: xiaoshun fumu, diaohe shengse; jiu: zunshou jiaotong guize; shi: bu canyu zhengzhi huodong, shiwei youxing).
[64] Si fa si men si he yi

One' system refers to the four hierarchical group categories, namely Unity (合心), Harmony (和氣), Mutual Love (互愛), and Joint Effort (協力[65]), from the centre to the periphery. Similar to the official governmental administrative units of county/city, district, township, and neighbourhood, under the Four-in-One system, all Tzu-chi commissioners are geographically allocated to 11 Unity groups across Taiwan, each Unity group is divided into several Harmony groups, and so on.

The second type of Tzu-chi volunteers is *certified community volunteers*. Volunteers who are not commissioners yet who complete the service training or meet the requirements of a specific missionary project receive official recognition as a qualified missionary volunteer from the related department. Not all Tzu-chi missions have a scheme for non-commissioned volunteer certification. According to my understanding, this category is specific to the Tzu-chi recycling programme and hospital volunteering.

Finally, the final category of Tzu-chi volunteer is the uncertified community volunteer. In my writing, I refer to this category as the 'walk-in' volunteers because the organisation defines this group in the broadest sense as anyone from the public who recognises Tzu-chi thinking and has assisted Tzu-chi and who may participate temporarily or irregularly. For example, in principle, anyone who brings recyclables to a Tzu-chi station and separates the materials according to the Tzu-chi recycling scheme would be recognised as a Tzu-chi recycling volunteer.

Similar to the general categorisation of Tzu-chi volunteers, there are also three categories of Tzu-chi recycling volunteers: commissioners, certified recycling volunteers, and uncertified walk-in volunteers.

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[65] Hexin, Heqi, Huai, and Xieli.

Figure 3.10 Tzu-chi volunteers and their uniforms (source:Tzu-chi official website[66]; Da-ai Technology official website[67;68])

In local congregations, there is a functional sub-unit 'recycling group' which makes up the largest share of Tzu-chi commissioners working at the recycling sites. These recycling commissioners are generally given the title 'environmental admin' (環保幹事[69]) in the group category to which they belong in Tzu-chi's hierarchical laity system. In particular, the environmental admins in the Unity and Harmony groups are referred to as the 'environmental cadres' (環保幹部[70]). The

[66] Tzu-chi Foundation 慈濟基金會, 'ciji zhifu' 慈濟制服, Tzu-chi official website, 18 October 2017, https://www.tzuchi.org.tw/about-us/%E6%85%88%E6%BF%9F%E5%BF%97%E5%B7%A5/%E6%85%88%E6%BF%9F%E5%88%B6%E6%9C%8D (accessed 17 September 2019).

[67] Da-ai Technology 大愛感恩科技, 'DA.AI Eco Polo Gray Shirt', Da-ai Technology official website, https://newshop.daait.com/goodDetail.htm?id=8a8195944ecbf439014ed890a3e60145 (accessed 17 September 2019).

[68] Da-ai Technology 大愛感恩科技, 'xinjiapo ciji zhigong fangyi fuwu guanhuai wennuan yihu xintian' 新加坡慈濟志工防疫服務關懷 溫暖醫護心田', Da-ai Technology official website, 23 September 2020 https://www.tcnews.com.tw/news/item/5699.html (accessed 17 November 2020).

[69] huanbao ganshi

[70] huanbao ganbu

Unity environmental cadres tend to consist of senior recycling volunteers. They act both as the path of communication from Cheng-yen and the foundation's environmental team to the volunteer recycling laity and as project consultants for the local recycling stations. The Harmony environmental cadres are the executive force behind project planning, human resource management, people coordination, and the administrative management of the recycling sites. The jurisdiction of the Harmony environmental cadres is not standardised but rather depends on the number and scale of the recycling sites in the area. In addition to the institutional environmental cadres, each Tzu-chi recycling site often has its own local 'station chief', the figure in charge of local and trivial matters and is not necessarily a Tzu-chi commissioner.

Nevertheless, not all commissioners who work at the recycling sites are members of the 'recycling group', nor they are environmental administration or cadres. At a few of the Tzu-chi recycling sites that I observed, the local congregation arranges shifts in order to ensure that the general commissioners regularly participate in the recycling programme. Moreover, not all the commissioners who volunteer at recycling sites work on recycling. One significant functional sub-unit of commissioners that appears regularly at recycling sites consists of the catering volunteers, who prepare free lunches for the recycling volunteers.

Although it is common to find the image of Tzu-chi recycling volunteers represented by commissioners (see Chapter Four), to my knowledge, the non-commissioned community volunteers actually represent a larger portion of the labour force of Tzu-chi recycling.[71] In contrast with the commissioners, who participate in various Tzu-chi activities, the recycling community volunteers, certified or not, rarely engage in Tzu-chi activities other than recycling. The figure found in the Tzu-chi almanac, provided earlier at the beginning of Chapter One, suggests that nearly 90,000 people have volunteered for Tzu-chi recycling. However, this number indicates the certified community volunteers and excludes

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[71] By the time I finished my fieldwork in 2018, there were no statistics to indicate the proportion of commissioned and non-commissioned volunteers in each recycling site and the Tzu-chi recycling community as a whole. This is mainly due to the ambiguous way in which the organisation recognises who counts as a Tzu-chi community volunteer. Moreover, all Tzu-chi recycling sites are open to the public to volunteer without requiring a fixed commitment or registration. People can walk in and out any time. Although without statistical support, the suggestion that non-commissioned volunteers are the mainstay of Tzu-chi recycling's human capital is made based on my own observation as well as the impressions given by the members of the environmental administrative team and several cadres from the recycling sites in the areas of Yilan, Taipei, and Kaohsiung.

the commissioners who participate in recycling activities. Moreover, the number is a total amount accumulated since the 1990s, including those who have stopped volunteering or since passed away. The national survey of Tzu-chi recycling in 2014 indicates that about 33,000 non-commissioned but certified volunteers currently work at stations across the country. These certified recycling community volunteers are mostly women and elderly people (Table 3.1). Eighty per cent of the total certified community recycling volunteers is female. Nearly 60% of the volunteers are above the age of 65, with the majority in the age group of 55 to 79 years old. Because of their age, the commissioners and administrators sometimes refer to these community recycling volunteers as 'elderly Bodhisattvas' (老菩薩[72]).

Table 3.1 Age distribution of Tzu-chi certified recycling community volunteers (table made by the author; source: Tzu-chi Foundation[73])

age	0-9	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80-89	90+
%	0	0	2	2	6	18	29	26	14	2

A walk-in volunteer must meet four conditions to become a certified recycling volunteer. The title is granted to those who (1) have spent one year volunteering at the environmental mission (recycling programme); (2) have performed at least eight recycling engagements on the site; (3) have participated in the annual event held for the non-commissioned volunteers, the Environmental Volunteer Improvement Day (環保志工精進日[74]); and (4) abide by the 10 commandments of Tzu-chi. The qualified volunteers whom the local environmental cadres recommend receive the Tzu-chi grey uniform, 'gong xiu fu' (共修服), and the title of the certified environmental volunteer from the monastics of the Merit Society headquarters at the Environmental Volunteer Improvement Day event before the end of the year. The certification and the institutional ritual represent an appreciative gesture from the organisation, officially recognising the dedication

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[72] lao pusa

[73] Tzu-chi Foundation, '2018 ciji huanbao tongji (xiu)' 慈濟環保統計(修; unpublished document, 17 September 2019), PowerPoint file.

[74] huanbao zhigong jing jin ri

and qualification of these non-commissioner volunteers. The implied significance of such an endorsement, however, is more personal than institutional. According to the staff of the environmental team, for some community volunteers, the likelihood of acquiring the 'desired' identity of Tzu-chi commissioner is low, given the required time and engagement in all eight missionary tasks. However, I must note that not all community volunteers share the desire to become a Tzu-chi commissioner. Some regular volunteers at the recycling station considered the status of a community volunteer to be 'better' than that of a commissioner (see Chapter Four). According to Tzu-chi's statistics, about 13% of the total of 33,537 certified recycling volunteers later become Tzu-chi commissioners.[75]

4.2   Recycling Sites

Tzu-chi recycling volunteers assemble and collect discarded materials at the 'community recycling points' (社區回收點[76]), which are locations outside Tzu-chi associated properties, such as office buildings or shops, before transporting them to Tzu-chi's recycling sites, the 'environmental protection stations' (環保站[77]). By the end of 2018, there was a total of 8,536 community points and 279 Tzu-chi environmental stations across Taiwan. While Chapter Six discusses the recycling collection works and the community points, this section examines the Tzu-chi environmental stations, where the dismantling and sorting works mainly take place.

Tzu-chi's environmental stations vary in scale and configuration. The official category 'environmental stations' includes three types of recycling sites: the community stations (e.g., the Wuxin environmental station in Taipei), the district stations (e.g., the Dong-gang environmental station in Yilan), and the environmental parks (e.g., the Neihu environmental park in Taipei; see Figure 3.11-3.14). The indicators that determine a station's category include the sources and quantities of the processed waste materials, the recycling trucks and labour force available, whether there is storage space or 'proper' bookkeeping, and the size of the property.

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[75] Tzu-chi Foundation, '2018 ciji huanbao tongji (xiu)' 慈濟環保統計(修; unpublished document, 17 September 2019), PowerPoint file.

[76] shequ huishou dian

[77] huanbao zhan

Figure 3. 11 Tzu-chi community environmental station (photo by the author, 2016)

Figure 3. 12 Tzu-chi district environmental station (photo by the author, 2016)

Figure 3.13 Tzu-chi environmental park (photo by the author, 2018)

Figure 3.14 Sorted PET bottles in a Tzu-ch district station (photo by the author, 2016)

Because recycling bases are mostly initiated locally, the majority of Tzu-chi recycling sites are not owned by the organisation. Particularly during the grass-roots phase of formation of the Tzu-chi recycling programme, there was little institutional intervention, and local residents or Tzu-chi associates often offered their trucks or land for recycling purposes. Only 50 out of the 279 Tzu-chi environmental stations are located on land owned by the Tzu-chi Foundation. These organisation-owned stations have often been developed into larger district stations, to which local congregational halls, the Jingsi Tang (靜思堂), relocate. The dependence on local spontaneity and social relationships, however, can lead to recurring problems with property ownership and usership, for example, because the previous owner of the property passed away, the social connections between the volunteers and donors eroded, or the capacity of the site cannot cope

with the number of volunteers or volume of recyclables. In response to this, and also in the context of the overarching formalisation and institutionalisation of the programme, the headquarters increasingly develop recycling sites on the organisation's own properties. For example, newly built Tzu-chi properties often incorporate a recycling site, or the organisation rents non-public-use properties from the government.

Inside the recycling sites, the spatial configuration is organised and clear, whether in smaller-sized community stations, district educational stations, or the large environmental parks. A twofold logic underlies the spatial configuration of Tzu-chi recycling sites. The first is in relation to the material categorisation. In one of Tzu-chi's capacious environmental education parks at Hualian, for example, the premises are divided into several compartments, where large board signs hang on the wall and indicate each zone's 'speciality'. There are zones for 'glass bottles', 'plastic bags', 'iron', 'aluminium', 'bicycles', 'dismantling', 'repair', and more.

Moreover, the spatial classification of Tzu-chi recycling sites is often based on logistical considerations and in relation to the amount of effort required in recycling work. Compared to sorting metal cans, for instance, recycling household appliances or repairing clothes demands much more time and labour. Therefore, dismantling and repairing zones are often found in the corners farthest away from the entrance. The spatial arrangement of the long, narrow space of smaller-sized Wu-xin station in Taipei clearly demonstrates this principle of spatial classification. Walking from the front patio to the back of the building, visitors first pass piles of colour-sorted glass bottles, then come to the area where soft and hard plastic containers and metal cans are separated. In the middle, volunteers sort wastepaper into several categories. At the back corner is the stationary work-top for dismantling. The work-top is a place where volunteers dissemble compacted appliances, such as the motors of electronic devices, to retrieve the components that have the most monetary value, such as copper magnet wires. Undoubtedly, a seat at the work-top station is a symbol of authority for skilled and senior volunteers.

4.3   Material Classification

The primary waste material categories that Tzu-chi recycles are the following: 'soft' plastic,[78] 'hard' plastic,[79] PET plastic bottles,[80] glass bottles, metal cans, paper, batteries, light bulbs, textiles, electronic appliances, and metal scraps. In order to help the volunteers memorise the categories of the most commonly recycled items, a commissioner has summarised the classifications into 10 categories and created the mnemonic phrase of the 'pithy 10-finger environmental formula' (環保十指口訣[81]). The mnemonic phrase consists of abbreviations and homophonous words for recycling items: ping, ping, guan, guan, zhi, dian, yi, san, wu, qi (瓶瓶罐罐紙電一三五七). The poster of the 'pithy 10-finger environmental formula', which displays samples, is often found on the walls of Tzu-chi recycling stations, and the phrase is widely used in organisational environmental education activities (Figure 3.15). According to the commissioner who handed me a flyer with the phrase and related graphic at an environmental event, the 'trick' to memorising the recycling categories is to use procedural memory, and once the volunteers 'move their fingers'. they can quickly recall the items.[82]

However, the 'pithy 10-finger environmental formula' categories only indicate the most common recycled items, not the full list. Rather than having a comprehensive list of all the materials and products that every Tzu-chi station recycles, the recognition and classification of waste in Tzu-chi is bound and spurred by the social context, labour capacity, and the local network of each station. Is Styrofoam cushioning rubbish or recyclable? To which category should rain-coats be assigned? Does Tzu-chi accept bulky items such as office partition panels? There is no unified answer. Every Tzu-chi recycling community has its own system, which could vary across time and often depends on human and material resources inside each recycling site and on the surrounding environment outside. What to recycle and how to do so not only depend on how the

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[78] The category 'soft plastic' is a term commonly used in Taiwanese recycling businesses to include plastic items such as polypropylene (PP), polyvinyl chloride (PVC) and low-density polyethylene (LDPE). The material items made from those plastics are usually bendable, hence the name 'soft'.

[79] In contrast to 'soft plastic', 'hard plastic' includes items made from acrylonitrile butadiene styrene (ABS), polystyrene (PS), high-density polyethylene (HDPE), which are less easily folded.

[80] polyethylene terephthalate bottles

[81] huanbao shizhi koujue

[82] Interview with commissioner Ms. Chen at the Earth Day event (April 16, 2016).

commander-in-chief and volunteers of each site 'feel,' but also the extent to which the volunteers are skilled and equipped. It depends on what waste the neighbourhood brings the recycling community, which again depends on the social networks of the recycling community members. The classifications also differ according to whether there is surplus holding space at the station, and whether the volunteers can find downstream recycling wholesaler buyers. The constant price fluctuations in the secondary material market can add another layer to the changeable situation. For instance, the number of recycling wholesalers in the Taipei region that are willing to purchase waste soft plastics between 2016 and 2018 dropped significantly due to the significant price drop in this material. As a result, in some smaller-sized Tzu-chi recycling stations, soft-plastic became 'half-recycled', meaning that while volunteers still collected the items from the general public and sorted them, the waste material items were transported to nearby, larger stations with surplus storage space to 'sit and wait' until the market could accommodate them again. In other words, waste classification in Tzu-chi is not determined externally and objectively; it is socially and locally embedded.

Figure 3. 15 A poster of the 'pithy ten-finger environmental formula'

4.4   Administrative Task Force

The administrative tasks of the Tzu-chi recycling programme are mainly coordinated by the Environmental Protection Promotion Team (環境保護推廣組,[83] hereafter, the environmental team) at the religion division of the Tzu-chi headquarters. Stationed in the Tzu-chi Charity Foundation in Hualien, the primary work of the environmental team includes registering and coordinating environmental volunteers and cadres, organising annual events, and institutionalising recycling site management, as well as processing and archiving information. Before 2009, the administrative task force consisted of one person. It was not until 2010, two decades after Tzu-chi's engagement in community recycling began, that the current head of the environmental team, who was a member of the Tzu-chi International Humanitarian Aid Association (人援會[84]) at the time, was given charge of the recycling programme. Soon, the team was expanded to seven people, its current size.

The establishment and operation of the environmental team, to a large extent, illustrates the process of institutionalisation seen in Tzu-chi recycling. In his 50s, the environmental team leader introduced himself using his English name when we first met. He frequently referred to his previous work experience in an international electronics conglomerate, and he saw the team's tasks as works of rationalisation and systematisation. Two of the primary tasks initiated were, first, risk management, such as arranging insurance for the recycling sites, and second, systematic assessment: updating the obsolete information of recycling volunteers, facilities, and spaces.[85] Along with the formation of the environmental team, the task force conducted a national survey in two stages, in 2011 and 2015, which updated volunteer information and recycling site statuses. The survey was part of an attempt to institutionalise and build a digital management information system. In 2018, the team launched a preliminary version of the cloud database of Tzu-chi recycling, which digitally documented material and financial flows, the background information of certified missionary volunteers, the recycling site equipment available, application forms, the groups visiting the Tzu-chi recycling stations, and other information.

Moreover, the environmental team coordinates the recycling programme's grand events, particularly the annual event, the Volunteer Improvement Day, which is

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[83] huanjing baohu tuiguang zu
[84] ren yuan hui
[85] Interview with the Tzu-chi Environmental Protection Team in Hualian (22 January 2018).

held twice a year for non-commissioned recycling volunteers. The team also facilitates regular meetings of the local environmental cadres in each region, the bi-monthly meeting of the Unity and Harmony environmental admins. However, the environmental team is not in charge of organising the activities. Instead, the local cadres perform the main operation tasks, while the environmental team determines the annual policy and event theme and assists with the coordination. In the annual events and the cadre meetings I attended, the local cadres were the main presenters and reported the recent developments, plans, and incidents of the local recycling communities; they also shared recycling tips and gave personal testimonies. In short, rather than being the central focus of volunteer action, the environmental team plays the role of mediator and develops an adaptive system of communication between the headquarters and the bourgeoning local volunteers.

It would be hasty to conclude that the environmental team staff members at the headquarters are the delegates of Tzu-chi recycling and have the power to manage and regulate dispersed local recycling communities because of their position in the hierarchical labour division between management and operations. Based on my observation, the power relationship between the headquarters team and the local volunteers is dynamic and equivocal. This is partially because the local communities were self-operated and had a high level of autonomy throughout the Tzu-chi recycling movement, and the headquarters has only had a corresponding office for the last decade. Furthermore, to a large extent, the delicate relationship reflects the seniority culture of Tzu-chi. In Tzu-chi, seniority, meaning the privileged position earned by more experience as a Tzu-chi volunteer, is the key indicator of one's social rank in the hierarchy. This indicator usually correlates with a volunteer's age. The senior members who participate in Tzu-chi recycling tend to be environmental cadres in the hierarchical group category of Unity in the Four-in-One laity system. In contrast to senior and elderly volunteers, the staff of the environmental administrative task force tends to be aged between 40 and 50 and have fewer years of Tzu-chi involvement. Their institutional position as official representatives, in this context, does not necessarily translate into authority. In an interview with the environmental team staff members, after providing numerous examples of how they adjure the local volunteers to adapt and consider new policies such as surveys, recycling more plastic bags, or documenting volunteers' health check-ups, the staff described their primarily role as offering technical and emotional support to the volunteers. Even though, so far, the discussion seems to suggest that the recycling volunteers

are on the higher end of the power spectrum, this is not always the case. For the volunteers, the environmental team staff embodies the 'people who work with Cheng-yen' and who share a certain amount of the religious authority of the leader through their close contact, that is, by being physically near her. This, in addition to their professional background and knowledge of technology, ensures a degree of trust and respect from the volunteers.

4.5   Institutional Partners

Even though the Tzu-chi recycling programme does not have its own independent missionary affiliate, it works closely with Tzu-chi's listed company, Da-ai Technology (大愛感恩科技[86]). Da-ai Technology was founded in 2008 by five members of the Tzu-chi commissioner titled group, the Tzu-chi International Humanitarian Aid Association (TIHAA). Formed by entrepreneurs from various industries, the TIHAA is considered one of Tzu-chi's most prestigious groups and often elicits an admiring, respectful tone when mentioned because of its high status because of both the political-economic backgrounds of its members and their innovative endeavours. The role of the TIHAA in Tzu-chi resembles a research and development department in that the members develop technological designs, for instance for 'emergency housing' (急難簡易屋[87]) or portable catering trucks (行動餐車[88]), and administrative systems, such as the international logistics system used to deliver goods to support Tzu-chi's disaster relief activities.

Collaborating closely with the TIHAA and the Environmental Protection Team, Da-ai Technology is one example of the TIHAA's achievements and capacity. The listed company, which donates 100% of its profits to the Tzu-chi Charity Foundation, is in charge of the manufacturing of various 'green' products from the PET bottles recycled at the Tzu-chi recycling sites. However, instead of manufacturing the products themselves, Da-ai Technology is responsible for the technological development of secondary material applications and has a management office dedicated to marketing and environmental education. The PET bottles Tzu-chi volunteers recycle and process are collected by the various resourcification factories Da-ai contracts across the country. These factories then produce blankets, clothes, stationery, suitcases, shoes, and so on using the

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[86] da ai ganen keji
[87] jinan jianyi wu
[88] xingdong canche

recycled material. The recycled products—like other Tzu-chi merchandise, such as instant food and books—are often delivered as part of Tzu-chi's disaster relief efforts or sold in Da-ai Technology stands in several department stores or at Tzu-chi's chain of bookshops and cafés.

5. Concluding Remarks

This chapter elucidates Tzu-chi recycling's institutional management and operation scheme and locates it in Taiwan's recycling landscape. The Tzu-chi recycling movement is rooted in Taiwan's pre-existing tradition of scrap collection and its business network, which transformed into a recycling movement and industrial commodity chain under the national waste-management policy in the period of the 1990s and 2000s. In other words, the preceding recycling culture and the thriving industry help explain why Tzu-chi recycling developed so rapidly even in its early stages. Furthermore, the chapter reveals that, although Tzu-chi's religious background and volunteering operation represent an unusual case in the political-economic recycling system, the particularity of Tzu-chi recycling includes its similarity and embeddedness in the system. Structurally and in terms of scope, it is comparable to the private business and the governmental recycling collection system; like them, Tzu-chi recycling consists of two phases of waste works, from assembly to sorting and then to auction, which require transportation and storage across a chain of volunteering sites.

As one of the Tzu-chi organisation's eight missionary projects, the Tzu-chi recycling programme is not a product of top-down organisational development. Instead, Tzu-chi recycling is largely initiated, organised, managed, and operated by the recycling volunteers at a local level. Waste materials are collected from designated local community points and transported to and stored at Tzu-chi recycling sites of different scales, and the majority is privately owned by local residents. The Tzu-chi recycling volunteers, who are primarily elderly and female, and the community volunteers, not the Tzu-chi commissioners, categorise and auction off waste materials based on each base's local capacity and networks. However, the local recycling communities are not independent of the organisational headquarters or from one and another. Instead, they are closely coordinated through Tzu-chi's institutionalised managing and laity systems. Along with the establishment of the administrative team in the headquarters, the Tzu-chi programme has undergone a gradual process of institutionalisation over

the last decade through the development of an information management and communication system.

Overall, this chapter highlights the mixture of Tzu-chi recycling's differences and similarity with other recycling actors, which not only contribute to but also reflect the multi-faceted nature of Taiwan's recycling. These embedded particularities make Tzu-chi recycling a thought-provoking case-study. They provide developmental and organisational contexts for analysing Tzu-chi recycling, and these aspects are taken up in the following chapters in terms of the social roles and cultural meanings of waste works and how recycling remakes Taiwanese society.

Chapter Four |
The Disposable
and Recyclable Labour

1. Moving Beyond Beliefs

Chapter Three has explained that, in Tzu-chi recycling, all the people involved are volunteers, except the seven members of the environmental team at the headquarters, who are hired employees. It also has illustrated that discarded materials travel through a chain of Tzu-chi recycling sites, where Tzu-chi recycling volunteers, commissioned or not, conduct a variety of recycling works. However, at this point, the daily work of recycling, the individual volunteers, and their motivations are not yet clear. In this and the next chapter, Chapters Four and Five, the discussion brings Tzu-chi volunteers and their recycling labour to the centre of the investigation. Both chapters grapple with four primary questions: what are the waste works, who are the volunteers, why do they volunteer, and what is their relationship with recycling work?

While weaving together descriptions of how the volunteers perform the work of sorting, cleaning, dismantling, packing, and storing waste materials, this chapter particularly contextualises the investigation in Taiwan's industrial development in the second half of the 20th century. By examining the characteristics of recycling labour and the ways the community volunteers experience and understand their recycling involvement, this chapter reveals that, in contrast to the prevailing wisdom on these voluntary engagements as a form of religious

devotion, the people and labour found inside Tzu-chi recycling stations read Taiwanese industrialisation and modernisation through the lens of its social and economic costs and consequences.

Regarding the four questions proposed in this and the next chapter, scholars who have studied Tzu-chi recycling have thus far rarely investigated the questions of 'who' and 'what.' Some studies, both in sociology and in the field of (religious) voluntarism and citizen participation, however, have explored the question of 'why'. Most have highlighted the salient role of value systems in galvanising the volunteers, and they have proposed different theories to conceptualise the influence of the ideas, symbols, and rituals embedded in Tzu-chi recycling practices.

Three principal lines of thought are identified in the existing research. First, scholars have argued that the volunteers' recycling engagement is a direct result of rising environmental awareness (Ho 2003; 2016; Lee and Han 2015; Chen 2017). The second and foremost line of thought emphasises the role of religiosity. Studies with this approach often argue that the volunteers are inspired by the organisational leader Cheng-yen's transcendent interpretations of environmental issues. They have internalised the message and are thus interpellated into the discourse and practice of viewing recycling as a spiritual cultivation to realise Buddhist altruism and to build a Pure Land (Chang 1996; Chiu 2000; Wu 2010; Chau 2013; Her 2014). Third, some scholars maintain that Tzu-chi's environmental and religious discourses indicate a modality for the volunteers to perform traditional rules of conduct, a personal-cultivational modality of doing good. For Lin (1999) and Clippard (2012), this is exemplified by the organisational narrative of describing recycling as a practice of 'knowing *fu*, cherishing *fu,* and making *fu*' (知福、惜福、造福[89]). As a traditional concept, *fu* (福), on the one hand, implies a blessed status in which one is at one with all necessary resources. Therefore, recycling as 'knowing *fu*' and 'cherishing *fu*' is an expression of showing appreciation of and preserving resources at both the spiritual and the material levels. This is morally appealing to volunteers (Lin 1999, 200). On the other hand, the concept of *fu* is also equivalent to individualistic spiritual capital earned by doing good. Within this conceptual framework, being altruistic is conceived of as self-interested behaviour to accumulate religious credit, as a way of *zuo gongde* (做功德), generating karmic merits. In this regard, by engaging in the dirty, energy-consuming work of recycling, volunteers assume

[89] zhi fu, xi fu, zao fu

they will receive their reward, either a purely moral one or possible material benefits received within this lifetime or beyond. Such considerations resonate with the instrumental motives suggested by the exchange theory, in which volunteering is a rational choice people make through weighting the costs and benefits (Stebbins 1994; Wilson 2000).

In short, according to the literature, as well as the analysis this dissertation develops concerning organisational discourse (see Chapter Seven and Eight), the entwined moral values embodied in the practice of recycling provide cultural resources to attract the public to volunteer for Tzu-chi recycling, regardless of self-interest or altruism, environmentalism, religion, or traditional motives. The work-like activity of dealing with rubbish, in this account, is what Adam Y. Chau has described as 'an ensemble of mechanisms through which the practitioner crafts and fashions him or herself in the image of some kind of ideal figure' (2013, 79). Moreover, some research mentions aspects of social networking and solidarity benefits in Tzu-chi recycling which yield positive mental effects. These also draw people into volunteering (Wu 2010; Chu 2012; Her 2014; Chen 2017). However, contributions that refer to somewhat sociological aspects of Tzu-chi recycling usually do so in the form of factors that complement the religious and organisational ideology, and they rarely address the volunteers' socioeconomic characteristics in a direct manner.

In other words, our current understanding of why people engage in Tzu-chi recycling is dominated by an assertion emphasising ideological impetus and institutional discourse. In this account, the volunteer individuals are seen as religious practitioners or Tzu-chi's organisational followers, not as people who voluntarily engage in waste works. The current understanding not only overlooks the sociological background of volunteering as well as the 'contents' of the chosen task of recycling, but it also rarely acknowledges different 'types' of volunteers in Tzu-chi recycling. The commissioned volunteers wearing blue uniforms, the non-commissioned but certified volunteers wearing grey uniforms, and the non-commissioned and non-certified walk-in volunteers without uniforms are categorised under a 'catch-all' term: Tzu-chi recycling volunteer.[90] While treating the nature of volunteering as a multi-dimensional reality is indispensable, volunteers' different associative relationships with the organisation reflect the

[90] See Chapter One for further discussion of the different types of Tzu-chi recycling volunteers and the requirements to become a commissioner and certified environmental volunteer.

different meanings they attribute to volunteering and its related work. This assumption is manifested in the observation during my fieldwork that the majority of the Tzu-chi recycling volunteers, particularly the non-commissioned ones, do not volunteer in any Tzu-chi activities other than recycling. In contrast, the commissioners I encountered at the recycling sites often participate in a variety of Tzu-chi charitable projects, volunteering in hospitals or at schools, for example, and they are often members of multiple Tzu-chi local sub-units.

If, as previous research suggests, volunteers are motivated by religious and traditional values of altruism, why do they limit their philanthropic involvement to the task of recycling only? It is more likely that the picture scholars have so far depicted of Tzu-chi recycling volunteers is largely based on the image of Tzu-chi commissioners. To my knowledge, the non-commissioned community volunteers actually comprise a large portion of the labour force of Tzu-chi recycling, but they have nevertheless been left out of the analysis.[91]

The non-commissioned volunteers' almost exclusive choice of recycling as *the* volunteering work in which they participate reflects another structural context of Tzu-chi recycling that previous research has overlooked: that is, that a different type of volunteering participation emerged throughout Tzu-chi's communitisation movement. As Chapter Six discusses in detail, the Tzu-chi communitisation movement was an organisational restructuring effort the Tzu-chi organisation advanced in the 1990s and 2000s to stimulate people from many walks of life to participate in a variety of missionary activities the Buddhist organisation has developed. Chiu (2000) has argued that the participatory mode of this new group of community volunteers, including those who engage in recycling works, diminished the role of life-long-commitment and religious identification. These volunteers have a more temporary commitment, focusing on programme-based tasks rather than the organisational ideologies. This stands in

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[91] To a large extent, the fragmented view probably originates from the methodological approach scholars have taken. The researchers mentioned earlier mostly depended on the methods of discourse and literature analysis, using organisational documents and publications as their primary sources, in which the institutional and religious perspective is most apparent. Although some studies do incorporate ethnography and interviews with volunteers in the research design (for instance, Chang 1996; Chiu 2000; Wu 2010), the respondents who appear in the analysis are still mostly the commissioners. I, too, experienced a similar tendency during my fieldwork. Particularly during the first few site visits, it was always the commissioners, often the station chief or media production sub-unit volunteer, who served as representatives to receive my questions and give introductory tours. It was only through a longer period of participant observations that I learned the differences in volunteers' associations with the organisation and their views on recycling volunteering.

contrast to Tzu-chi's 'traditional' volunteers, who were mostly religious housewives, and the social professional elites who joined Tzu-chi in its earlier institutionalisation process (*ibid.*, 155). The transition Chiu has observed in the nature of Tzu-chi volunteering to an extent echoes a shift in the level of individual commitment to civil society and the affiliation with faith-based organisation that international scholars have noted. The observed tendency is one of an increasingly 'loose connection' between volunteer and organisation, and a shift from 'other-' to 'self-oriented' types of volunteering (Putman 2000; Hustinx and Lammertyn 2003; Wuthnow 2006).

It is important to note that the issue in this chapter is not proposing a replacement of commissioned volunteers' motivations and views with those of the non-commissioned ones, nor to create a contrast between the two groups. In fact, on various occasions throughout my fieldwork, I made similar observations to those of previous researchers, noting that the volunteers who undertake recycling, not only commissioners but also, sometimes, non-commissioners, articulated religious, traditional, and environmental attitudes when explaining their volunteering motives. Chapters Seven and Eight discuss those scenarios. Nevertheless, in this and the following chapter, I wish to draw more attention to the non-commissioned volunteers, although not exclusively, to highlight the multi-layered nature of Tzu-chi recycling volunteers and the sociological significance of their volunteering.

Regarding the four research questions raised in the beginning of the chapter, to investigate why individuals volunteer, particularly those like the Tzu-chi non-commissioned recycling volunteers who volunteer on a sporadic, specific-task basis, it is imperative to incorporate the latent connections between subjective motivation and volunteers' social-structural embeddedness. In other words, the answers to why they volunteer are a component of the questions, 'What are the works?', 'Who are they?', and 'What is their relationship to the task?' with reference to broader historical foundations and sociological preconditions. From the point of view of this type of inquiry, this and the next chapter study Tzu-chi recycling volunteers by focusing on the contents and characteristics of recycling labour. Each of the two chapters represents a different angle. While Chapter Five is mainly a personal, living experience account, this chapter has an economic structural perspective. The remainder of this chapter consists of two parts. The first provides a general description of recycling labour and individual volunteers. It first highlights how recycling in Tzu-chi is repetitive, meticulous, and sometimes explorative work. It then tells stories of the volunteers and their

participation in Tzu-chi recycling. In the second part, the discussion moves to the transitions of Taiwan's industrial modernisation and shows who and what was considered useful/useless and valuable/valueless throughout the economic development process. The chapter thus argues that Tzu-chi recycling volunteers are the once 'disposed of' and now 'recycled' labour, along with Taiwanese industrial development.

2.   Recycling Labours and Individuals

2.1   The Labour of 'Unmaking'

Compared to most recycling collection businesses I visited, the amount of time and physical effort Tzu-chi volunteers invest in their recycling work is remarkable. Despite variations in the classification systems in different Tzu-chi recycling stations, overall, the recycling work is episodic and miscellaneous. In addition, it involves a repetitive series of 'unmaking' processes, the deconstructive work of separating, removing, breaking, and dismantling, material by material, item by item.

At the stations, vehicles featuring the Tzu-chi logo pull up to the entrance to unload the recycling materials collected from the site's neighbourhood region. Volunteers near the entrance take batches and proficiently perform an initial division by placing the discarded items into several large plastic baskets: one for paper, one for PET bottles, one for plastic containers, one for household appliances, and so on. After the first round of separation, the filled baskets are delivered to the individual working areas for further separation.

In the paper recycling area, some volunteers tear out book pages by hand; some pick commercial flyers and papers coated with a layer of plastic film by testing how easily they can be torn apart piece by piece. The sorted papers are sent to other volunteers for further processing; volunteers cut blank white paper from the parts tainted with ink so that they can separate it from the rest. The repetitive tasks can sometimes become a reflex. For instance, once, an elderly volunteer 'accidentally' recycled a consent document that was intended for her to sign. In between the conversations with the television crew, who gave the volunteer the document, the volunteer began to cut out the blank white part of it as she held it.

Similar meticulous work also takes place in the plastic recycling areas. On one side, the volunteers work on discarded PET[92] plastic bottles. The process begins with emptying out and rinsing the bottles before the plastic labels, caps, and the remaining ring are removed using a curved blade or a cutting machine designed by Tzu-chi volunteers. The processed bottles are further sorted by colour—transparent, green, and other—before they are transported to and stored at the larger stations for the Da-ai technology company's contracted wholesalers to collect them and manufacture them into a variety of 'green' products.

Figure 4.1 Reference sample board of Tzu-chi plastic packaging material classification (photo by the author, 2016)

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[92] Polyethylene terephthalate is one of the most widely used plastic materials in making fibres for clothing, containers for liquids and foods, and in the manufacturing process as a whole.

On the other side of the plastic area, a reference board with information on 12 plastic packaging materials with corresponding product samples hangs on the wall (Figure 4.1). During my first few weeks working in the plastic bag recycling area, my task was to learn to recognise the recyclable items made of high-density polyethylene (HDPE), low-density polyethylene (LDPE), polypropylene (PP), polystyrene (PS) and polyvinyl chloride (PVC). After initial product classification, volunteers in the plastic bag area further work on colour-sorting by removing stickers and labels, or by cutting the coloured parts from the transparent film. At some large sites, volunteers operated a vacuum machine, designed by both Tzu-chi and the National Industrial Technology Research Institute, to compress the air-filled materials for convenient storage and transportation.

Inside the dismantling zone, miscellaneous objects—ranging from household appliances to toys, from helmets to cassettes—are taken apart. In contrast to the plastic, paper, and general classification areas where the atmosphere is often lively and bustling, the dismantling area in all the Tzu-chi recycling stations breathes a quiet and concentrated atmosphere, where the sounds of hammering and metal clicking are sometimes mixed with the background music of Buddhist songs playing from an audio station. From time to time, motionless volunteers staring at the recycled items in their hands make a sharp contrast with their fellows hammering objects. Tzu-chi volunteers describe the dismantling labour in Taiwanese Hokkien as a 'real thick job' (真厚工[93]), as it demands not only time but also both physical and mindful work.[94] It could take one volunteer more than three mornings to disassemble a total of 40 helmets. Some volunteers are in charge of breaking down video home system (VHS) and cassette tapes by separating magnetic tape from plastic shells and metal screws. Once, I observed a volunteer spend 25 minutes studying and taking a blender apart by using two hammers, one pair of pliers, a screwdriver, and a magnet to separate the blade parts into two plastic items, one iron component, and one copper component.

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[93] tsin kāu-kang

[94] Interview with a Tzu-chi recycling volunteer at the dismantling area of the Kaohsiung Sanmin station (November 08, 2014).

2.2   Stories of Shen, Mei, and Chu

Why do the volunteers want to invest so much time, labour, and energy in the dirty, demanding, sometimes dangerous, and generally stigmatised work of recycling? It should be noted that, although the volunteers commonly perform tasks delegated to them by senior volunteers, doing this work meticulously is self-directed. For example, the Tzu-chi volunteers' commitment to detailed tasks once led to a disagreement between the then-station chief and the volunteers in the Bade recycling station in Taipei. The station chief asked the packaging recycling volunteers to skip cutting labels and sorting by colour and put all packaging materials together in order to empty the storage space for site relocation. After the chief left the room, the volunteers nevertheless performed these tasks for some time. After following the instruction unwillingly, Mei, one of the volunteers, murmured in Taiwanese Hokkien that 'this [detailed classification] *is* what [we are] *willing* to do[95]' and 'such a pity (拍損[96])' several times.[97]

Based on the interviews and participant observation, a general impression emerged that, in the eyes of the volunteers, recycling has the same function as leisure or sport. The volunteers, commissioned or not, sometimes describe the activity as 'invigorating', 'to exercise muscles and bones', 'to activate the brain so it doesn't *shrink*', or 'to lose weight', and sometimes as 'killing time', 'a reason to go outside of the house', or 'working and chatting with friends'. The best way to further examine and contextualise this view is with reference to ethnographic vignettes. During my fieldwork, I spent the most time with three volunteers—Shen, Mei, and Chu—in the plastic packaging recycling room in the Bade station in Taipei during 2016. In the following section, I tell brief stories of the three volunteers, describing who they are and their participation in Tzu-chi recycling.

Ms. Shen, 69 years old, former construction *worker*

When I asked Shen, a then-69-year-old female volunteer, the reason she volunteered with Tzu-chi recycling on a daily basis, her first response was, 'It's easier and faster to pass the days when you have work to do'. Shen is a former construction worker. Nine years ago, one day after her retirement, she walked into the Tzu-chi community location near her house to ask about volunteering. 'I

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[95]   「這就是欲做的事」('tse tiō sī bueh tsò ê tāi-tsì'), in Taiwanese Hokkin, the word *bueh* (willing) can denote either 'want' or 'should'.

[96]   phah-sńg

[97]   Personal communication, four Tzu-chi recycling volunteers at the Taipei Bade station, including Chu, Shen, and Mei (21 May 2016).

couldn't just sit at home and stare at the television. It drives me crazy. Being here is good. You work, you talk, and then the day passes by'. Shen is the quiet one in the plastic recycling room. I asked if she was ever bored by the mindlessly repetitive movements or repelled by the sometimes dirty work of recycling. Shen responded that she would be 'feeling uncomfortable' if she were doing nothing and commented, 'The more I do, the happier I am'. [98] A week before my volunteering at the Bade station began, the site was closed temporarily for about two weeks. In order to 'fill the gaps', Shen went hiking every morning for a week. Soon, she found herself visiting other Tzu-chi recycling stations to ask for work to do. Despite her commitment, however, Shen showed no interest in any Tzu-chi activity other than recycling, whether it was guiding tours to visit different environment-related sites, religious assemblies, or volunteer training events. Although Shen was a certified community volunteer of Tzu-chi recycling, I never saw her wearing the grey uniform at the site. Describing herself as a 'simple volunteer', Shen maintained that the substantial degree of choice—no obligation to work specific shifts and the power to terminate the involvement with relative ease—was better than being a commissioner, despite its seeming prestige.

Ms. Mei, 72 years old, former breakfast shop *worker*

Mei, a 72-year-old woman at the time, had come to Tzu-chi recycling at the encouragement of an old customer of hers. Mei was a former breakfast shop worker, and the customer was a Tzu-chi senior commissioner. Mei began her Tzu-chi involvement two years ago when her sons hired a Filipino caretaker to look after her chronically ill husband. Despite her junior standing in Tzu-chi recycling, Mei was one of the most active figures at the station and in the plastic recycling room. Other volunteers told me in an impressed tone that Mei could sort more than 1,000 PET bottles a day before she came to the plastic packaging room. Mei was often the one who assigned everyone's tasks, led the group conversation, and supervised a new-comer's learning process. When other nearby recycling stations were short of specialised plastic packaging volunteers, Mei adjusted her 'shifts' to 'work' extra and help out. In contrast to Shen, Mei liked to participate in different kinds of Tzu-chi activities organised for the non-commissioned recycling volunteers. While sharing the stories of her trip to Tzu-chi's largest environmental educational station and to a water purification factory, Mei

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[98] Interview with Tzu-chi recycling volunteer Shen at the Taipei Bade station (14 May 2016).

described the experience in Taiwanese Hokkien, describing it as learning 'how many kilos the outside world weighs'.[99]

Ms. Chu, 73 years old, former restaurant cleaner

Seventy-three-year-old housewife Chu shared Mei's motivation to have her 'own thing outside the house'. Chu told me that she came to Tzu-chi to volunteer out of boredom. At the time, she sought work to do when she realised her children were all grown; one of her three sons left for the United States for his career, taking two of her grandchildren with him, whom she had raised. One day, Chu saw Tzu-chi commissioners 'wearing that beautiful cheongsam uniform walking down on the street'. Her admiration drove her to participate in Tzu-chi volunteering.[100] Over her 13-year participation in Tzu-chi, however, Chu did not become a commissioner, nor did she receive her cheongsam uniform. Instead, she had a grey-and-white Tzu-chi working uniform. The conditions of becoming a commissioner—which require participating in a variety of organisational philanthropic activities and trainings—were harder to meet in Chu's situation. Chu's husband was not particularly supportive of her volunteering work in Tzu-chi, and his disagreement became stronger after Tzu-chi's public crisis in 2014. Despite her husband's rejection, Chu insisted on continuing, but she reduced her involvement in Tzu-chi recycling from every day to three to four times a week. Chu usually came to the recycling station while her husband was at work, and she came with an extra change of clothes, to 'hide' the evidence of her recycling labour—her sweat and the trashy smell. 'I told him it's my business', Chu said with a sour undertone. Noticing that Chu sometimes deployed distancing language when talking of her home as 'that house', I asked if she felt that her home was a place of work. Facing my rather direct question, Chu replied that the nature of recycling—sorting, organising, and being surrounded by 'good people'—gave her peace of mind.[101] Speaking of her adoration of recycling work, Chu explained that, due to her previous jobs working as a cleaner in a mall and at restaurants, she was not afraid of dirt or waste.

3. Being Productive and Being Recycled

Despite the differences between Shen, Mei, and Chu's volunteering experience in Tzu-chi and their attitudes towards their relationship with the organisation, their

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99 Interview with Tzu-chi recycling volunteer Mei at the Taipei Bade station (21 May 2016).
100 Interview with Tzu-chi recycling volunteer Chu at the Taipei Bade station (13 May 2016).
101 Interview with Tzu-chi recycling volunteer Chu at the Taipei Bade station (21 May 2016).

similarities can be described as rooted in a number of identities. They are non-commissioned but certified recycling volunteers. They are elderly, female, retired individuals with a shared previous life experience of being an 'atypical worker'. Following the descriptions of Taiwanese atypical employment that Lin et al. (2011) and Chen and Shi (2012) have discussed, I use the term 'atypical worker' to refer to those 'non-standard' workers who engage in part-time, temporary contractual, or dispatchment-type manual jobs and transitional employment, excluding the self-employed.

The shared traits of Shen, Mei, and Chu shed light on the structural context of Tzu-chi recycling volunteering. In essence, the majority of Tzu-chi recycling volunteers are elderly women. According to the official environmental volunteer survey Tzu-chi conducted in 2011, of a total 33,537 non-commissioned but certified recycling volunteers, 80% are female. [102] The age range of Tzu-chi recycling volunteers is related to their status of retirement. Shen, Mei, and Chu only began to consider volunteering when their previous jobs ended, be it construction work, breakfast shop work, or taking care of a husband, children, and grandchildren. Once, in a group conversation, Mei referred to the fellow volunteers as 'classmates', implying that they were all there to learn new things. Chu corrected Mei, saying they were colleagues instead. The volunteers in the room all found Chu's suggestion more appropriate.[103]

The practice of volunteering, in this account, is a replacement for work, done for the sake of keeping busy and active. A negative description associated with retirement and being elderly in the Tzu-chi lexicon, to which recycling volunteers sometimes refer, clearly articulates this account: *san deng gongmin* (三等公民). The term translates as 'third-class citizens', but it is used as a double entendre in the Tzu-chi context and becomes a 'citizen of threefold waiting', referring to a person who waits to eat, to sleep, and to die.[104] The term denotes an animal-like way of living and reveals the role of work in the volunteers' self-conception: life without work decreases in value and is not worth living.

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[102] Tzu-chi Foundation, '2018 ciji huanbao tongji (xiu)' 慈濟環保統計(修; unpublished document, 17 September 2019), PowerPoint file.

[103] Group conversation with volunteers of the plastic packaging area at the Taipei Bade station (12 July 2016).

[104] For example, see: Li Wei-huang 李委煌 , 'Meiyou shijian qu langfei' 沒有時間去浪費, *Ciji Yuekan* 慈濟月刊 [Ciji Monthly] 607, 25 June 2017, http://web.tzuchiculture.org.tw/?book=607&mp=6455#.XaJd1yVS924 (accessed on 17 September 2019).

The volunteers, Shen, Mei, and Chu as well as others, discuss their discomfort about the emptiness and dullness found in the life phase of retirement. This 'boredom', as Chu described it, underpins their motivation to volunteer in the first place. In sociology scholarship, boredom is often associated with the performance of monotonous activity that can 'begin or stop at any time and is not immersed in a cohesive and organic temporal flow', which is a work type associated with industrialised manufacturing (Gardiner 2012, 46). In this regard, like Sisyphus's punishment, boredom is considered to derive from endless, linear repetition (Barbalet 1999). However, even though the features that scholars have proposed trigger a sense of boredom are almost identical to the characteristics of recycling work in Tzu-chi, the volunteers choose the same work as a *solution* to their 'boredom'. Thus, Chu's sense of boredom and emptiness, or the 'uncomfortable' feeling in Shen's words, is not so much an emotion derived from repetitiveness, but rather 'an estrangement from the formerly stable moral and socio-cultural foundations of acting and thinking' (Gardiner 2012, 42-3). A source of boredom for the volunteers lies not in the absence of vital interest or meaning in the activity itself, but in the absence of the activities that render a familiar, sound life purpose—that is, being productive.

This affirmation of labour for its own sake and seeing work as a personal duty and source of meaning in the eyes of recycling volunteers clarifies how individuals associate their 'usefulness' with productivity and the relationship the volunteers have with the recycling tasks. People not only work for their livelihood, but they also invest personal time in work, producing a 'self' through working and relating to life and the world through work. Shen's comment, 'The more I do, the happier I am', anchors the paradoxical connection between work and the notion of happiness Daniel Just has noted when discussing the pivotal status of work in the modern era. Just writes that, 'as [a] temporary renunciation of happiness, modern work becomes a substitute for happiness, and ultimately its main source' (2014, 436).

So far, I have described the content and characteristics of Tzu-chi recycling works and the recycling volunteers. To further understand why the volunteers share a work ethic and take it to heart, as well as their relationship with the chosen task of recycling as a practice to realise this attitude towards life, those aspects must be contextualised in the concrete social context and historical account of Taiwan's economic transformation.

The following section recounts the drastic and rapid industrial development of Taiwan. The changes took place particularly between the 1960s and the 1980s, the period when the majority of Tzu-chi recycling volunteers, including Shen, Mei, and Chu, were in their 20s to 40s. In the earlier part of this period, Taiwan experienced a rapid industrial modernisation and the development of an export-led economy. People on the island were systematically and strategically mobilised and turned into human resources to produce a great variety of consumer goods. However, as the following section illuminates, when the national industry shifted from manufacturing towards the tertiary sector of service and high-tech industry, the once-utilised labour and skills became unwanted. As a result, middle-aged labourers, women in particular, entered a labour market of atypical jobs, just as Shen, Mei, and Chu did. This life experience manifests their later involvement in Tzu-chi recycling volunteering.

3.1   The Age of 'Making'

Over the past 60 years, Taiwan has experienced a fundamental transformation of its industrial structure, shifting from the post-war agrarian economy to a manufacturing industry and then to high-tech and service industries (Figure 4.2). The continuum of transition entailed a hyperactive 'making' period in which national industrial systems were in constant construction, producing a variety of objects and goods for export while people sought to usher in economic success.

Generally speaking, in the 1960s, the government used cheap labour and policy incentives to attract overseas capital and technologies and thus develop an active, export-oriented economy. By then, Taiwan had begun to participate in the global production market via its distinctive 'satellite factory system', a 'hierarchical subcontracting manufacturing system that consists of numerous small-scale, family-centred, and export-oriented factories' (Hsiung 1996, 1). Labour-intensive light industry activities such as textiles and umbrella and shoe manufacturing grew quickly; since then, the label 'made in Taiwan' has become globally recognised. In the 1970s, the government launched a national infrastructure building programme, the Ten Major Construction Projects, as a response to the 1973 oil crisis, leading to the development of heavy industry as well as building projects of numerous pieces of national infrastructure. Further, since the late 1980s, the high-tech and IT industry has risen to prominence under the auspices of the government, and, together with the services sector, took over from the traditional manufacturing economy (Chen and Shi 2012). In short, Taiwan has

experienced about three waves of drastic change in its national industry, from agriculture to high-tech industry, within three decades.
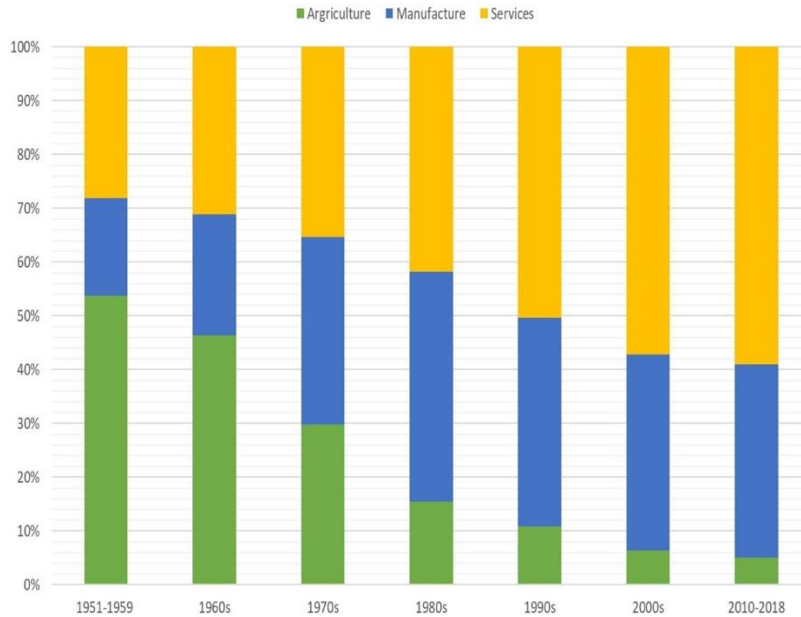
Figure 4.2 Industrial structure change, 1951-2018 (figure made by the author; data source: DGBAS, the Executive Yuan[105])

While Taiwan earns a place among the 'Four Asian Tigers' (Vogel 1991) and has developed an economic 'miracle paradigm' with a record 9% gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate average per annum between 1963 and 1996 (Lin, Thung-hong 2015), an emblematic popular song of the time, 'Only Hard Work Ushers in Success' (愛拚才會贏[106]), could be heard in karaoke rooms and on the stages of all kinds of political campaigns.[107] The chorus lyrics of the 1980s Taiwanese Hokkien hit song are, 'good luck, bad luck, always get back on your feet to work; one third is fate, two thirds is labour; only hard work ushers in

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[105] Taiwanese Directorate General of Budget, Accounting, and Statistics. 2019. *DGBAS Data Repository: For Labour Force Data*. Taipei, Taiwan: https://win.dgbas.gov.tw/dgbas04/bc4/timeser/indu_f.asp.

[106] ai pin cai hui ying

[107] For example: Wu, Jia-yi and Zou Jing-wen 吳嘉億、鄒景雯, 'Zongtong dao yingqu weilu chang *ai pin caihui ying*' 總統到營區圍爐唱「愛拚才會贏, *Liberty Times*, 7 February 2008. https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/politics/paper/187672.

success'.[108] The song not only evokes an image of Taiwan's miraculous economic success made possible through people's hard work, but it also shows that success was considered achievable. At the time, there was a high growth rate resulting from rampant entrepreneurism, an employment rate of almost 100%, and an expanding middle class (Lee and Lin 2017). The belief was that earning success for the future was in one's control and was built upon one's hard labour. From this belief arises an affirmation of work as a life purpose, as well as virtues such as frugality and resilience, which in turn produced the dependable labour force necessary for a productive economic system.

The affirmation of work ethics is not only moulded in the grand project of state-building; it is also deeply intertwined with the family values in which patriarchy persists. In the 'satellite factory system', family-oriented small- and medium-sized companies dominated the economic landscape (Lim 2014). In the family-business setting, being productive for the company directly translated into being a dutiful family member, which often led to self-exploitation or exploitative mismanagement (Shieh 1992; Ke 1993; Liu et.al 2010). Numerous studies have highlighted how this was intertwined with gender roles. As industrialisation unfolded, the informal and formal female labour force participation rate increased along with the development of the satellite factory system. The gendered economic activities in which paid and unpaid women partook served as a means to support or complement their primary roles as wives, mothers, and daughters (Kao 1999).

For example, the state advocated a community development programme of 'Living Rooms as Factories' in the 1970s to promote home-based work and to increase the productivity of married women, in addition to the work of single women in the export industrial sectors. Shen, Mei, and Chu, among other Tzu-chi recycling volunteers, remember that movement. Women, including them, made and crafted all sorts of consumer goods by weaving bamboo baskets, assembling toys, patching up clothes, and boxing and packaging different goods at homes and communal areas. The volunteers recalled sitting in the corner of rooms or communal areas with family members or neighbours. Together, they worked on disparate tasks as temporary, additional jobs to 'make some extra money' or to

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[108] 好運,歹運,總嘛要照起工來行; 三分天注定,七分靠拍拼;愛拼才會贏 (hó-ūn, pháinn-ūn, tsóng mā iau tsiàu-khí-kang lâi kiânn; sann hun thinn tsù tīng, tshit hun khò tánn phing; ài phing tsiah-ē iânn)

help each other out when they would not finish the amount of subcontracted work from the factories during the peak season.[109]

As a part of the subcontracting network of Taiwan's export-led economy, the 'Living Rooms as Factories' programme was developed by the state as a solution to one of the prime issues at the time: the labour shortage. According to Hsiung, the programme was a part of a larger project that was 'designed to bring the surplus labour [...] into productive work' after 'several national surveys were conducted to measure the extent and nature of surplus labour in various communities' (1996, 52). When the survey found many 'idle women' in the community, a variety of workshops, training activities, and support systems were launched to harvest this surplus labour force for needed production (*ibid.*).

In other words, when the entire nation was regulated and adjusted to the goal of becoming an economically more efficient and productive society, much as natural materials are turned into material resources, the entire population was turned into human resources under systematic measurements and strategic mobilisations. People who did not engage in the needed production of consumer goods, described as 'idle individuals', thus became morally wrong and economically 'wasteful'. To see Shen, Mei, and Chu's life experience against the socio-economic background of Taiwan, it is unsurprising that work became the primary purpose of their lives.

3.2   Recycling Disposable Labour

From the perspective of a developmental model, Taiwan's drastic economic structural change tells the story of success by upgrading the industry from agricultural to high-tech production within half a century. From another, less bright angle, it nevertheless tells the story of how the market economy can rapidly cast off industries, businesses, and the labour force. According to the Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting, and Statistics of Taiwan, between 1978 and 1994, the average unemployment rate was below 2%.[110] When the high-tech industry and services economy rose to prominence in the 1990s, the unemployment rate began to rise, reaching two peaks in the early 2000s and by the end of the 2000s, with the number at 5%. Among those who did not have and could not find a job, the majority were those who had a job since the early 1980s, who accounted for

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[109] Personal communication, four Tzu-chi recycling volunteers in Bade station, including Chu, Shen, and Mei (21 May 2016).
[110] Data prior to 1978 is not available.

nearly 85% of unemployed Taiwanese by the early 2000s. In other words, instead of finding it difficult to enter the labour market, the challenge was to stay in the labour market. The percentage of unemployed former workers positively related to the portion of unemployment caused by 'business closure or shrinking'. In the 2000s, the percentage of employment caused by losing jobs surpassed the percentage of those who left their job because of dissatisfaction (Table 4.1).

Along with tertiarization, two additional economic structural transitions contribute to the labour market conditions described. The first is the decline of small- and medium-sized companies whose share of export value, according to Lin (2015), dropped from 76% to 18% since the early 1990s, to be replaced by monopolies, multinational enterprises, and automated production modes. The second structural change is the industrial offshoring that caused factories of small, labour-intensive light industries to begin large-scale relocation in the late 1980s, followed by large business groups of the information and communications technology (ICT) industry in the 2000s, primarily to China (Lin et. al 2011). This trend largely corresponds with structural unemployment caused by post-industrialisation seen on a global scale, which was further aggravated by the economic recession of 2001 and the financial crisis of 2008.

Table 4.1 Unemployment-related statistics, 1980-2018 (table made by the author; data source: DGBAS, the Executive Yuan[111])

Year	unemployment rate (% per thousand people)	first-time job-seeker	non-first-time job-seeker	reason of unemployment: business closure or shrinking[112]	reason of unemployment: dissatisfaction with previous job
1978	**1.67**	55.63	44.37	7.33	21.72
1982	**2.14**	41.12	58.88	14.93	24.45
1986	**2.66**	34.67	65.33	18.64	28.11
1990	**1.67**	33.71	66.29	17.25	35.6
1994	**1.56**	30.06	69.94	13.52	40.37
1998	**2.69**	22.88	77.12	27.83	31.96
2002	**5.17**	15.65	84.35	48.11	21.26
2006	**3.91**	19.94	80.06	28.57	34.42
2010	**5.21**	18.13	81.87	41.57	24.57
2014	**3.96**	22.98	77.02	28	35.32
2018	**3.71**	23.7	76.3	23.4	38.12

In such a transition from a 'miracle paradigm' to a 'recession paradigm' (Lee and Lin 2017), the population's previous labour skills became unwanted. When explaining the rise of the service economy since the 1990s, scholars and experts have suggested that it is the result of 'absorbing' a large portion of middle-aged and low-skilled factory workers and managers who lost their jobs and turned to low-paid and precarious, atypical work (Lin et. al 2011, 127-143). Similarly, Chen and Shi (2012) have moreover discovered that women have a stronger tendency to take atypical jobs than men. A research report of the Ministry of Health and Welfare further suggests that, for middle-aged and elderly women, most opportunities for such atypical jobs are working as restaurant cleaners, home-

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[111] Taiwanese Directorate General of Budget, Accounting, and Statistics. 2019. DGBAS *Data Repository: For Labour Force Data*. Taipei, Taiwan: https://win.dgbas.gov.tw/dgbas04/bc4/timeser/indu_f.asp.

[112] In the governmental survey design, other options for causes for unemployment include dissatisfaction with previous job, injury or illness, termination of seasonal or temporal task, (female) marriage or giving birth, retirement, and being occupied by household tasks.

based care givers, or breakfast shop workers—exactly the jobs Mei and Chu took before they volunteered at Tzu-chi recycling. The limited choice and the job characteristics reflect the non-transferable skills of the middle-aged women's former jobs as manual craftswomen, while working as a caregiver or cleaner or at a breakfast shop is a result of transferring their homemaking skills to the labour market. Either way, choosing an atypical job is a choice of continuity, that is, being flexible for the sake of the enduring dual responsibility of being a (Taiwanese) woman: housekeeping and family income. [113]

Just as the market economy can turn certain kinds of people into surplus resources, it can also make them redundant. Michelle Yates (2011) has argued this view theoretically. She has proposed that, when labour is reduced to a factor of production, a social system thus displays what she calls a 'logic of human disposability' based on its roots in the logic of capitalist mode of production. 'Waste', then, becomes a common metaphor for understanding the continuous dislocation of work and the disposability of people (Doherty and Brown 2019, 5).

A parallel drawn in Zygmunt Bauman's work *Wasted Lives* (2004) can be inspirational here. Characterising *liquid* modernity as a civilisation of 'excess, redundancy, waste, and waste disposal' (*ibid.*, 97), Bauman affirms that the categories of waste material result from a social order that has been cultured to abide by planned obsolescence. Likewise, the production of 'waste lives'—cast out people and communities—at a systematic level is fully compatible with the logic of modern societies. For Bauman, according to the logics of the modernist system dominated by market-driven and progressive imperatives, those who do not or are unable to perform in a way that would appear 'meaningful' are 'naturally' required to step aside by the system. Bauman terms 'disposable people' the 'collateral damage' of the system (2011), even though this state of being often explained by their own failure to be resourceful enough to be of use.

Some of the waste studies literature considers the rather direct entanglement of and interaction between surplus people and waste materials. The literature

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[113] Government of Taiwan, Ministry of Health and Welfare, Social, and Family Affairs Administration. 'Zhonggao Ling Funu Xuqiu Pinggu Yanjiu Baogao' 中高齡婦女需求評估研究報告, coordinated by Hung Hui-Fen. Taipei: Foundation of Women's Rights Promotion and Development, 2018. https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiZpfKmqZnlAhWEKFAKHVr0AdsQFjABegQIABAH&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.taiwanwomencenter.org.tw%2Fupload%2Fwebsite%2Ftwc_5ab44799-64ee-4661-8040-f533337af720.pdf&usg=AOvVaw28iJdp9-Q-P8Lqe12PB267 (accessed on 13 October 2019).

shows that, when global society throws more and more manufactured goods into rubbish bins, more people who are washed out of labour markets by the global economy turn to waste work in order to get by (for example, Gowan 1997; Reno and Alexander 2012; Parizeau 2015). Researchers have demonstrated that, far from being structurally irrelevant or absolutely excluded from the production scheme, waste workers in different societies are tenuously and unevenly integrated into the market economy as they collect, sort, and resourcify rubbish. While re-inserting the discarded materials into mainstream resource flows, their labour is also 'recovered' and placed back into the (re)production chain of the national or global recycling economy to capture marginal gains.

Tzu-chi recycling volunteers, particularly those who are the focus of this chapter and who are the former manual and later atypical workers before retirement, represent a specific group of Taiwanese individuals whom the market economy has utilised and subsequently discarded. Their engagements in Tzu-chi recycling represent this waste-labour entanglement in an emblematic and particular way. The symbolic representation shows labourers in Taiwan who used to make and assemble a variety of consumer goods at industrial and domestic factories and who now unmake and disassemble a variety of consumer goods at multiple recycling sites and on different scales. The lives of these volunteers—largely non-commissioned, elderly, retired, and female—are entangled with commodity markets. Moreover, the transition of their working lives, the jobs they take and have taken, and the places they have been mirror the 'social life and afterlife of things' (Reno 2009) through which materials travel across different markets. The peculiarity, on the other hand, is the volunteerism of the engagement. Unlike waste workers whose livelihood depends on waste, the Tzu-chi individuals volunteer to engage in waste work.

To illustrate this particularity, I tell the story of Dong, a male, non-commissioned Tzu-chi recycling volunteer. Dong's work experience encapsulates how the tide of the Taiwanese industrial transition sweeps up and leaves behind labour and skills. The 60-something was a former mechanic who lost his factory job in the early 1990s and later became a part-time mechanic repairing plumbing and electronic devices at homes and businesses. After his semi-retirement in the early 2010s, he volunteered at the dismantling zone of a Tzu-chi recycling station in Yilan county on an irregular basis. While dismantling a motor, Dong told me the reason he volunteered at Tzu-chi recycling: 'Otherwise, the [skills] learned for 40 years

would turn out to be useless, just like this [the motor]'.[114] Dong's comment exemplifies the entanglement of discarded material and discarded labour at an almost confrontational level. The revalidation of the value of that discarded motor in Dong's hands is made possible through the recycled 'usefulness' of Dong's skill, and vice versa. In other words, through the 'reflexive and flexible intervention' of the market economy of recycling, which shifts the boundaries that define where markets are (Gregson et. al 2013), the formerly externalised labour and objects brought each other back to be included again.

4.   Concluding Remarks

This chapter is an effort to challenge and complicate our current understanding of Tzu-chi recycling volunteering as dominated by a religious, environmental, or traditional value-oriented view that focuses on the commissioned volunteers. Instead of seeing the individuals who work in the Tzu-chi recycling stations as Tzu-chi's religious and organisational volunteers, I regard them as voluntary waste workers and attend to the category of non-commissioned community volunteers, who are the mainstay of Tzu-chi's recycling labour force. From this perspective, I explore their relationship with the task to explain their decision to volunteer and the choice of recycling. While highlighting features of recycling labour for Tzu-chi, which involves extensive, meticulous, and repetitive manual processes of disassembly, I clarify the distinctive characteristics of Tzu-chi recycling volunteers. The majority of the non-commissioned recycling volunteers are elderly, female, retired individuals who previously participated in Taiwan's industrial modernisation process as manual workers, and who later had a life experience as an 'atypical worker'.

As the chapter reveals, their voluntary engagement in Tzu-chi recycling is deeply embedded in the historical development and transition of Taiwan's economic industry since the 1960s in two ways. First, through a work ethic, industrial modernisation cultivates a person's economic potential to the extent that it is no longer merely the period of their working life; rather, their whole lifespan becomes the object of the best possible utilisation by the apparatus of economic production. For those who volunteer for Tzu-chi after retirement, continuing their productivity, as a way to show a person's value and worth, underlines their motivation. Second, the choice of recycling reflects a latent connection between

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[114] Interview with Tzu-chi recycling volunteer Dong at the Yilan Dong-dong station (16 May 2016).

the working lives of the former atypical manual workers and the social lives of things. In the eyes of these voluntary waste workers, the discarded materials are emblematic of their once-discarded manual skills and life experience. Therefore, from making to unmaking/remaking objects, the choice of recycling as a task becomes symbolic; it is not only a process of recycling materials, but also of their labour and skills. The temporal properties of the volunteers and waste materials are once again included in the market economy and attained at Tzu-chi recycling. From this perspective, Tzu-chi recycling sites are more than community sites where activities related to environmental efforts, religious training, and the recovery of materials take place. Instead, they become manufacturing factories and produce recycled products, including the volunteers' labour and skills, as well as broken items converted into resources the market economy needs. Regardless of the organisation's ideological stance, in a world where ideas of technological progress continue to provide the benchmark to determine human progress, the task of utilising surplus/discarded resources has itself become an industry.

Chapter Five |
The Volunteers
and Their Volunteering

1. A Typical Day at a Tzu-chi Recycling Station

At 9:30 am on an ordinary weekday in April 2016, I walked through the gates of the Tzu-chi Bade (八德) recycling station in the heart of Taipei City. The Bade station is one of the Tzu-chi district recycling stations where I conducted most of my participant observation in 2016. The dilapidated, four-storey building is the abandoned dormitory of a former state-owned enterprise. It served as the temporary location for the Bade recycling station during the construction of the district's new congregational hall, Jingsi Tang, two blocks away. The six-storey building would have a floor space of nearly 1,000 square meters and was the intended new site of Bade recycling.

While walking towards the rear of the derelict building of the temporary site, where the recycling takes place, a male commissioner sitting in the guard room next to the gate greeted me: 'Morning sister, come to do *huanbao* today?' This was my second visit, and the male commissioner had been the first to welcome me three weeks earlier when I came to the station to ask about volunteering. Twice a week, he fulfils his commissioner duty shift at the recycling station by assisting the public with separating the recyclables they bring to the station, or by welcoming those who come to volunteer or visit the site. I met the chief commissioner of the station on my second visit. The commissioner, who was in

her 70s and, with her husband, had been volunteering in the Tzu-chi recycling programme for more than two decades. During our first encounter, the chief commissioner assigned me the task of plastic bag recycling because the intricate work this requires means that they are 'always in need of people'.

Figure 5.1 Outside the plastics recycling room at the temporary Tzu-chi Bade recycling station in Taipei (photo by the author, 2016)

As I approached the room in which plastic bag recycling takes place, I noticed that the disposable wet raincoats I had hung out to dry the day before were all gone. It turned out that Chu, one of the senior volunteers who had coached me in recycling the plastic bags, had arrived at the station at 8:00 that morning and had already finished what I had left the previous afternoon. Sitting on a pink plastic chair and surrounded by receptacles of unsorted plastic wrapping and bags, Chu said she knew I would be coming that day: 'Shen told me on the phone last night'. Shen is another volunteer at the plastic-bag recycling section, and we had spent the previous afternoon together.

I put on my recycling gear: a pair of gloves, an apron, and a long-sleeved shirt to protect me against the mosquitos during the early but already warm summer. I retrieved two bags of unsorted plastic packaging from a storage space at the back of the room, where about 40 bags of packaging were piled up, waiting to be

processed. Over the next two hours, Chu and I cut out the coloured parts of the plastic wrapping from the transparent parts and removed labels and stickers while chatting about the best morning markets in Taipei, Chu's experiences of Tzu-chi recycling, food choices in the Netherlands, and how Chu's family disapproved of her volunteer work at Tzu-chi. Occasionally, Lian, a man in his 60s who sat in the corner of the same room, and passing volunteers from the paper and PET bottle recycling zones would join in our conversations.

Figure 5.2 Inside the plastics recycling room at the temporary Tzu-chi Bade recycling station in Taipei (photo by the author, 2016)

Around 11:35 am, the chief commissioner came to announce that lunch was almost ready. All the volunteers gradually filed out of their work rooms into the canteen and filled their plates with the vegetarian dishes, soup, and fruit on offer. The free meals prepared by the on-duty Tzu-chi catering volunteers every day were a thank-you for the volunteers' contributions from the local Tzu-chi congregations and commissioners.[115] Shortly after most of the volunteers sat down, with all the men on one side and all the women on the other, as was the custom, a senior volunteer walked to the front of the hall. He asked the crowd to stand up and sing Tzu-chi's lunchtime thanks song, the 'offering

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[115] Generally, Tzu-chi recycling sites or local congregations have their own budgets for food procurement. However, it is not unusual for the catering volunteers to contribute to procuring food or providing the ingredients themselves.

song' (供養歌[116]). People pressed their hands together in the Buddhist gesture and sang along. The lyrics are as follows:

Offering to the Buddha,
Offering to the Dharma,
Offering to the monk,
Offering to all the sentient beings,
May cultivate all the goodness,
May eliminate all the evil,
May transcend all the sentient beings.[117]
After the singing, the senior volunteer turned on two second-hand televisions that had been repaired at the station and switched them to Tzu-chi's Da-ai channel. As usual, the midday news was on, airing Tzu-chi's national and international events and news.

Figure 5.3 Canteen at the temporary Bade recycling station when the volunteers were having their lunch (photo by the author, 2016)

Seventy-two-year-old Mei sat down next to me and commented on the lunchtime meal. Like Shen and Chu, Mei is a Tzu-chi non-commissioned but certified recycling volunteer. As newcomers, Lian and I were the only ones who had not gone through the certification process of missionary volunteers and received the grey uniform. Like all of us, Mei specialised in plastic bag recycling. Before I could ask, she explained that she had been at another Tzu-chi recycling base in the morning: 'They were short of people. The plastic bags were piled up to the ceiling!

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[116] gongyang ge
[117] See Appendix, quotation 5-1 for the Chinese text and pin-yin.

So they asked me if I would go and help'. It was not difficult to detect a sense of pride in Mei's tone, despite the fact that I was distracted by the conversation taking place among the three commissioner volunteers next to us. The commissioners were discussing the 'Northern Region Environmental Volunteer Improvement Training Course' (北區環保志工精進研習課程[118]) that would be held at another large recycling station in two weeks.

At 12:45 pm, on my way back to the plastic bag room, I passed a male volunteer who had already resumed dismantling an electronic rice cooker in the hallway. Meanwhile, I saw Chu and several others in the repair room, busy going through bags of clothes that someone had just donated. The volunteers sort and repair the donated clothes before they are resold at Tzu-chi's second-hand shop, the Cherished Blessing Shop[119] (惜福屋[120]), located at the front of the dormitory building. Later, the volunteers returned with their 'shopping results'. My fellow volunteers were amazed by the quality and how intact their items were. 'There are rich people living in this neighbourhood […] they've just forgotten what they've bought,' Mei opined, shaking her head. I noticed that some of the clothes were high-end international fashion brands with the tags still on.

Around 1:30 pm, the station chief suddenly appeared in the room and hurriedly asked if anyone had not yet had their blood pressure measured: 'All volunteers need to have it taken. […] It's part of the welfare of being a Tzu-chi recycling volunteer!' The chief added that, without a record of the volunteers' health, she could be 'accused' of not taking care of them.

At 2:15 pm, when I returned to the plastic recycling room after the blood pressure measurement, Lian had gone for his weekly hospital check-up, and Chu was about to leave, too. However, another commissioner had joined the room; wearing the casual Tzu-chi uniform of a blue polo shirt, the female commissioner sat opposite Mei and joined in the recycling work. Like the gatekeeper and the catering volunteers, the woman fulfilled her weekly shifts as a commissioner by volunteering at the Bade recycling station. As I joined the female commissioner and Mei to separate 'e-white' (transparent polyethylene) plastic packaging from 'p-coloured' (coloured polypropylene), I asked if the commissioner, Bai, would attend the 'improvement training course' that the other commissioners had discussed during the lunch break. Bai did not plan to join, as 'it is mainly for [non-

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[118] beiqu huanbao zhigong jingjin yanxi kecheng
[119] Since 2014, Tzu-chi has gradually closed its second-hand businesses.
[120] xifu wu

commissioned] community volunteers'. Instead, she mentioned she would be involved in the Earth Day Festival, where the local congregation would set up a stall and some commissioners would 'educate the public' about Tzu-chi's environmental philosophy and achievements.

Around 3:40 pm, Bai went to lock the door, and Mei started to sweep the floor. I placed the day's sorted plastics in the 'categorised' storage room. While saying goodbye, Mei asked if I would come again the following day. Apologetically, I said no. In response, Mei said, 'That's not a problem, come whenever you can, there's no pressure to do this'. She made similar comments two more times before she headed to her bus stop.

2.   Moving Beyond the Economic Structural View

In addition to providing a more grounded idea and overview of how Tzu-chi recycling takes place on site, the ethnographic account of one particular day I spent at the Bade recycling station is an illustration of how recycling is structured and infused with sociocultural significance inside the station. It depicts the daily happenings with works of moving, classifying, separating, cleaning, and storing waste materials, as well as the different types of volunteers who engage in numerous tasks and participate in various events. It shows social interactions and activities (e.g., daily conversations, purchasing unwanted items, and a training assembly) as well as the different welfare services (e.g., lunch and the blood pressure measurements) found in the stations. All these aspects constitute the lively scenery of Tzu-chi community recycling.

The above ethnographic description provides an opening to understand the people and labour of Tzu-chi recycling, which differs from yet complements the accounts in the previous chapter. In Chapter Four, the discussion addressed who the volunteers are and why they volunteer from an economic-structural perspective. I then argued that the individuals' commitment to volunteering and their choice of recycling are the result of socio-economic forces and forms; their motivation to volunteer is a manifestation of having a practice of a work ethic of being productive, and recycling recycles their labour. However, as this chapter aims to show, this argument is only one side of the story. What has so far been left out in the analysis is the perspectives of the volunteers.

By continuing the discussion of the relationship between the Tzu-chi recycling volunteers and the task, this chapter explores the issue with reference to the

volunteers' lived and living experience. To this end, I pay particular attention to their interactions with waste materials and with each other. I ask: what is the role of the materiality of waste and the physicality of recycling work? What kinds of environments in Tzu-chi recycling stations have attracted their participation? In what way can one make sense of their choice of recycling in relation to the accounts they give of their past, present, and future? By doing so, I argue that the physical, sensory, and communal aspects of Tzu-chi recycling labour evoke a sense of familiarity for the volunteers through their embeddedness in Taiwan's historical economic development. In this register, recycling is a way for the volunteers to cope with a rapidly changing world.

In order to address the importance of having a dialectical way to understand Tzu-chi recycling volunteers and labour, the chapter begins with the continuation of the view of Tzu-chi as a 'manufacturing site' of recycled labour and materials. I highlight how the organisation benefits from different forms of values the volunteers bring and produce and describes Tzu-chi's 2014 public crisis which brought this view into the public eye. While illustrating the incident, the section also critiques the tendency in the public narratives to depict Tzu-chi recycling volunteers as the organisation's ignorant, deluded victims. With this critique, I emphasise the indispensability of understanding Tzu-chi recycling not only from an economic-structural perspective, but also from a volunteer's point of view. Therefore, in the second part of the chapter, I return to my participant observation to clarify the 'other side' of the same volunteering and labour coin.

3.   Volunteers or Victims?

During my earlier visits to Tzu-chi recycling stations, in response to my stunned facial expression and to asking why such a detailed classification and complicated processes were applied, the first reason the volunteers gave was consistently practical in nature. For example: 'The more detailed the separation, the better the price you get', or, 'Otherwise, the recycling factories would not want [to buy] them'. Most Tzu-chi recycling volunteers could easily name, or at least rank, the values of different materials. Newspapers have the highest price, followed by white paper, and then paper of mixed colours; the price of one discarded fan that has not been dismantled is 10 dollars, but after disassembling, it is 100; the integrated circuit board with double green sides is A-class, which means that it can sell at a better price.

Suddenly, between the conversations of how polluted the world has become and how recycling as a religious practice purifies minds and brings a community together, the act of waste sorting falls back into an economically productive enterprise. The recycling practice is a means to make money, no less remunerative and no less morally complex than other modes of material transaction. These reactions from the Tzu-chi volunteers echo Martin O'Brien's view. That is, when people and systems organise waste materials, the 'intimate individual and collective meanings' first divested are 'connected […] to economic contexts in which their pecuniary value might release profits to private enterprise' (2012, 122). The recyclables are the commodities produced through the labour of classification. Therefore, the more labour involved in the production process, the more refined goods are, and the better price there will be, as the volunteers explained. In addition, the profits Tzu-chi recycling earns contribute to the operations of the Tzu-chi conglomerate. Because of the volunteers' unpaid labour, the income is lucrative, amounting to nearly 48 million NTD (1.4 million euros) in 1994.[121;122] Today, all of the recycling profit goes to funding the Tzu-chi-owned television station Da'ai TV (see Chapter Seven).

Moreover, the recycled PET bottles the volunteers collect and sort are used to manufacture a wide variety of the 'green' products that the Tzu-chi-associated, listed company Da-ai Technology sells at Tzu-chi shops. A tag printed with a Quick Response (QR) code is attached to some of those products, such as polo shirts and blankets. The digital sign leads to a webpage telling the stories of Tzu-chi recycling volunteers, describing how individuals who are unknown to society contribute to environmental protection and social betterment through their selfless endeavours. Through the addition of the QR code, the life stories of these recycling volunteers are summarised, codified, and materialised through the operation of marketing and technology, turning them into another layer of value added to the products made from the rubbish they recycle.

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[121] Tzu-chi Almanac 1995, "Hui gui xin ling de gu xiang" 回歸心靈的故鄉, 166.

[122] The annual income for 1994 is the only public record that I could find of the Tzu-chi recycling programme's financial achievements, in addition to several mentions of local community outcomes in the early Tzu-chi almanacs. Additionally, Chen (2007) has estimated that more than 160 million NTD (4.5 million euros) were made through the Tzu-chi recycling scheme between 1990 and 2007. Given the high market price for recycling in the 2000s and the scope of the Tzu-chi recycling programme, I believe that Chen's estimate is significantly understated. Nevertheless, for every year since 1995, Tzu-chi has published its total recycling volumes by material category in the Tzu-chi almanac.

In other words, at minimal cost, the Buddhism-based organisation benefits greatly from the variety of personnel, financial, material, and symbolic values the Tzu-chi volunteers and their labour recover and create. In this regard, the welfare services provided at Tzu-chi recycling sites—free lunch, blood pressure measurements, and volunteer training activities—are considered part of the same power operation to fashion people as workers and to continue their productivity. On this account, it is not surprising to find some narratives in the public and media that regard the recycling volunteers as victims of Tzu-chi's religious economy. Such narratives have become particularly discernible since 2014, after a Facebook post by former national policy advisor and well-known businessman Dai Sen-tong (戴勝通) suggested the social problems caused by Tzu-chi and its recycling engagement.

3.1 Victimisation controversy

In April of 2014, Dai posted a picture of a one-sentence, hand-written note addressed to Tzu-chi on his Facebook fan page. The sentence stated, 'Please save some bites for the working poor' (請留口飯給艱苦人吃[123]). Together with the picture, Dai wrote in the first part of his posted message that about 20,000 low-class 'working-poor' (艱苦人[124]) individuals rely on their PET bottle collection to make about 5,500 NTD dollar (about 160 euro) per month for a living. Dai wrote, 'Now it has all changed' because Tzu-chi carved up the market, depending on 'free volunteers' and the 'home factory' of Da-ai technology to 'fight over interests' with individual recyclers, using the lucrative income to purchase land. The rest of the post further elaborates his criticism of Tzu-chi's hospital policy and organisational financial management as a whole.[125]

Dai's Facebook message received more than 350,000 views the day it was posed.[126]. It caught the attention of a variety of national news media, leading to an

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[123] qing liu kou fan gei jiankuren

[124] The word *jiankuren* (艱苦人) is a traditional and sympathetic term for the working poor in Taiwanese Hokkien. A vernacular term often associated with rag pickers and individual waste workers.

[125] See Appendix, quotation 5-1 for the full message content in Chinese text and pin-yin.

[126] Shenghuo Zhongxin 生活中心, '"Qing Ciji Liu Kou Fan Gei Qiongren" Daishengtong pi Zhigong Qiangzuo Huishou; Ciji： Feiyingli' 「請慈濟留口飯給窮人」 戴勝通批志工搶做回收 慈濟：非營利, *Apple Daily*, April 17, 2014. https://tw.appledaily.com/headline/daily/20140417/35772195/ (accessed 13 October 2019).

outpouring of public discussion as well as criticism of Tzu-chi's actions.[127] By September 2019, the post had received a total of 10,000 likes and had been shared more than 4,000 times on Facebook.[128] Dai's Facebook post marked the beginning of a period of intensive public discontent and scrutiny towards Tzu-chi between 2014 and 2016, when two other Tzu-chi-related scandals emerged.[129]

Dai's post divulged information about the competitive and hierarchical nature of the recycling market to the public and referred to Tzu-chi's recycling system as an industrial chain. Three aspects of the recycling market can help clarify Dai's message. First, as illustrated in Chapter Three, Taiwan's recycling system involves a complicated commodity network composed of a variety of players across the industrial chain. Tzu-chi recycling collection, with its almost complete system of supply and processing, carves out about 3% of the national secondary material market supplied by the public, sharing the market with two other main collecting

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[127] For example: Jishi Xinwen 即時新聞, 'Ciji Qiang Huishou Daishengtong： Liu Kou Fan Gei Jiankuren Chi' 慈濟搶回收 戴勝通：留口飯給艱苦人吃, *Liberty Times Net*, 16 April 2014. https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/life/breakingnews/989632 (accessed 13 October 2019); Shenghuo Zhongxin 生活中心, 'Ciji Qiang Huishou Daishengtong： Liu Kou Fan Gei Jiankuren Chi' 慈濟搶回收 戴勝通：請留口飯給艱苦人吃, *Sanlih E-Television*, 17 April 2014. https://www.setn.com/News.aspx?NewsID=20138 (accessed 13 October 2019).

[128] Genzhe Dongshizhang You Taiwan 跟著董事長遊台灣. 2014."Gei Ciji" 給慈濟. Facebook, 16 April 2014. https://www.facebook.com/taiwanviptravel/photos/a.364192126971526/685386294852106/?type=1&theater (accessed 13 October 2019).

[129] After Dai's post, another wave of public criticism towards Tzu-chi was related to the national food safety scandal in Taiwan in 2014. At the time, the Taiwanese food conglomerate Ting Hsin International Group (頂新國際集團) was indicted on charges of fraud and the production and trade of toxic oil for use in food products. The former chairman of Ting Hsin was Wei Ying-chung (魏應充), who was also a founding member of the Tzu-chi international humanitarian group TIHAA and the Da-ai Technology company. While a national boycott occurred of Ting Hsisn products, the public condemned Tzu-chi for its silence and considered its attitude to be a cover-up for its famous member. In 2015, the public discontent with Tzu-chi reached its climax because of the development plan of Tzu-chi's Nei-hu environmental (recycling) park, which is controversial due to its choice of location within one of Taipei's municipal conservation areas. Concerned that Tzu-chi's development plan could destabilise the land, some local community residents and environmental groups questioned the legitimacy of the environmental evaluation process and the purpose of the development project. The disputes between Tzu-chi and the local groups caught the attention of the press, and the media railed against the organisation's lack of financial transparency and suspected collusion between the government and conglomerates. Aspersions were cast on the appropriateness of a religious charity conducting such a (financial) policy. In March 2015, Tzu-chi withdrew the Nei-hu development project and held a press conference to ask the public to give it a chance to reform.

conduits through which recyclable waste material travels: governmental waste collection and private business.
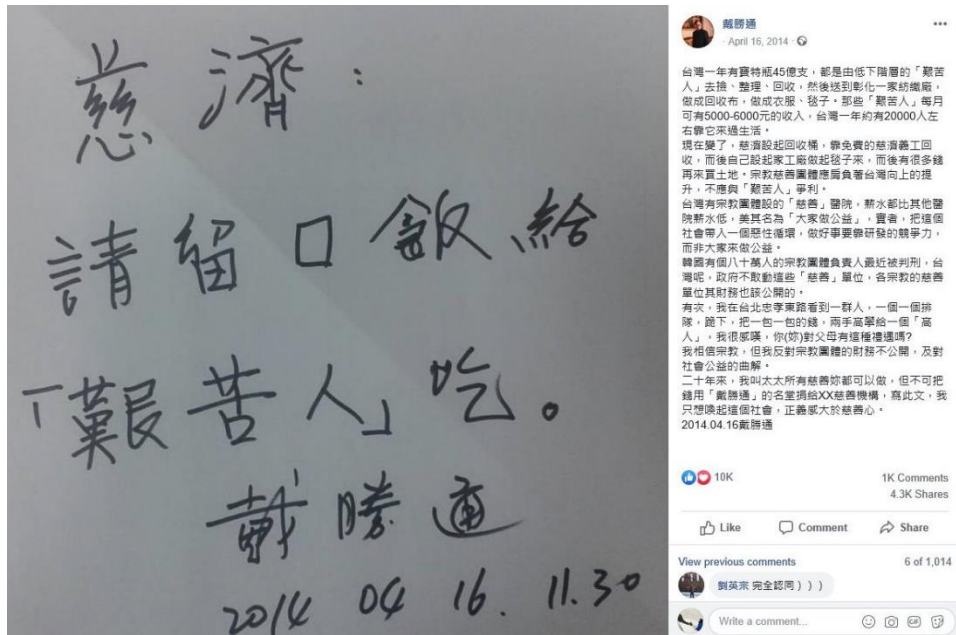
Figure 5.4 A screenshot of Dai Shen-tong's Facebook post

Second, the focus on PET plastic bottles in Dai's post indicates a waste material hierarchy in Taiwanese recycling. This hierarchy differs from the 'waste hierarchy', which connotes a ranked order in a waste and resource management scheme that prioritises practices ranging from waste prevention and recovery to landfills and disposal. Instead, a waste material hierarchy suggests a prioritised order in the waste collection and selection process where collectors, private or public, prefer specific waste items. Although the waste material hierarchy preference is volatile and based on local settings and the global raw material market, it is generally determined by aspects such as monetary value, risk assessment, and working efficiency. Based on my fieldwork in the Taiwanese recycling industry, PET bottles and paper are the two types of waste material collectors' favourites, in addition to available and light-weight metal items such as aluminium cans or copper wires. This is mainly because of their relatively stable and high market price compared to other plastic materials such as PE and PP. Another reason lies in their materiality: bottles and paper are safer to handle

and denser (when PET bottles are compressed) compared to other materials, such as glass and metal. These characteristics make discarded PET the most desirable item for recyclers, resulting in the most competitive market among the collectors.

Third, there is a hierarchy of waste labour which corresponds to their positions in the industrial chain. According to Fang (2001) and Huang (2005), individual recycling collectors in Taiwan are often associated with low occupational status. Moreover, even if the same task of collecting recyclable materials from the public is the same, not all waste work is perceived to be equal. For example, Huang's (2005) research suggests that private collectors such as rag pickers and scrap dealers have a lower social status compared to governmental collectors and Tzu-chi volunteers. Such perceptions make evident the commonality of moral and symbolic registers in viewing waste work. The hierarchy reflects a political assumption about waste work, which 'should be' for environmental compensation or civic expression, not for profit. Waste scholars have also discussed waste labour hierarchies. For example, in Bonatti and Gille's research on women's waste-related engagements in Naples, Italy, the authors note that, in contrast to those who participate in waste campaigns and take out recycling in their household routines—whose work signals moral worth—another group of women, often migrants, handles waste as part of their profession. But they are perceived as engaging in a 'lowly job and a polluting nuisance' (2019, 127). Such a hierarchic perception also seems to apply in the distinction between unpaid but morally praised Tzu-chi volunteers and badly paid, socially stigmatised individual recyclers. Dai's post can be considered a way of speaking up for the latter.

Dai's critical message towards the Tzu-chi organisation, however, led to complex issues regarding waste workers and unintended consequences for Tzu-chi recycling volunteers. I must note that it is not my intention to counter Dai's criticism of the Tzu-chi religious economy, a complicated subject that is beyond the scope of this chapter. Nevertheless, on the one hand, it is questionable whether Dai's concern does justice to individual recyclers and their precarious economic and socially degraded positions, even though the message begins by mentioning them as the primary concern. Briefly described as the 'low class' and the 'working poor' with limited additional information, the lives of individual recyclers and the hybridity of this occupation are reduced into a single, pitiful image, which is then used as an objective fact to support Dai's criticism of Tzu-chi. Put otherwise, Dai's messages reproduce the discourse that victimises waste workers to articulate his opinions about how religion and charity should be. The precarious working conditions of recyclers, the competitive nature of the

secondary material market, and the structural tendencies that contribute to their perceived identities and attributes were not addressed in Dai's message, nor were they fully explored in his later elaborations.

Another group of people who are also assigned to the role of victim in the public discussion of Tzu-chi's recycling business is the Tzu-chi recycling volunteers. Among the public narratives from around and after 2014 which generally share Dai's critique of Tzu-chi, where Tzu-chi recycling volunteers are mentioned, accounts tend to regard the volunteers as ignorant and deluded followers of the organization. Phrases such as 'labour of little value', 'deployed ants',[130] 'slavery at the bottom of Tzu-chi's class-system', 'almost brain-damaged fools', and 'people who are being tricked'[131] are used to describe the volunteers. Some gave suggestions to the volunteers; for example, instead of recycling, the volunteers should alternatively engage in more 'meaningful' environmental work, such as monitoring industrial pollution.[132]

The most significant problem with those descriptions of Tzu-chi recycling volunteers is perhaps that they obscure the volunteers' lived experience. Formulating judgement through victimisation also ignores the meaning that recycling has for the volunteers. To say that recycling volunteering is an opportunity rather than a necessity, that it concerns what people receive from doing such work rather than what they put into it, does not deny the hardships and structural issues. However, doing so recognises the agency and life of the volunteers. The volunteers, like the former mechanic Dong from Chapter Four, see themselves in the discarded materials. Therefore, acts of recovering the value of the unwanted material have distinctive value, and they carry personal meaning beyond that of the organisation. Moreover, ignoring individual consciousness

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[130] The Sunflower Movement. '03202015 Xintaiwan Jiayou Pi Lanpao canxuan? Zhuanxiang Luying? Di San Shili? Lihongyuan Zhuanfang! Zongjiao Fengbao! Guagou Zhengjie Beihou? Zongjiao Xuanmin 2016 Yingxiang li? Taiwan Zongjiao Sida Shantou Lupinchang Beihou?' 新台灣加油 披藍袍參選? 轉向綠營? 第三勢力? 李鴻源專訪 宗教風暴 掛勾政界背後 宗教選民 2016 影響力 台灣宗教 4 大山頭屢拚場背後. Uploaded on 20 March 2015. YouTube video, 97:57 min. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=steBnbCuUck (accessed 13 October 2019).

[131] Chen, Raby. 2018. 'Yitanxue Guoran Shi Jiangjingguo, Wangduanzheng he Zhongyang Ribao Jieru Niezao de Jiagushi' 一灘血果然是蔣經國、王端正和中央日報介入捏造的假故事. Kanqing Ciji Zhenxiang 看清慈濟真相 (blog), 1 June 2018. http://raby123.blogspot.com/2018/06/blog-post.html (accessed 13 October 2019).

[132]Li, Bai-feng 李柏鋒. 2014. 'Da'ai Ganen，Shizai Jiepin Jifu，Haishi Zuo Gongde?' 大愛感恩，是在劫貧濟富，還是做功德. Libaifeng de Kuodaji 李柏鋒的擴大機 (blog), 21 October 2014. https://www.buffettism88.com/2014/10/DaAi.html (accessed 4 January 2016).

exaggerates the individuals' vulnerability and underestimates their resilience. In fact, the Tzu-chi volunteers are quite aware that the achievements of Tzu-chi recycling are the result of their free labour. They do not unconsciously exclude their own labour value in the economic reckoning of recycling results. When discussing Tzu-chi's detailed classification system, the volunteers stated that regular recycling businesses would never do this because 'it would not be cost-effective if they had to pay people to do that'.[133]

While criticism of the victimisation of Tzu-chi recycling volunteers is necessary, it does not contradict the claim in the previous chapter that Tzu-chi recycling volunteers represent a specific group of Taiwanese individuals whom the market economy has utilised and subsequently disposed of. It also does not contradict the previous claim that the Tzu-chi organisation benefits greatly, and not only financially, from the volunteers' contribution. Indeed, the volunteers, their lives and labour, are preyed on in Taiwan's industrial modernisation, and Tzu-chi benefits from utilising their remaining labour capacity. This argument is one side of the story. Nonetheless, simplifying individual actions into the results of socio-economic forces and forms only runs the risk of, as Gowan writes, 'jumping too quickly from what capital needs to what capital gets' (1997, 167). In short, the bigoted descriptions in the public narratives show the danger of seeing things *solely* from the structural perspective. Therefore, I now return to my participant observation to clarify the 'other side' of the story.

4.   Recycling and Re-living

4.1   Somatic Skills and Tacit Knowledge

'Rely on your feelings' was perhaps the advice given most often during the time I learned and observed recycling work at Tzu-chi. Senior volunteers taught me to make sensory observations by interacting with material objects when separating and dismantling waste. 'Listen to the sound it makes when you rub it; if it rustles, it's most likely a PP', said my recycling 'teacher', Mei. For the first three to four weeks of my volunteering in the Bade plastic recycling room, interactions similar to the following one often took place between me and my recycling fellows Mei, Chu, and Shen:[134]

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[133] Interview with two Tzu-chi recycling volunteers at the plastic packaging area of the Kaohsiung Sanmin station (8 November 2014).

[134] Personal communication with Mei and Chu, the Tzu-chi recycling volunteers at Taipei Bade recycling station (21 May 2016).

Mei: This cannot be recycled. This cushion material. [Mei picks up a piece of PU foam from the pile of recycled plastic packaging and gives it to me while squeezing it.] Feel it? Too spongy.

Me: Can the less spongy ones be recycled?

Mei: Like the floor map for the kids, they can be recycled. But this one can't. [Mei hands me another piece of packaging shell while rubbing it.]

Me: What is this? How is this different from egg packaging boxes?

Mei: I don't know what that is. Do you know what this is? [Mei turns to Chu. Chu reaches out to rub the piece of plastic].

Chu: I don't know what it is called, but it cannot be recycled.

Shen: Oh, this sort of foam can be recycled. [Shen hands me a piece of EPE foam.]

Mei: Yes, that is 'E', like guava nets, the fruit packaging.

Chu: This, this too [can be recycled]. A bit shining and smoother. And its price is higher. [Chu hands me another piece of EPE foam in a different form.]

Without knowing the full chemical nomenclature of different materials, and sometimes finding it difficult to identify the artefacts by their materiality, the volunteers demonstrate ways of categorising plastic packaging materials based on common products made from it, the look and feel of different types of film, the smell when the material burns, the sounds it makes, and the shapes of the edges when the film is torn. The coaching style of Mei, Shen, and Chu was not a peculiar case and did not solely concern plastic materials. Another volunteer in the dismantlement area used similar principles to teach me how to dismantle a motor. Commissioner Du had volunteered for Tzu-chi recycling for more than 16 years. When I interviewed her, she was in charge of the stationary work-top at the dismantling area at the Kaohsiung San-min station. Due to the respect that other volunteers showed to Du, I had assumed that the experienced volunteer would use professional mechanical terms to explain the job. However, the instruction terms Du used turned out to be rather casual and subjective. While placing different retrieved metal components in my hand and suggesting that I feel and weigh each item, Du repeated statements like, 'When you see shapes like this, you

do this, and you will find that', and 'This kind of work is learned through touching'.[135]

What implicitly underlies the descriptions in the volunteers' instructions is somatic, tacit knowledge. Harry Collins has explained somatic tacit knowledge as a type of knowledge that 'we cannot tell [...] but we can have it passed on in ways which involve close contact with those who already have it' by referring to the examples of typing on a keyboard or riding a bike (2010, 99). Thus, the know-how of recycling becomes a sort of 'immethodical expertise' which can only be implemented in relation to specific, physical objects in a concrete scenario. An individual can only gain knowledge through an intricate variety of created and shared experience, and the shared knowledge is mostly expressed in various inconsistency (Clifford 1983, 90). In Tzu-chi's lexicon, this process of gaining somatic knowledge is described as a spirit of *zuozhong xue* (做中學), meaning 'knowing through doing'. It is a motto the organisation uses to emphasise the importance of actual practice more than of abstract discussions.

This dependency on flexible and improvised 'rules of the thumb' and the intrinsic, physical properties of the object instead of the rigid application of abstract, invariant principles to gain technical knowhow are familiar to those with a past as manual workers. For the volunteers, the process of *zuozhong xue,* as well as the meticulous and physical labour of recycling—touching and feeling, sorting and separating, moving and packing, tearing up and hammering down—capture a sense of temporally and historically informed sensory presence. This sensory presence and bodily engagement, according to Thomas Csordas, is a 'pre-objective reservoir of meaning' that renders a sense of 'existential immediacy' as a form of self-identity based on the mutualism of body, self, and culture (1994,10). In other words, recycling as an embodiment of somatic skills and tacit knowledge works like a trigger. It evokes a sense of familiarity, a reminder of those habitual practices from the work the volunteers had before their retirement or when they were young. This is akin to the 'memory-in-action' that Bergson (1988 [1896]) has described; that is, memories are enacted in the present as we engage with our surroundings in habitual ways. Recycling, in this register, is a way to bridge the past and the present, creating a continuity in the volunteer's individual biography.

In addition to the somatic expertise of recycling, the physical setting of Tzu-chi recycling provides another layer of material reference to enacting a sense of

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[135] Interview with Tzu-chi recycling volunteer Duo at the dismantling area of the Kaohsiung Sanmin station (8 November 2014).

familiarity. To some extent, the working environment of Tzu-chi recycling stations resembles those of the 'living room factories', a result of 1970s Taiwan's economic policy and national mobilisation to turn private settings such as residential houses or communal areas into production sites for consumer goods (see Chapter Four). Inside Tzu-chi recycling stations, the volunteers disperse into different corners of a room or into a communal square, squatting on stools next to one another and chatting while working, surrounded by piles of objects waiting to be processed (figure 5.5).

In other words, the physical works and working surroundings of Tzu-chi recycling are sentimentally appealing to the volunteers. Different volunteers told me that coming to Tzu-chi and unmaking items takes their minds off worrying thoughts and stops them from becoming immersed in negative emotions, as tends to happen when there are no tasks to be done. For Chiu, those thoughts mostly concerned her children and grandchildren, which created a sense of helplessness because they were not physically present. Shen told me that watching television could worsen her anxiety when she found it difficult to understand what was happening in the 'strange world'. From this perspective, the work and environment of Tzu-chi recycling is an individual 'survival' coping mechanism, while volunteering for Tzu-chi is an attempt to retain a putative coherence that is unavailable in the fragmented, constantly changing living environment and the irreversible flow of time. Recycling work becomes an axis that links the volunteer's present to the past. However, rather than the restorative nostalgia that Boym uses to describe a retrograde attitude which 'gravitates toward collective pictorial symbols and oral culture' (2001, 49), the recollection of the past in Tzu-chi recycling is embodied habit in the present, which is more 'oriented towards an individual narrative that savours details and memorial signs' (*ibid.*). For the volunteers, engaging in something familiar is not a pretext for nostalgia for midnight melancholia but a creative challenge and possibility. This is seen, for example, in Shen's love of being a non-commissioner, which freed her of a sense of obligation and allowed her to determine how much she wanted to commit to the task. For Mei, the volunteering work offered her a chance to explore the world outside her previous life experience. On the other hand, Chiu's commitment to the volunteering work became a source of leverage in her relationship with her husband, a way to bargain for a sense of autonomy, which she otherwise had relatively little of in her married life. In those scenarios, through that nostalgic longing and the sense of familiarity found in the waste work, the volunteers discover that the past is not that which no longer exists, but something that 'act[s]

by inserting itself into a present sensation from which it borrows the vitality' (Bergson 1988, 240, cited in Boym 2007, 16). In this mode of nostalgia, the past and present are not in disjuncture. Instead, as Coleman argues, 'the past is not what has happened […] but what is [still] happening' (2008, 93).

Figure 5.5 Tzu-chi recycling volunteers working in a Taipei district station (photo by the author)

4.2   Aging Together

The volunteers surely have a sentimental attachment to the past, which is manifested in their relaxed, cheerful facial expressions, for instance, when talking about the past in comparison to the present, summoning faded memories of helping families and neighbours while working in the 'living room' factories in the old days. However, they did not always talk about the past. In fact, these topics rarely occurred 'naturally' in the daily conversations. Instead, the most common topic in the volunteers' daily conversations concerned present experience— bodily aging as well as entering old age. As mentioned in Chapter Three, while the majority of the non-commissioned but certified volunteers are between 60 and 70 years old, about 43% percent of Tzu-chi non-commissioned volunteers are older than 70, including nearly 30% of the volunteers who are older than 75. For

this reason, a recycling volunteer in the Bade station once made the slightly exaggerated comment that 'anyone who's younger than 80 would be considered young in recycling stations'.[136]

In this light, it is not strange that the number of one's children and grandchildren was almost a standard part of any self-introduction. Greetings were often coupled with asking about each other's health conditions, and the conversations were laced with tips on choosing doctors, hospitals, and caregivers, along with gossip and jokes. In those moments, the life experiences and problems that were central to the cohort of elderly people and that may be associated with weakness and marginality became sources of solidarity among the Tzu-chi recycling volunteers. A person's experience of mental decline and physical illness became the reference point for others to understand one's own body and state. In those scenarios, the on-going recycling engagement became an affirmation of one's still-functional body and mind. The volunteers used it as a 'piece of evidence' in exchanging mutual consolation and encouragement.

The shared experience was not limited to bodily change, but also included a common awareness of the proximity of death. On a limited number of occasions, when Mei, Chu, and Shen discussed something with a religious grounding, which was not often, they mentioned chanting the sutras at other volunteers' funerals. After, they named the fellow volunteers whom they recently 'sent away' and described memories of them. Once, an 85-year-old comforted a dispirited volunteer who thought of her deceased volunteer friend. The 85-year-old volunteer reminded her that her friend had been 'joyfully doing recycling' before her last days and ended the consolation by remarking that the deceased volunteer set an example for them to 'live fully until the end'.[137] Recycling volunteering, in this context, is evidence of living fully.

The challenge to 'age and die well' was not only a concern among the elderly Tzu-chi volunteers, but also in Taiwanese society as a whole. Within five decades, the demographic structure of Taiwan has experienced a radical change, with an alarming acceleration speed of ageing and a declining fertility rate. As late as the mid-20th century, Taiwan was largely rural, agricultural, and young. At the time, only 2.5% of the population was 'senior', or over 65 (Huang 2010). However, in 1993, the senior population accounted for 7%; and in 2018, it became 14%, and

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[136] Personal communication with a Tzu-chi volunteer at the Taipei Bade station (9 July 2016).
[137] Personal communication with two Tzu-chi recycling volunteers at the Taipei Bade station (8 November 2014).

Taiwan officially entered the era of an 'aged society' according to the standards of the World Health Organisation. Elderly Tzu-chi recycling volunteers represent this brand new generation of an aged population that has not been seen before, a generation that has only recently emerged in Taiwan and in the rest of the world. Facing rapid demographic structural change, Taiwan lacks facilities and long-term care services. In the 1990s and 2000s, corresponding gerontology policies started to emerge. At the time, the provision of social services was transferred from the central government to local governments and NGOs, and community-based support for the needs of the rapidly aging population were implemented (Wang 2013). Among non-profit organisations, rising expectations extend to faith-based organisations, particularly to local congregations, to provide relevant social services (Chang 2015).

The volunteers told stories of people taking their elderly parents to a Tzu-chi recycling station before work and picking them up afterwards.[138] In this context, the Tzu-chi recycling site is described as a 'light safe home' (輕安居[139]), a geriatric day care location where elderly people 'go to work' regularly, in the Tzu-chi lexicon.[140] In these 'alternative' centres for the elderly, free lunches, blood pressure measurements, and medical check-ups are the social welfare services provided, while a variety of tasks that recycling encompasses serve as different physical exercise activities for the participants. In other words, volunteering at Tzu-chi recycling communities has become part of a coping strategy, not only for the volunteers but also for their families, to deal with the structural novelty of having such a large elderly population. This strategy involves a process of mobilising familiar skills, engaging in nostalgic tasks, and being surrounded by people who share similar experiences and challenges related to their phase in life.

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[138] Interview with a Tzu-chi environmental cadre of the Taipei Neihu station at the Annual Volunteer Training event (6 July 2016).

[139] Qingan ju

140 See, for example: Tzu-chi Foundation. 2010. 'Xunhui Shengming de Jiazhi Huanbao Jiaoyu Zhan Chengwei Laoren Xinleyuan' 尋回生命的價值　環保教育站成為老人新樂園. *Cishan Xunxi* 慈善訊息 (news blog), 1 May 2010. http://news.tzuchi.net/tccm.nsf/04a1ed8230e768ac4825685f0033abfa/76998a4bd2b7066 14825771600353288?OpenDocument (accessed 13 October 2019); Lin, Shu-duan 林淑緞. 2010. 'Qingjing Qingan ju Huxin Hu Dadi' 清淨輕安居　護心護大地. *Tzu-chi Foundation Website*, 11 November 2010.www.tzuchi.org.tw/全球志業/臺灣/item/9043-清淨輕安居--護心護大地 (accessed 13 October 2019).

Unit: population
(10,000 persons)
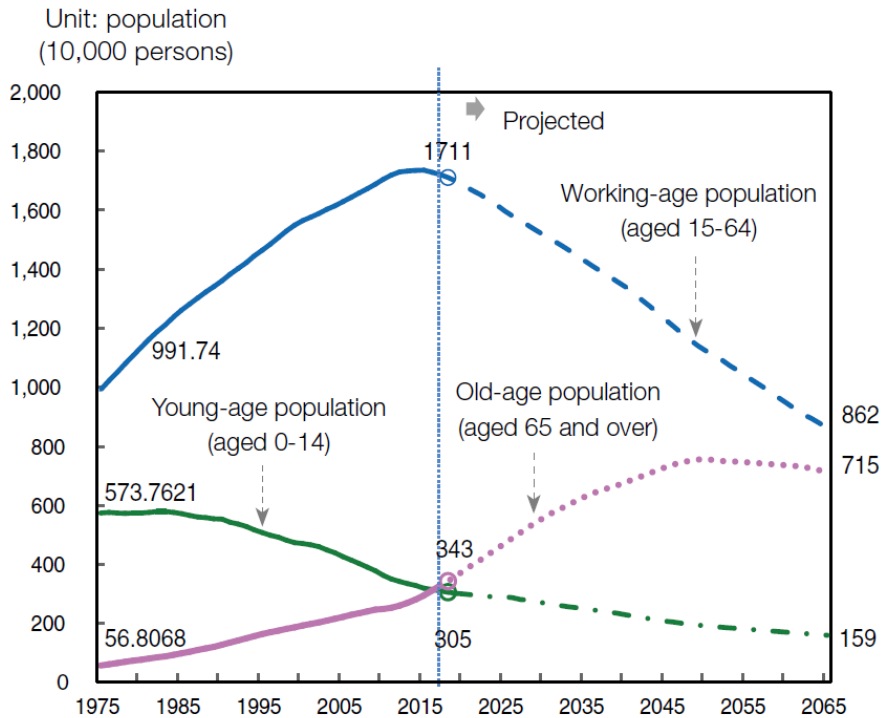
Figure 5.6 Trend in Taiwanese population of three broad age groups, 1975-2065
(Source: National Development Council[141])

5.   Concluding Remarks

Individuals come to Tzu-chi recycling to volunteer because of their past. As the
previous chapter shows, this past concerns their working experience as manual
workers, their once-discarded labour and skill, as well as a central belief in
productivity moulded and embedded in Taiwan's condensed economic transition,
which the volunteers experienced in their youth. Nevertheless, this chapter tells
the other side of the same story by exploring the connection between the
commitment to recycling volunteering and their past from the individual's
perspective. By focusing on the interactions the volunteers have with the
materials and with other people in the station, I show that what motivates the

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[141] National Development Council. 2018. *Zhonghua minguo renkou tuigu (2018 zhi 2065 nian)*
中華民國人口推估(2018 至 2065 年). Taipei, Taiwan: https://pop-
proj.ndc.gov.tw/upload/download/%E4%B8%AD%E8%8F%AF%E6%B0%91%E5%9C%8B
%E4%BA%BA%E5%8F%A3%E6%8E%A8%E4%BC%B0(2018%E8%87%B32065%E5%B9
%B4).pdf

volunteers' commitment is the latent 'remains' from this economic past: the somatic knowhow, interacting with one and another through tacit knowledge, and the factory-like communal work setting. These aspects provide a sense of recognition of oneself, an antidote to cope with the challenges that lie ahead. Those challenges can be at a personal level, such as one's marriage, life changes after retirement, or aging; they also can be at a broader societal level, such as the lack of an elderly care system or, more generally, a rapidly changing and unfamiliar world. In other words, for the volunteers, waste work becomes an active management of the relationship between past and present. They not only use recycling to relive the past, to experience an accustomed ethical self, but they also use it as a means to formulate a preferred reality.

Seeing Tzu-chi recycling volunteering from the volunteers' perspective with their lived and living experiences tells a quite different story of the same content seen from an economic structural view. Instead of mindless followers of religious mobilisation and exploited victims of economic upheaval, the volunteers are also the ones who give meaning to the waste work. To an extent, they are aware of the material, financial, and labour values they supply the organisation. They nevertheless endeavour to perform the tasks, to navigate, and remake themselves through the work of recycling.

Chapter Six |
(Re)Making the Communities
and Locality

1. Introduction

The development of Tzu-chi recycling occurred with the spread and establishment of Tzu-chi recycling communities across Taiwan starting in the early 1990s. Local commissioners and volunteers initiated rubbish collection near their living area, sorting waste materials in the spaces often lent by volunteers' acquaintances and neighbours, and selling the materials to local recycling businesses. Today, some of the larger stations, particularly the district stations or environmental parks, function as a sort of community centre for Tzu-chi volunteers to hold neighbourhood events. At several events in which I participated, the local residents learned about global warming and how to classify waste materials and re-use disposable ones from the Tzu-chi trained environmental lecturers. According to the Tzu-chi official record, in 2015, Tzu-chi's large recycling stations hosted over 45,000 visitors[142] participating in environmental education-related activities. [143] In addition to the environmental events, from time to time, other Tzu-chi local community groups use Tzu-chi

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[142] However, not all visitors are local neighbours of the station. Out of total 863 visiting groups, more than 200 travelled from abroad.

[143] Tzu-chi Foundation, 'he lan Leiden Univ - ciji huanbao fenxiang' 荷蘭 Leiden Univ - 慈濟環保分享 (unpublished document received by personal email to author, 1 June 2016), PDF file.

recycling sites, such as study clubs or the Tzu-chi doctor club members, who give health-care counselling or check-up services to the neighbourhood residents and recycling volunteers. At those events, the volunteers take the opportunity to introduce the organisation and its environmental endeavours to their non-Tzu-chi neighbours.

In this chapter, the focus of the study shifts from *inside* the Tzu-chi recycling stations to the *outside*, from the works of object disassembly to those of material and people assembly. Throughout the chapter, I treat Tzu-chi recycling as a collection of situated local communities characterised by their daily engagements and social networks. The chapter shows that the successive emergence and development of Tzu-chi's local recycling communities is part of the broader social milieu and cultural politics in Taiwan in the 1990s and 2000s, namely, Taiwan's national localisation movement as a whole and the Tzu-chi organisation's communitisation movement in particular. Reading the development and operation of Tzu-chi recycling against this background, I ask: what role did recycling play in the process of Tzu-chi and Taiwan's localisation movement? What 'community' does Tzu-chi's local recycling network form and represent? What cultural imagination and social mechanisms support the community movement of Tzu-chi recycling?

This chapter consists of three main parts. The first provides the background contexts of the Tzu-chi and Taiwanese community-based movements and a case study of the recycling community that arose in both movements. By presenting the case of Jiaoxi Linmei community recycling, I show the pervasive role of recycling in Taiwan's localisation movements. Furthermore, the empirical illustration shows that Tzu-chi recycling has never been an isolated movement of the Buddhism-based organisation. Rather, it intersects closely with other local networks and affairs and influences community development inside and outside of Tzu-chi. In the second part of the chapter, the discussion focuses on the cultural politics of the communitisation movements, highlighting a nostalgic longing for locality which drove the movements of both Tzu-chi and Taiwan. Through a close examination of Tzu-chi recycling collection, I show that the Tzu-chi community forms its recycling network and collects rubbish through employing and restoring traditional mechanisms of social interactions. By doing so, Tzu-chi recycling realises the desired locality. The final part of the chapter, however, complicates the seemingly ideal situation of community recycling and locality-making. I continue with the case study of Jiaoxi Linmei community recycling and analyse it from the perspective of local politics. By paying attention to its later

developmental stage, I argue that the Linmei recycling community, which began in Tzu-chi recycling, represents a local faction that emerged from the localisation movement. I further reveal how local politics is complicated by the lucrative profits and political opportunities of recycling.

2. Taiwanese Localisation Movements, the 1990s-2000s

2.1 The Tzu-chi Communitisation Movement

In the 1990s, Tzu-chi's organisational structure, volunteer participants, and social tasks underwent a series of change aimed at 'localisation'. The policy ideas of 'volunteering communitisation' (志工社區化[144]) and 'walk into communities' (走入社區[145]) the leader Cheng-yen proposed between 1996 and 1997 were the benchmark of this organisational restructure. By then, Tzu-chi's volunteer recruitment scheme had gradually shifted from the early stage of being religion-based and personal-tie-oriented[146] to being community-based; in addition, the structure of the Tzu-chi laity was reorganised and became spatially categorised as the 'Four-in-One' system (Chao and Kau 1993; see Chapter Three). Since then, the volunteers' congregational affiliation is localised according to one's living area.

Moreover, the localisation movement of Tzu-chi parallels the increase of non-commissioned volunteers who come from a variety of walks of life (Chiu 2000). The social backgrounds of Tzu-chi volunteers become more diverse. This further contributes to the growth of different Tzu-chi local groups and activities; at the time of writing, there are approximately 32 kinds of local clubs and groups.[147] The community recycling of Tzu-chi represents one of such emerging functional tasks of Tzu-chi's communitised development. Prior to the formation of these local groups, the primary tasks of Tzu-chi commissioners were commissioner

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[144] zhi gong she qu hua

[145] zou ru she qu

[146] In the previous, personal-tie-oriented model, volunteers were grouped according to the recruitment scheme. The Tzu-chi volunteers refer to the system as 'the hen takes along the chicks' (母雞帶小雞 muji dai xiaoji), describing how new volunteers were automatically assigned to the group of their recruiter and trainer. Chiu Ding-bin summarises that the 'hen-chick' network system was the basis of Tzu-chi's organisation structure. It reflected the religious community characteristics of Tzu-chi and functioned as an emotive mechanism as well as the principle hierarchy of Tzu-chi; from 'Cheng-yen—senior commissioner—new commissioner—backstage commissioner—member' (2000, 106-110).

[147] I regroup the local sub-units into four categories: administrative units for internal affairs (e.g., finance or human resources), functional units for missionary activities (e.g., recycling or media production), supporting units for institutional operations (e.g., cooking for congregations or office maintenance), and titled clubs (e.g., the youth corps or teachers' club).

recruitment, fundraising, and home visits. The new local clubs and units, often initially established by the commissioners (Chang 2008) with assistance from the religion division of the Tzu-chi headquarters, are more directed at tailoring volunteer activities to the volunteers' private interests and preferences (Chiu 2000; Lai 2002).

2.2   The National Community-Making Programme

Tzu-chi's communitisation movement, however, is not an isolated phenomenon. Rather, it resonates closely with the broader social movement of localisation (在地化[148]), which, in Taiwan, was accompanied by political paradigm shifts. Starting in the early 1990s, a new form of governmentality was instituted, and the focus of the cultural policy shifted from 'the centre to the local' through extensive programmes of historical/cultural preservation and community-making (Lu 2002). In the 1990s and 2000s, Taiwan saw an ascending wave of place-based movements the state advanced. The first president-elect, Lee Teng-hui (李登輝), proposed the notion of Taiwan as a 'community of shared fate' (生命共同體[149]). Imagining Taiwan as one community furthered Lee's political agenda of promoting a Taiwan-centred worldview to replace the previous China-centred one which dominated during the Cold War and the post-war authoritarian political regime of the nationalist political party KMT.

Against this background, the national 'integrated community-making programme[150]' (社區總體營造[151]) was launched in 1994 by the Council of Cultural Affairs. Chen Chin-nan (陳其南), a renowned anthropologist who was the chief architect of state's community-making projects as the deputy director (1994-1997) and minister (2004-2006) of Council of Cultural Affairs (CCA), argued that the government was obliged to develop people's communal sentiment and citizen consciousness, as these were necessary in terms of subjective preparedness for a *modern* nation (Chen 1990). A state official's policy book report entitled *The Trajectory of the Taiwanese Integrated Community-Making Programme* declares that the bourgeoning cultural and historical works and events were 'developed out of the Taiwanese localisation movement'. 'Local

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[148] zaidi hua

[149] shengming gongtong ti

[150] Scholars use different English terms to translate this national project. A variety of translations include 'Comprehensive Community Building' (Ho 2012), 'Integrated Community Building' (Lin, Wan-I 2015), and 'Community Total Construction Project' (Chen and Ku 2017).

[151] shequ zongti yingzao

culture,' it continues, 'illustrates the dominant value system of the local community in the context of everyday life', and 'the possible developments of local culture(s) concern the issue of constructing a *community of shared fate'.*[152]

Around the same time, the Ministry of the Interior altered its regulation of community committees. Under the new rule, every administrative neighbourhood and village was entitled and encouraged to develop its own community development association (CDA). The shift in community regulation was part of the political liberation and democratisation process to open up public gathering and civic activities at the time after a long period of political suppression. As a result, nascent NGO community organisations like CDAs, which were self-governed, operated independently, and relied on the voluntary resources of a community, began to bloom and received substantial governmental subsidies and technical support (Chen and Ku 2017). These community groups, particularly CDAs and faith-based local groups, such as Tzu-chi local communities, became the primary local service arena, a gateway to health, educational, social, and recreational resources (Chen and Chen 1998). In addition to a variety of socialisation, physical health, and well-being activities, cultural and historical events were organised at all levels, from communal to national, to celebrate local cultures and traditions. Local festivals and guided tours were developed; folklorists, local historians, and researchers were devoted to revitalising and preserving local traditions through activities such as studying old books, pictures, maps, records, buildings, crafts, and temples and collecting oral histories from locally respected elderly people (Yang 2014a).

3.   A Case Study of the Jiaoxi Linmei Community

I outline the relationships among the three movements: Tzu-chi recycling as a local functional group emerged in Tzu-chi's communitisation movement, which reconciled with the national localisation development and cultural transformation of Taiwan at the time. Instead of being parallel to one another, Tzu-chi's community-based movement interacts with and influences the movement outside of Tzu-chi. Additionally, the waste work of recycling plays a key role in this interaction. The following section shows this entanglement by

[152] Government of Taiwan, Ministry of Culture [Council of Cultural Affairs], *Taiwan shequ zongti yingzao de guiji* 臺灣社區總體營造的軌跡, edited by Su Zhao-ying and Cai Jixun 蘇昭英,蔡季勳. (Taipei: Council of Cultural Affairs, 1999). Accessed 3 October 2019, http://47go.org.tw/article/2003.

presenting the case of community recycling in the Jiaoxi Linmei Village of Yilan County.

3.1   Linmei Community and its Recycling

In the North-eastern corner of Taiwan, the village of Linmei (林美) is situated on the hillside of Jiaoxi   Township (礁溪鄉) in Yilan county. Compared to the touristic areas in the centre of Jiaoxi Township, the primary economic activities of the peripheral Linmei are agriculture-based.[153] The village is populated by scarcely 1,400 residents, 17% of which are elderly. Despite its relatively small scale and remote location, Linmei is nationally known for its community development. In addition to its frequent appearance in news reports[154] and governmental policy promotional materials, [155] the community is a regular winner of governmental community competitions. For example, in 2005, the community association won second place in a national competition held by the Ministry of the Interior for community development, and in 2007, it won first prize in the national environmental community held by the Environmental Protection Administration.

The Linmei CDA was founded in September 2001 by Mr. Pon, the village chief at the time, who was later elected the CDA's chairman of the board. As chairman, Pon appointed Mr. Liang, a Tzu-chi commissioner and recycling volunteer, as the general director of the Linmei CDA. This administrative pair lasted eight years until Pon completed his maximum chairmanship tenure in 2009, and Liang was elected chairman. Under the auspices of the Linmei CDA, a variety of community groups and activities were formed, such as the patrol team, a recreation club for

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[153] Linmei CDA, 'Shequ jieshao' 社區介紹, Yilan xian jiaoxi xiang linmei shequ fazhan xiehui guanfang wangzhan 宜蘭縣礁溪鄉林美社區發展協會官方網站, Yilan xian jiaoxi xiang linmei shequ fazhan xiehui 宜蘭縣礁溪鄉林美社區發展協會, last revised October 2019, www.lm.org.tw/menudetail.php?idNo=51.

[154] For example: Xie, Wen-hua 謝文華, 'Jiaoxi linmei shequ ziyuan bian huangjin' 礁溪林美社區 資源變黃金, *Liberty Times*, 6 July 2005; Lin, Jin-ming 林縉明, 'Jiaoxi zhongyang jinglao, yenai xue tiao maojin cao' 礁溪重陽敬老 椰奶學跳毛巾操, *United Daily News,* 30 September 2014.

[155] For example: Taiwan Executive Yuan Environmental Protection Administration*, Shequ huanjing jiaoyu xuexi shouce: 22 ge shequ gushi* 社區環境教育學習手冊:22 個社區故事 (Taipei: Executive Yuan Environmental Protection Administration, 2007), 145-152; Taiwan Executive Yuan Environmental Protection Administration, *Shequ haogan du 100%: huanjing zaizao 25 li* 社區好感度 100%: 環境再造 25 例 (Taipei: Executive Yuan Environmental Protection Administration, 2012), 152-159; Taiwan Cultural Affair Bureau of Yilan County, *Yilan huojingu* 宜蘭火金姑 (Yilan City: Cultural Affair Bureau of Yilan County, 2013), 74-81.

elderly people, a cooking class for mothers, and home visiting and health service teams. Additionally, many developmental projects of the Linmei CDA are environment-related. They include several tree-planting projects, the building and maintenance of the Shi-pan (石磐) forestry trail, and training eco-tourism guides.

Among many community projects, the recycling programme perhaps counts the most successful development of and for the Linmei community, and it is also the most crucial. The Linmei community recycling team was formed in April 2002 [156] and consisted of about 30 volunteers, mostly women; it was led by Liang's wife, Ms. Hui. For more than 10 years, the Linmei recycling volunteers convened at the square next to the community temple every Monday afternoon, sorting recyclables at the community recycling station, which was made from two purchased intermodal containers. The collected waste materials were not only sourced from Linmei Village, but from across Jiaoxi Township.

Instead of complying with a prevailing notion of recycling as a civic and/or environmental endeavour, the former CDA chairman, Pon, did not shy away from the economic aspect. In his answer to my question about the reason to undertake community recycling, Pon stated: 'With money, the community can develop; without it, it is just like a family without bread, and things will get ugly'.[157] Despite his bluntness, Pon was not the only the CDA associate with whom I spoke who was aware of the recycling economy. When they discussed it, some of them recalled that activities such as collecting and selling empty glass bottles and broken pans to scrap collectors were an 'old-fashioned way' to earn 'some extra cash' that they had known since their childhood.[158] Given the high market price for recycling in the 2000s, the high profits from the community recycling programme—for example, nearly 2.5 million NTD (60,000 euros) between 2002 and 2007[159]—become the prime source of income for the Linmei community (Huang 2008). The Linmei CDA uses considerable funds for its social welfare projects and a variety of community activities, such as student scholarships,

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[156] Although the Linmei recycling team was formed in 2002, it was officially registered as a sub-group of the Linmei CDA in 2014.

[157] Interview with the former Linmei CDA chairman, Pon (28 April 2016).

[158] Interview with Liang, former Linmei CDA chairman, and Hui, former recycling team leader (16 May 2016).

[159] Luo, Jian-wang 羅建旺, 'Huishou wu bian xianjin jiangzhu shequ xuezi' 回收物變現金 獎助社區學子, *United Daily News*, 14 October 2007.

recreational and educational tours, catering lunches and celebratory festival events for elderly people, and insurance for the forestry trail visitors.[160]

3.2   From Tzu-chi to Township to Community

The leader of the Linmei recycling team, Ms. Hui, is also a Tzu-chi commissioner. Together with her husband, Liang, who worked as a train station attendant, the couple have engaged in Tzu-chi recycling since 1991, after they attended a session of Cheng-yen's national touring speech 'Reserving Terrestrial Pure Land', in which recycling and environmental consciousness were addressed. Since then, they have played a crucial role in initiating and developing the Tzu-chi community recycling programme in Jiaoxi Township.

In the early stage, the couple turned the warehouse of the Jiaoxi train station into a recycling station and bought a pick-up truck to visit local shops, schools, and factories, where staff was persuaded to classify (saleable) recyclables for their collection.[161] A variety of participants from different villages of Jiaoxi Township were mobilised to join the couple's endeavour. Together, they constituted the Tzu-chi Jiaoxi recycling community network. In accordance with the state governmental policy of having registered environmental volunteering groups in different local governments, the couple formed the 'Jiaoxi Environmental Protection Volunteering Unit' (礁溪環保工中隊[162], hereafter, the township environmental unit) in 1995. The township environmental unit, which is still operational today, consisted of more than 100 volunteers divided into eight sub-units. When I first met with the Liang-Hui couple in 2016, Liang wore a vest bearing the title of the township environmental unit. He told me about its formation:

> I deployed the people who volunteered in Tzu-chi recycling. All together, we formed a volunteering unit to help the Jiaoxi township office out. If cleaning is needed anywhere, like on mountains or beaches, picking up

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[160] Shen, Hong-yu, '2016 linmei shequ jianbao' 林美社區簡報 (unpublished document received by computer file sharing, 22 May 2016), PPT file.

[161] Lin, Ming-xian 林明賢, 'You rong chun mo mo jinxing laji huishou' 游榮春默默進行垃圾回收, *the Common Daily*, 11 August 1996; Liao, Hong-sheng 廖洪勝, 'You rong chun rongying quanguo shida huanbao yigong ' 游榮春榮膺全國十大環保義工, *United Daily News*, 21 February 2003.

[162] jiaoxi huanbao yigong zhong dui

rubbish, or roads and parks that need to be maintained, removing the weeds or sweeping the street, then we go to do so.[163]

In other words, the Jiaoxi township environmental unit is a morph and an expansion of the Tzu-chi Jiaoxi recycling community. Moreover, one of the eight environmental sub-units of the township is the Linmei sub-unit. When the Linmei CDA was established, the Liang-Hui couple stopped their involvement and environmental cadre positions in Tzu-chi recycling, joined the community development, and turned the Linmei sub-unit of the township unit into the Linmei community recycling team. According to Huang Qiu-fen's interview records of the recycling team members of Linmei in 2007, several other cadres of Tzu-chi Jiaoxi recycling who were members of the township volunteering unit also quit their Tzu-chi engagements and 'followed them [the Liang-Hui couple] to continue the recycling work in the community' (2008, 70-74).

From the Tzu-chi local community in the early 1990s to the governmental unit in the late 1990s and to the CDA in the early 2000s, the Liang-Hui couple's shifting engagement focus is one example of Tzu-chi's role in the (non-Tzu-chi) community-making movement; it also reveals the traces of Tzu-chi recycling's pervasive 'community effect' (Chiu 2000, 135). In developing community recycling, the couple not only utilises the social resources built through their Tzu-chi recycling experience, but to an extent, they also reproduce Tzu-chi's welfare scheme: using the recycling income to support other community activities, such as elderly recreational clubs and scholarships.

The Linmei community is not the only case that exemplifies Tzu-chi's participation in the national community-making project through waste cleaning, and recycling. The Taiwanese sociologist Yang Hung-jen's (2014a) research on the community-making movement of Linbian Township (林邊鄉) in Pingtung County, for example, provides another case that shows the interconnection of community-based development, a local Tzu-chi network, and recycling activities. Similar to the Linmei community, some Tzu-chi commissioners at Linbian Township also played a role in the establishment and success of a local community association: the association for the Linbian Natural, Cultural, and Historical Preservation (林仔邊自然文史保育協會;[164] hereafter, the Linbian Association). According to Yang, one-fourth of the founding members of the Linbian Association were Tzu-chi commissioners. These commissioners were

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also members of the local Tzu-chi recycling community and teachers' club. They actively engaged in (non-Tzu-chi) community affairs; they joined traditional philanthropic and environmental activities, such as street-sweeping and creek-cleaning, that some elderly community members initiated. Later, the commissioners had the resources of Tzu-chi to develop the Linbian Association in its early stages. As Yang has discussed, the community recycling that Tzu-chi members initiated became the funding source for the association's financial costs, a developmental strategy similar to the one in the Jiaoxi Linmei community. Because of several community activities organised with the local Tzu-chi congregation, the Linbian Association began to be publicly known among local residents, and its development flourished (*ibid*, 176-178).

In his master's dissertation, Chiu Ding-bin (2000) also discusses the development of the Tzu-chi local community in Zhongpu Township (中埔鄉), Chiayi County, where the Tzu-chi volunteers mobilised non-Tzu-chi residents and groups to participate in community recycling. Chiu has noted that, by including people from their personal social networks in the work, 'the recycling volunteers no longer see their work as *Tzu-chi's* but as their own' (*ibid.*, 138). The geographical identity and solidarity that emerged through community recycling works were a welcome result; they not only contributed to the fast, extensive spread of Tzu-chi recycling communities, but also to the communities' autonomy (*ibid.*, *136*). The locality that Tzu-chi community recycling materialised, Chiu notes, made 'the volunteers likely to be independent from Tzu-chi's organisational operations' (*ibid.*, 138). This was also very much the case in Linmei.

To briefly summarise, as this section has shown, the case of the Jiaoxi Linmei Community Development Association and its recycling programme exemplifies how recycling—collecting, sorting, and selling discarded materials— as a 'recycled', old-fashioned practice contributed to Tzu-chi's social impact on society, on the one hand, and to the national project of local development and the development of locality on the other. The contribution was made possible by two aspects of recycling. One was its nature as a material exchange and its status as the result of a social network formation. The other was the result of the economic aspect of recycling, in which profits made from selling rubbish, particularly in the context of a thriving secondary material market in the 2000s, supported broader community development. The two features of recycling, to some extent, are also the keys to Tzu-chi's methods and management of recycling; and because the aim is to be 'local', this organisational 'template' could easily be shifted to a non-Tzu-chi context.

4. Modern Community-making through Nostalgic Past-remembering

In this section, the discussion focuses on cultural politics to reveal the driving force which brought forth Taiwan's localisation movement and Tzu-chi's communitisation (recycling) movement. To contextualise Taiwan's localisation movement and community-based development since the 1990s, scholars have argued that the cultural political phenomenon can be seen as a response that paralleled the global shift in valuing locality and pluralism, on the one hand, and Taiwan's local context on the other, in which a continued 'identity crisis' coincided with the call for political democratisation and 'cultural nativism' (Lu 2002; Chang 2004). In her research on the cultural politics of the localisation movement, the anthropologist Lu Hsin-yi has argued that encouraging the development of stronger local attachments in the community-making movement was, moreover, rooted in an anxiety that was widely shared among the intelligentsia at the time: the anxiety of losing traditional lifestyles and senses of cultural authenticity in a fragmented, accelerated world. She notes that this sentiment regarding cultural problems and the proposed solutions took an opposite, 'inward' turn, departing from the sentiment during the early stages of the 20th century, when it consisted of learning from others, the 'advanced civilised countries', which was regarded 'as the remedy to heal and elevate the backwardness of Taiwanese culture' (2002, 34-35).

In concurring with Lu's view, this section sheds light on the nostalgic imagination of locality and community, which undermined the localisation phenomenon. In the policy book report, *The Trajectory of the Taiwanese Integrated Community-Making Programme*, in the late 1980s and 1990s, Taiwan was described as having waning traditional and primary industries, a damaged natural ecology, and rapid urbanisation that led to a chaotic public order and worsened public hygiene. [165] Local residents were strangers to one another, and 'life properties and dignities were challenged as never before' by, for example, inconsiderate land use for commercial and industrial development. In the section 'The Unfolded Directions of Local Cultural Policy', the same governmental report states that the phenomenon of bourgeoning local cultural and historical works and activities was nevertheless a 'response to the sense of alienation caused by rapid change and the

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[165] Government of Taiwan, Ministry of Culture [Council of Cultural Affairs], *Taiwan shequ zongti yingzao de guiji* 臺灣社區總體營造的軌跡, edited by Su Zhao-ying and Cai Jixun 蘇昭英,蔡季勳. (Taipei : Council of Cultural Affairs, 1999). Accessed 3 October 2019, http://47go.org.tw/article/2003.

past educational system in Taiwan', which 'in turn motivated the public to engage in and consume the forgotten yet familiar things'. The report thus declares that the local cultural and historical works and activities 'developed out of the Taiwanese localisation movement, of a nostalgic remembrance of time past and a consolation in homesickness'. In other words, the advocacy of restoring traditional and local cultures originally countered the previous negative portrait of the social atmosphere in post-economic-boom Taiwan. Therefore, intellectuals and the state proposed community-based local identity as a key solution in response to the social and environmental consequences of industrial modernisation, which was welcomed by the public.

The reference points that underlay the formation of phenomenological ideas about 'homelands' and 'folklores' as well as 'community' and 'locality' were thus more historical than geographical. In studying the public narratives regarding the 1970s that were published throughout the 1990s and after, Wang Chih-ming (2007) has identified a nostalgic sentiment in the intelligentsia among scholars, writers, activists, and artists. The 1970s was remembered as an 'age of idealism', when the the KMT authoritarian regime was crumbling, and when the Communist Party of China replaced it as the charter member of the United Nation. The changing political situation and international diplomatic isolation opened up social fields for new political possibilities and compelled intellectuals, particularly those in their 20s through 40s in the 1970s, to advance ideas for social reform. The Taiwanese historian Hsiau A-chin (2005) has described this phenomenon as the emergence of a 'back-to-reality generation', when set of new political and cultural narratives was developed to criticise the predominant sojourn mentality based on a China-centred nationalist historical view. Concurring with Hsiau, Wang has proposed that political movements and quests for a localised identity in the 1990s were a continuity of the 1970s' 'unspoken' efforts of de-Sinicisation in its series of social reforms. However, Wang has observed that, in eulogising the 1970s as a period filled with idealist passions and an unpolluted living environment, the nostalgic 1990s narrative was tinged with a sense of cultural lamentation and saw the turbulence those ideals brought to the 'homeland', thus contributing to a 'commercialised and unauthentic' era of the 1990s (*ibid.,* 29). In other words, the localisation movement in the 1990s was a combination of new and old, two seemingly opposite directions in relation to the 1970s: a progress-based goal of building a modern, democratic society with a local identity, and a retrospective one of restoring traditional lifestyles and culture that was motivated by nostalgic longing.

The nostalgic sentiment and criticism of post-industrial society found among the 1990s' intelligentsia and in the policy-making arena was similar to the tone of Tzu-chi's institutional discourse to advance its communitisation movement. While Chapter Eight discusses the religious and cultural aspects of Tzu-chi's community developmental stage in detail, in short, the organisation's communitisation movement is a part of its effort of 'order reclamation.' This is exemplified by an article on Tzu-chi's official website that introduces the organisation's communitisation development. The article states that, the morally disorderly society Taiwan has become, the necessary charity works were 'spiritual instead of material'. One fundamental 'treatment' for the disorderly situation, as the opening statement on the webpage declares, was to fix and restore interpersonal relations, to 'return to old ways, restoring the warmth and affection found in traditional communities'.[166]

In other words, for Tzu-chi, remaking an ideal local, traditional community means rebuilding social relations. In her advocacy, Cheng-yen uses the term *jue you qing* (覺有情) to describe the type of 'pure', longed-for social relationship that disappeared with pre-industrialised societies. I read the idea of *jue you qing* as 'being aware of and having *renqing*', denoting an individual's empathetic responses when confronted with various situations in daily life. In this sense, the rebuilding of social relations in Tzu-chi's view is to restore the type of social relationship which features *Gemeinschaft* one of Tönnies's dichotomous typology, which denotes a preindustrial, integrated, and small-scale community based on kinship, friendship, and neighbourhood. It is in contrast to its obverse, *Gesellschaft,* which signifies modern associations composed of impersonal, contractual, and amoral ties. To achieve locality, the Tzu-chi organisation puts tremendous efforts into localising volunteer participants and activities to form a 'reciprocal community network of amity and rescue', and it develops care and activities according to perceived local needs.[167] The nativist and traditional sentiment attached to its cultural criticism finds expressions in a variety of emerging community activities. This is still apparent today in the Tzu-chi tea clubs, caring and healing events of 'spreading love in the terrestrial' (愛灑人間[168]), and the

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[166] Tzu-chi Foundation 慈濟基金會, '*ciji shequ zhigong jianjie*' 慈濟社區志工簡介, Tzu-chi official website, 21 April 2008,
https://www.tzuchi.org.tw/%E6%88%90%E7%82%BA%E5%BF%97%E5%B7%A5/%E5%BF%97%E5%B7%A5%E7%A8%AE%E9%A1%9E (accessed 17 September 2019).
[167] *ibid.*
[168] ai sa renjian

moral development classes for children and parents; it also appears in activities involving the elderly, such as home visits, healthcare seminars, and traditional philanthropic endeavours, such as street sweeping and recycling.

5. Tzu-chi Recycling Collections and Social Relations

Among the numerous community operations, groups, and projects that Tzu-chi develops, recycling was a paragon to realise Tzu-chi's ideas of community and yearning for locality. In his research on Tzu-chi's communitisation movement, Chiu states that recycling was perhaps the 'only part that is an actual success' in achieving broader effects in local neighbourhoods (2000, 138). This 'community effect' of Tzu-chi recycling particularly occurs through the work of waste collection. As briefly illustrated in the case of Tzu-chi Jiaoxi recycling, waste collection relies on local personal relations. By looking more closely at the waste works that take place outside of Tzu-chi recycling sites—collecting recyclable materials and getting local residents involved—the following section highlights the social mechanism which supports the formation of Tzu-chi recycling local networks and which creates the locality that Tzu-chi values in its definition of an ideal community.

5.1 Fetching Materials, Building Networks

Tzu-chi recycling sites collect their recyclables from different sources. Apart from walk-in individuals who bring some recyclables and several factories that provide specific discarded items in large amounts, the volunteers gather most of the recyclables outside the site on flat hand carts, scooters, or trucks. Once or twice a week, the volunteers—mostly male commissioners—follow their 'fetching route' in the neighbourhood in the morning and visit the designated community points to gather discarded materials. These collecting points can be someone's home, open air markets, clothing shops, commercial offices, residential complexes, or public buildings.

In most cases, the 'local suppliers' are the volunteers' personal acquaintances. The mother of the head officer of the environmental team turns the front courtyard of her house into a collecting point to gather recyclables from her neighbours and nearby local shops before giving them to the local Tzu-chi recycling station. One Tzu-chi recycling station in Taipei started placing various recycling bins in a flower market every weekend after a volunteer from the station learned of this possibility from his neighbour, who was a vendor at the market. A large clothing

chain store became a Tzu-chi recycling point when the former classmate of a relative volunteered at the Tzu-chi recycling station near the clothing store spoke to the store manager.

In addition to relying on connections via personal acquaintance, Tzu-chi volunteers sometimes develop their collecting network geographically by proactively knocking on their neighbours' doors. The volunteers bring home-made handouts with Tzu-chi's environmental narratives or couplets of Cheng-yen's 'words of still thought' (靜思語錄[169]) to nearby shops and neighbours to advocate recycling practices and promote Tzu-chi's environmental thinking. Occasionally, the volunteers encounter potential recyclable suppliers within the neighbouring area. For example, a commissioner volunteer from a Yilan recycling station approached a bookstore and asked for permission to collect recyclable materials after finding discarded magazines piled outside.[170] Another such incident occurred when Tzu-chi added plastic packaging materials to its recycling list in 2008. A commissioner learned from the owners of a fruit vendor and a laundry store where she often shopped that both businesses dealt with and disposed of large amounts of plastic film. At an annual gathering of Tzu-chi recycling volunteers, the commissioner shared her experience with the crowd and encouraged the volunteers to visit fruit and laundry stores near their station. During a subsequent interview, the commissioner jokingly described herself as a 'search engine' to illustrate how she mobilised her knowledge of her living space and local social network to contribute to developing a new collection network of plastic packaging materials.[171]

The social networks that underlie Tzu-chi's collecting practices are what Fei Xiao-tong has referred to as a 'differential mode of association' (差序格局[172]), that is, 'a pattern which is composed of distinctive networks spreading out from each personal connection'. This means that each participant is at the centre of a unique network composed of one's particular social ties, while other people in this network also have their own network of social relations (1992, 71). An individual is usually simultaneously involved in several different groups in different contexts; for example, one might be a relative as well as an old classmate, or a

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[169] jingsi yulu

[170] Interview with Tzu-chi commissioner volunteering in Dong-gong recycling station in Yilan (28 April 2016).

[171] Interview, Tzu-chi environmental cadre volunteering in Xindian recycling station (14 July 2016).

[172] chaxugeju

neighbour as well as a vendor at the flower market. The continuous, intersecting, and overlapping webs of Tzu-chi volunteers' personal and geographical relations together lead to an on-going process of local network formation.

In addition to the daytime kerbside collection, some Tzu-chi recycling stations have recently begun establishing collection schemes at designated locations[173] called 'evening environmental protection points' (夜間環保據點[174]). Generally, on Wednesday and Sunday nights, when the municipal recycling trucks are off-duty, Tzu-chi recycling volunteers gather at designated communal spaces in the neighbourhood, such as community parks, to collect and sort materials from neighbouring households and shops. The volunteers sort the recyclables into primary categories on site. A more straightforward reason that the volunteers, particularly the commissioners with day-time jobs, participate in the evening scheme is because it offers them an additional occasion to engage in their recycling volunteering. Furthermore, within the on-average 30 to 60 minutes of collecting and sorting, recycling is no longer confined to the Tzu-chi premises, or what could be called its spatial territory, but instead takes place in open spaces. Greeting and chatting with neighbours and the families of other volunteers makes the space communal. Engaging in recycling in one's own neighbourhood offers the volunteers an opportunity to express and perform their Tzu-chi identity in front of relatives and neighbours. Such a demonstration is not limited to the individual level, but also occurs on the community level. For Tzu-chi recycling communities, the evening scheme offers an occasion to be seen by and actively interact with their neighbours so that the public, who are less aware of the organisation, can recognise their Tzu-chi neighbours' endeavours, while the volunteers can discuss proper recycling with the public. A volunteer described this recognition as a process of turning a 'faceless organisation into the hard work of someone you know'; further, the volunteer suggested, 'people tend to give things to someone they already know'.[175]

5.2   Collecting Materials, Exchanging Renqing

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[173] Xiong's (1999) research on how Tzu-chi community recycling came to be in the Keelung region in the early 1990s, however, has documented that, in the early stage, many Tzu-chi volunteers began recycling by having a designated collection point in the neighbourhood. The Tzu-chi recycling gradually switched to the kerbside collection scheme in order to avoid unsorted trash dumping and to cultivate the public's knowledge of waste classification.

[174] yejian huanbao judian

[175] Interview with a female Tzu-chi certified recycling volunteer working in the evening recycling at zhong-xing park in Taipei (8 April 2015).

In Taiwan, there are multiple conduits through which to dispose of household recyclables. In addition to regular municipal collection at designated locations, a variety of private businesses also provide collection services. Some larger recycling businesses, such as those that act as middlemen or depots, pay for recycled materials. However, these locations are usually on the outskirts of the city. and they expect a significant quantity of materials per deal. Therefore, most residents give their recyclable materials for free to municipal collections, individual recyclers, or community recycling groups such as Tzu-chi. In those cases, the material exchange of recyclable collections is not an economic transaction, and there is space for other, non-monetary mechanisms and symbolic interpretations to play a salient role. In the case of Tzu-chi recycling, a traditional mechanism of social exchange is one important factor.

When approaching their non-Tzu-chi associates to ask them to choose Tzu-chi as their chosen conduit, the volunteers not only use the 'institutional sayings', for example that Tzu-chi recycling means doing good for the environment and philanthropic endeavours, but they also address their personal involvement and experience with Tzu-chi. A commissioner from a Kaohsiung recycling station told me that, from the supplier's view, choosing Tzu-chi as the recipient of waste materials, and from the Tzu-chi volunteer's view, choosing the supplier to provide pick-up services, was mostly the result of 'having connections' (有認識[176]).[177] The commissioners often use culturally specific terms to explained that for example to give the organisation recyclables is an act of *tau sann kang* (湊相共, in Taiwanese Hokkien), meaning to help out; a way of 'doing *renqing*' (做人情[178]), that is, converting reciprocity in a social relationship into a resource; or a 'consideration of someone's *mianzi*' (看人面子[179]), which can be understood as paying someone due respect. Additionally, the effort of introducing Tzu-chi recycling to unknown neighbours is described as an act of 'realising benevolent yuan' (結善緣[180]), the natural affiliations between people and connections of fate.

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[176] you renshi
[177] Interview with a female Tzu-chi commissioner volunteering in the Sanmin Jing Si Hall recycling station (8 November 2014).
[178] zuo renqing
[179] kan ren mian zi
[180] jie shan yuan

Figure 6.1 Tzu-chi evening environmental protection point in Taipei (photo by the author, 2015)

By using these culturally specific terms, which connote normative principles that regulate social interactions with others, volunteers suggest that Tzu-chi recycling collection is a process of social exchange. One primary rule of the social exchange process is the concept of *renqing*. *Renqing*, a Chinese term which denotes a kind of resource that 'an individual can present to another person as a gift in the course of social exchange' (Huang 1987, 956), is a well-developed concept commonly used in everyday settings. In his research on interpersonal behaviour patterns and rules of exchange in Taiwan, Hwang Kwang-kuo (1987) has argued that *renqing,* as a derivative of the reciprocity norm, is the social mechanism that individuals use to influence others when striving for desirable resources and to maintain a possible relationship. Giving someone *renqing* can mean that a giver recognises the receiver's social position and prestige, which translates into the phrase of giving someone *mianzi*, i.e., paying respect to the receiver's face.

Moreover, Tzu-chi volunteers' interpretation of seeking social relationships with strangers in a community as a way of realising *yuan* (natural affinity) further demonstrates the ways in which traditional social mechanisms shape Tzu-chi recycling collection. On the one hand, the concept of *yuan* reflects a traditional Chinese view of interpersonal relationships, in which destiny plays a role when

individuals regard their 'unexpected' meeting as a predestined occurrence that will lead to a happy result, and they thus attempt to assimilate each other into their personal social networks. For example, when explaining how the recycling station in Taipei established a collecting point in the flower market, a volunteer described his encounter with a neighbour as destined *yuanfen* (緣分). On the other hand, individuals also actively employ such references to fate in social interactions with strangers when trying to persuade them to provide the desired resources. In this case, it is an altercasting process to transform an initially ephemeral and instrumental relationship into a longer, emotive one by first involving the potential resource allocator in the volunteer's social network. Subsequently, the volunteer interacts with the potential resource allocator through the reciprocity norm of *renqing*.

However, it should be noted that Tzu-chi recycling volunteers do not necessarily always petition for recyclables and that the recyclable providers always take up the role of resource allocator. Providing the collection service can also be a favour when, for example, certain waste materials are unwanted in the industry because of low market prices. In 2018, one of my respondents from the recycling industry, a van recycler, contacted me to ask for Tzu-chi contacts in the hope that the Tzu-chi stations near his working area could take some recyclables, such as soft plastic or Tetra Pak packaging from the schools. The businessman could not find buyers in his own network. While inquiring, both the recycler and my Tzu-chi contact asked me how familiar I was with the other party. It was an example of a process of evaluation, i.e., assessing the type of interpersonal tie, to determine how much *renqing* should be employed and, accordingly, to what extent the resource allocation was suitable.

In short, the traditional reciprocal mechanism of social exchange underlies and fosters the social network of Tzu-chi recycling collection. The way the local network is constituted, whether as the reorganisation of existing sets of social relations or a call to form new sets of social relations, operates through individual interpersonal relationships and is grounded in the concreteness of everyday life and familiarity with the place and the people in one's living area. Further, the constitution and operation of Tzu-chi's local collecting networks consist of the development and management of 'normatively defined and strictly personal relationships' through the 'specific prescribed ritual behaviour' (Fei 1992, 22). In this setting, instead of waste items, which are only pollutants to be dealt with, also become symbolic resources in the course of social exchange, the cultural currency of *renqing*, and the physical threads with which open-ended webs of potential

connectivity are woven. The discarded materials both reveal and shape the social worlds of Tzu-chi recycling's local communities. Along the way, the Tzu-chi recycling community as a whole is constructed through the realisation and materialisation of its locality.

However, the social relation-driven characteristic of community recycling exposes the paradoxical nature of the community-making movement, or, to be more precise, an overlooked aspect in the idealist imagination of locality promoted in the localisation movements of both Tzu-chi and Taiwan. This lies in the pre-existing politics of the pre-existing social relations. In both Tzu-chi and the governmental advocacy to restore traditional social relations and develop community groups, the narratives seemed to imply that no or only fragmented local social relations and groups remained after rapid social changes and urbanisation. Therefore, the aim was to restore what had been 'lost'. Nonetheless, in practice, this narrative did not ring true in a countryside township like Yilan Jiaoxi, where local factions have dominated local politics for decades. The new local recycling community simply joined the game and further complicated local politics, as I illustrate in the next section.

6.   Local Factions of Environmental Protection and Recycling

In 2016, when I visited the Linmei community, the situation was somewhat different from the earlier depiction. The Liang-Hui couple had ended their involvement in the Linmei CDA and the community recycling after the husband finished the tenure of the third chairmanship in 2013. The former chairman, Mr. Pon, and the new chairman, Mr. Wen, were no longer on speaking terms with the couple. Compared to 30 regular recycling volunteers years earlier, in 2016, there were fewer than eight in the community recycling team. Those eight included Wen's wife, Jia, as the team leader, Wen's sister-in-law, one of the two 'remaining' volunteers from the previous team, and Wen's brother, who was in charge of recycling collection once or twice a weekend. The annual revenue of recycling was about one-fifth of the previous income. Meanwhile, various community development projects and activities, including the forestry trail, had been halted.

Throughout the interviews that I had with different key figures of the CDA, I could sense the tension within the community, particularly between the Liang-Hui couple and both the former chairman, Pon, and the current chairman, Wen. While the Liang-Hui couple and Pon avoided the topic, Wen and Jia described several incidents to me to express their frustration with the Liang-Hui couple and their

followers—the 'previous group of people'—as Wen and Jia sometimes referred to them. The incidents mostly revolving around two issues: the allocation of resources and benefits and a boycott of the new authority's management.

Local factions (地方派系[181]) provide a vantage point from which to better understand the rise and 'fall' of the Linmei CDA and its recycling programme. This basic argument has two parts: first, Liang and Pon's administrative effort to establish the Linmei CDA was a new 'dyadic alliance' (Landé 1977, xiv) *vis-à-vis* the traditional bi-factionalism that had dominated the local politics of Jiaoxi township for many decades. Second, the mobilisation of Linmei village residents into groups of community volunteers and participants largely took place through the key figures' personal bonds of acquaintanceship. However, the management of the factional membership depended heavily on the vertical dyadic alliances of patron-clientelism.

In his seminal work on factional politics in Taiwan, the political science scholar Chen Ming-tong (1995; 1996) asserts that a faction is a set of multiple networks of personal associations of indeterminate membership established with the collective goal of appropriating and distributing the resources of public and quasi-public institutions. Since the post-war years, local factions have operated in Taiwan and exerted tremendous influence on Taiwan's local governments and elections (Chao 1992; Bosco 1994; Braig 2016). While urbanisation, rising levels of education, and the political and economic transitions since the 1990s have decreased the influence of local factions, in some places, particularly in rural areas, local factions remain active. Jiaoxi Township is one example of this. According to Chuang's (2010) empirical study on Jiaoxi Township factions, the bi-factionalism between the Lin Faction (林派[182]) and the Wu Faction (吳派[183]) has dominated and shaped Jiaoxi local politics since the 1950s. The local elections of, for example, township councilmen, farmers' association representatives, village chiefs, and CDA chairmen are all political arenas for the two factions to compete with one another. From 1993 until 2010, 69% of the candidates for CDA chairmen in Jiaoxi Township were related to a faction, of which 44% consisted of Lin-faction-oriented candidates, and 25% were Wu-faction-oriented candidates (*ibid*, 109-112).

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[181] Difan paixi

[182] in pai

[183] wu pai

In his research, Chuang classifies both Pon and Liang as Wu-faction-related CDA chairmen. However, according to my interviews with Pon and Liang, the situation was rather more complicated than this simple categorisation suggests.[184] First, regarding to Pon's political association, when Pon founded the Linmei CDA in 2001, he was still a member of the Lin faction; after the violent conflict between the two factions in 2003, he switched to the Wu faction.[185] At the time, as a Lin faction member, Pon's primary goal in establishing the Linmei CDA was not to carve out more political power for the Wu faction. Instead, it was to gain office resources, namely governmental subsidies, because of the competition Linmei village had with its neighbour, a slightly larger village, San-min, whose village chief also belonged to the Lin faction.

Secondly, with regards to Liang's political association, instead of seeing Liang as a Wu faction member, based on my fieldwork research, I propose that the Liang-Hui couple and their associated environmental volunteers represented a new local faction in Jiaoxi Township, one I refer to as the *huanbao*[186] faction. As different forms of associational activity, both factions and communities are guided by similar traditional principles of the interpersonal mechanisms of forming networks and balancing *renqing*.[187] Beginning within the Tzu-chi context and extending beyond it to the township unit, the recycling community network the Liang-Hui couple led emerged from the place-based movement and developed into a local faction when competitions over public resources ensued. The *huanbao* faction aimed to acquire two types of resources: recyclable materials and governmental resources.[188] It should be noted that the national recycling system was advanced only roughly until the early 2000s (see Chapter Three),

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184 Interviews with Mr. Pon (28 April, 6 May 2016); interviews with Liang (15, 16 May 2016).
185 According to Chuang, Pon represented the Lin faction to participate in a temple representative election in 2003. However, the election ended in a group fight because of the controversial actions of a leading member of the Lin faction. Chuang notes in his research that Pon later switched to the Wu faction without giving an explicit time period and reason. In 2016, when I asked Pon about his decision to change factions, the man who had publicly announced his retirement from public affairs responded with a brief answer that there is 'no need to mention those things anymore. It's all in the past'.
186 Although recycling was the primary task of the Liang-Hui couple and the township environmental unit, it was not the only one. The local group also engaged in street-sweeping, tree-planting, and public building cleaning. Therefore, I use *huanbao* to refer to the group, an abbreviation of environmental protection (huanjing baohu) in Chinese.
187 Interview with Mr. Wen (28 April 2016); Interview with Mr. Pon (28 April 2016); Interview with Jia, the current community recycling team leader of the Linmei CDA (22 May 2016).
188 Interviews with Mr. Liang and Ms. Hui (15, 16 May 2016).

which further contributed to the general increase in the monetary value of recyclable materials in parallel to its booming market on a global scale. Before that, or at least when Tzu-chi, the Liang-Hui couple, and the Jiaoxi township environmental unit began their community recycling engagement in the 1990s, most discarded recyclable materials were 'valueless' and 'ubiquitous', and so the concern regarding acquiring rubbish materials was more associated with social stigmatisation towards waste works than with competition for valuable resources.[189] However, some recyclable materials with a historically developed secondary material market—such as waste paper, aluminium, and metal cans— were already regarded as valuable economic resources. According to a 1996 newspaper article in the *Common Daily*, valuable waste resource allocation between the *huanbao* faction and the municipal cleaning crew was already a source of conflict at the time. According to the article, a 'greedy' representative of Jiaoxi Township asked a local military base for their 'donation' of significant amounts of economically valuable discarded cardboard boxes to the *huanbao* faction instead of the township cleaning crew.[190]

In addition to recyclable rubbish, a government-related asset formed another primary resource whose allocation transformed a local social network into a local political faction, the *huanbao* faction. In the 1990s and 2000s, while environment-related issues were a prime policy focus across the board from central to local governments, policies provided abundant resources—subsidies, facilities, awards etc.—for the public to develop relevant projects, such as environmental education, waste management, and green beautification. By virtue of their environmental endeavours, the Liang-Hui couple was publicly recognised, appearing in media reports and receiving numerous awards and opportunities for numerous 'studying trips' outside the county and abroad.[191] The unit was equipped with various kinds of equipment and rewards.

In other words, the prime bases of the rise and success of the Linmei CDA were a dyadic alliance between the power constellations of the established cluster of Pon and an emerging one, the Liang-Hui couple. According to Landé, as the basic element of a faction, a dyadic alliance is a 'voluntary agreement between two

[189] Liao, Hong-sheng 廖洪勝, 'You rong chun rongying quanguo shida huanbao yigong ' 游榮春榮膺全國十大環保義工, *United Daily News*, 21 February 2003.

[190] Lin, Ming-xian 林明賢, 'You rong chun mo mo jinxing laji huishou ' 游榮春默默進行垃圾回收, *the Common Daily*, 11 August 1996.

[191] Luo, Jian-wang 羅建旺, 'huanbao daren yourongchun xiayue fumei guanmo' 環保達人游榮春下月赴美觀摩, *United Daily News*, 23 August 2007.

individuals to exchange favours and to come to each other's aid in the time of need' (Landé 1977: xiv). With the governmental community-making project providing political opportunities and economic resources and the recycling works of the *huanbao* faction and pre-existing factional network of Pon providing social relations and economic resources, the Linmei village 'made' their community successful for more than a decade.

In addition to the politico-economic interest exchange, two other kinds of symbolic interest played a role in gluing the two parties of the Linmei CDA together. One concerned waste, and the other was related to bi-factionalism. First, both Pon and the Liang-Hui couple gained their local political power because of their engagement in waste-related movements. The tea businessman Pon began his 'unplanned' political career after his participation in the township 'garbage war', a series of local protests against the township government's unsanitary waste dumping in the mountain region near Linmei village in 1990, when a nearby landfill reached its full capacity. During the interview, Pon showed me a picture of himself sitting in front of a township waste truck to block its entry, laughing proudly about the nickname he received as a result: an environmental hoodlum (環保流氓[192]). The similar background against which they rose to their positions gave Pon and the Liang-Hui couple a sense of shared identity in relation to environmental concerns and protecting their home. Their other shared ideology was the attempt to use their cross-political alliance [193] and the development of their marginalised village to transcend and overhaul the rigid tradition of Jiaoxi bi-factional conflicts between Lin and Wu factions.[194]

Although the dyadic alliance between Pon and Liang is a horizontal relationship, factions in general are mainly built up of vertical dyadic relationships of the patron-client type (Braig 2016). In vertical dyadic relationships, the patron—the high ranking, resource-rich, or influential person— represented by both Pon and the Liang- Hui couple, trades favours in return for support and loyalty from the client. This is clearly seen in the relationships between the Linmei community (recycling) leaders and the recycling volunteers. When describing what

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[192] huanbao liumang

[193] According to Chuang (2010), although in Jiaoxi, the local factions have more direct influence on local politics and elections than the two main political parties, KMT and DDP, the Lin faction is more associated with KMT, and the Wu faction is more associated with DDP. In an interview with one professor who had conducted long-term research on the Linmei community, I was told that, in principle, Liang's political ideology is more inclined towards KMT and Pon's towards DDP.

[194] Interview with a university professor (28 April 2016).

motivated the villagers to volunteer for community recycling, all key figures addressed the importance of providing 'welfare' (福利[195]) and 'feedback' (回饋[196]) to the individuals as frequently as was necessary or possible. In the conversations, different respondents found my suggestions of environmental concerns or senses of sisterhood as the motivation for their recycling engagement rather 'naive'. The current recycling team leader, Jia, responded: 'That's not how it works in the countryside'.[197] Jia's suggestion is in line with the characteristics of factional membership according to Landé, who has argued that members have 'greater concern with power and spoils than with ideology or policy' (1977, xxxii). In the case of Linmei recycling, the favours given to the volunteers can be material (for example, bicycles, umbrellas, and festival gifts), opportunities to attend recreational/touring trips outside of the country, or reputational (e.g., nomination for national environmental volunteers or engaging in activities at the patrons' home), but not monetary (income or paid work positions) because of the voluntary nature of community recycling.

Regarding the favour-exchanging nature of factions, political science scholars maintain that, although the method secures factional memberships, it also turns them into precarious and contingent ones (Landé 1977; Bosco 1992; Chen 1996). Roughly between 2011 and 2012, the alliance between Liang and Pon began to fade. At the time, Pon was no longer the CDA chairman or the village chief. Meanwhile, the governmental subsidies also began to decrease, and the secondary material market deteriorated. The changing conditions imposed challenges for power and spoils and caused competition between the Liang and Pon vertical factions. After a series of factional struggles in the following years, Pon announced his retirement from community affairs, and the Liang-Hui couple and almost all previous environmental volunteers stopped their community engagements in Linmei. Some of them 'returned' to the recycling community that had existed before the Linmei CDA. When I visited in 2016, the wife, Hui, regularly volunteered at a Tzu-chi recycling site, while the husband, Liang, still organised the township unit. However, the couple was not as actively engaged as before. The *huanbao* faction, which emerged from Tzu-chi's local community and was empowered by recycling, trailed off after more than two decades of expansion and transition.

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[195] fuli

[196] huikui

[197] Interview with Jia, the current community recycling team leader of the Linmei CDA (22 May 2016).

7.   Concluding Remarks

This chapter elucidates the role of cultural meaning, social mechanisms, economic power, and the political opportunity recycling plays in a communal setting and in Taiwan's localisation movement starting in the 1990s. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, after an authoritarian political regime crumbled, leading to waves of social-political reforms, Taiwan saw community-based movements in almost all social fields. While the Taiwanese government established a related national policy of community-making, people responded with establishments of locally based associations, mobilising local social networks and organising a variety of activities. Tzu-chi community recycling is one such example that is contextualised in the Tzu-chi organisation's own communitisation movement. In this national phenomenal development, community as a geographical administrative unit and 'local place' as a conceptual idea became an indication of an authentic social lifestyle and consciousness. A nostalgic past and traditional social mechanisms became resources for building a civic, modern society that offered a cure for modern problems.

In this cultural political atmosphere, community recycling provides a landing place for the ideas intellectuals, policy-makers, and religious philanthropists imagined of a locality. The old-fashioned activity of recycling, particularly its waste collection and network constitution, is the nexus of an inextricable convergence of daily life, place, and material and social relations. Doing community recycling dialectically interacts with the local knowledge and indigenous category of 'being a person', i.e., following the traditional norms of social interaction. It informs local collective identity when the development is entangled with the idea of protecting one's living environment from waste pollution. If it is strong enough, this aspect of local recycling practice can become detached from its original setting, as with Tzu-chi in the case of Jiaoxi Township, and become a part of local affairs.

In the postscript of an influential book on Taiwan's community movement, the sociologist Yang Hung-jen's *Making Community Work: a Case Study of Linbien*, Lee Ding-zan, another Taiwanese sociologist, rhetorically describes the Taiwanese community-based movement as a work of 'mysterious engineering of life' (神秘的生命工程[198]). Lee says that this engineering process entails a series of transitions and integrations between the seemingly binary oppositions of

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[198]   shenmi de shengming gongcheng

elite/public, discourse/practice, and public activist groups/traditional community associations, and it 'gives birth to a new life entity [as a community] with its own kinetic energy' (2014, 388-389). To a large extent, my study of Tzu-chi community recycling is aligned with Lee's observations. However, reality is not a vacuum awaiting the implementation of new ideas, practices, and relations, nor are local networks and interpersonal relationships simply a utopian image in which everyone lives harmoniously and orderly. While Yang's work on Linbian Township stopped at the phase in which a community is 'made' and people are mobilised, I use the case of the Linmei to offers a view of the longer effect of seeing how a mobilised community continues to operate and evolve with its 'kinetic energy'.

As illustrated in the last part of the chapter, on-the-ground, pre-existing social relations, and local politics, for example factional politics and patronage, work hand in hand with the traditional mechanisms of social exchange and networking. Recycling became the representative activity to materialise a community movement not only because of its capacity for supporting the local network constitution and practice of traditional social norms, nor solely because of its environmental connotations. It is also for its other 'traditionality' as a source of income and its 'newness' as a political opportunity. To continue with Lee's rhetoric, these aspects of community recycling, as seen in the case of Jiaoxi Linmei, can be likened to social and economic fuel that produced energy and powered the community development. It gave the association its financial autonomy to develop various social welfare projects accordingly, and from there, gain public recognition. The empowered, successful Linmei CDA was like a well-running engine. However, after nearly a decade of operation, the engine failed as the dyadic political alliances collapsed, subsequently slowed, and nearly stopped when the fuel, the financial resources and political opportunities, dropped significantly. Thus, recycling lost its former status of being embraced by local residents and community volunteers.

Chapter Seven |
Recycling and Religion:
A Humanistic Buddhist Approach

'Once human minds are purified, the land on which all living beings depend can be purified; once the land is purified, earthly disasters can be stopped'.[199;200]

'Recycling is a recollection and reclaiming of the discarded life of material objects. Much the same as a return-soul exhibits its life after rebirth, recycling is a material reincarnation'. [201;202]

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[199] See Appendix , quotation 7.1 for Chinese text and pin-yin; the English translation here is the author's.

[200] Cheng-yen 釋證嚴 and editors of Ciji YueKan 慈濟月刊編輯群, 'Ciji 45 zhounian xingru chanhui famen' 慈濟 45 周年 行入懺悔法門, *Ciji Yuekan* 慈濟月刊 [Ciji Monthly] 533, April 2011, http://web.tzuchiculture.org.tw/?mp=2061#.W6zt6sIyW70 (accessed on 17 September 2019).

[201] See Appendix , quotation 7., for Chinese text and pin-yin; the English translation here is the author's.

[202] Cheng-yen 釋證嚴, *Qingjing Zai Yuantou* 清境在源頭. (Hualian: Ciji wenhua chubanshe 慈濟文化出版社, 2010), 28.

1. Introduction

As Tzu-chi's recycling activities spread starting in the early 1990s, the organisation developed a series of environmental narratives to encourage and support the community movement and volunteering engagement. Terms such as 'environmental protection' (環境保護[203]), 'climate change', and 'global warming' began to appear in the founder Cheng-yen's public speeches and official Tzu-chi publications (Lee and Han 2015). These environmental narratives were soon integrated into the larger institutional discourse. Through speaking about the 'abnormality' of our social and physical environment, Tzu-chi has formulated a distinctive discourse, often religiously inflected, to address why this is so to help its followers understand how humans relate to nature; it therefore hopes to encourage the act of recycling.

In this and next chapter, Chapters Seven and Eight, I focus on Tzu-chi's environment-related discourse and examine Tzu-chi recycling from the perspective of the Tzu-chi organisation. The primary mission of both chapters is to explore the ways in which narratives of religion, traditional value, and environmentalism come into play in Tzu-chi recycling. I ask how Tzu-chi makes environmental issues and recycling action meaningful to its members and to the organisation itself. Three layers of inquiry underlie this investigation. The first is the representation of recycling and its relation to environmental concerns; the second is how Tzu-chi's environmental narrative resonates with the broader religious and cultural teaching of Tzu-chi's leader, Cheng-yen; and the third is how Tzu-chi's environment-related narrative corresponds to the social context of Taiwan.

The discourse analysis of both chapters primarily draws on a selection of Tzu-chi's environment-related organisational publications. The analysis traces specific aspects of the argument that recur in Tzu-chi's environment-related narratives.[204] By positioning language as an intermediary between self and world, as scholars such as Jim Cheney (1995) have suggested, environmental narratives tend to take an ethical approach to cultivate thinking about humanity's relationship with and existence in nature, which they charge with valuation and instruction. As Tzu-chi tends to use rhetoric and metaphors when formulating its environmental narratives, I keep Thomas Farrell's proposition on rhetoric in

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[203] huanjing baohu
[204] See Chapter Two for discussions of the material selection and analysis.

mind that this approach is a 'quest for meaning' that takes place through the efforts of 'instantiating and refiguring possible categories and criteria through the world of action' (1991, 195). In other words, the analysis here takes an interpretive stance towards the 'truth' the narratives aim to describe. It sees them as a reflection of the organisation's ethical views and places more emphasis on the communication through which ideas are expressed.

I should note that two primary kinds of environment-related narratives appear in Tzu-chi institutional discourse. One consists of organisational slogans and catchphrases—such as the rhymed phrases 'five grounds for environment protection' (環保五地[205]) and the 'seven ways of engaging in environmental protection' (環保七化[206])—which instruct about recycling practice and relate environmental concern to different aspects of everyday life. [207] The other kind more concerns ideologies, beliefs, and norms, including more elaborative articulations of the environment, society, and the inner-self nexus. While my analysis mainly focuses on the last of these, it is not always easy to identify the type of Tzu-chi's narratives, instrumental or philosophical. One example is the popular motto *qingjing zai yuantou* (清淨在源頭), which can be translated as 'clean purity at the fountainhead'. Although this phrase denotes Tzu-chi's Buddhist teaching on the saliency of mental purity, in fact, Tzu-chi members use it more instrumentally to educate the public to wash recyclables at home, the 'source' of discarded materials, before bringing them to recycling stations, as the cover of Tzu-chi's 2010 anniversary book explains. In other words, the presentation of Tzu-chi's environment-related narrative as a whole can sometimes appear to be a jumble which lacks of systematic organization. This nonetheless reflects how the environmental discourse was developed *simultaneously with* the community recycling movement. As with the movement,

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[205] huanbao wu di

[206] huanbao qi hua

[207] The *five grounds for environment protection* are 'talking about the earth (談天說地 tan tian shuo di), purifying the earth (淨化大地 jinghua dadi), purifying the heart (淨化心地 jinghua xindi), respecting the earth (敬天愛地 jing tian ai di), down to earth (腳踏實地 jiao ta shi di)'. The *seven ways of making environmental protection* are 1) rejuvenation of environmental protection (環保年輕化 huanbao nianqing hua), 2) embedddeness in daily life of environmental protection (環保生活化 huanbao sheng huo hua), 3) intellectualisation of environmental protection (環保知識化 huanbao zhishi hua), 4) family involvement of environmental protection (環保家庭化 huanbao jiating hua), 5) spiritualisation of environmental protection (環保心靈化 huanbao xinling hua), 6) refinement of environmental protection (環保精緻化 huanbao jingzhi hua), and 7) health-involvement of environmental protection (環保健康化 huanbao jiankang hua).

the development of Tzu-chi's institutional narrative is a mixture of value dissemination for its lay members and public camping materials that reach a wider public. It both stimulates local pioneering projects and upscaling the community recycling programme. In other words, rather than the organisation first developing environmental theology which later sparks a recycling movement, the opposite is the case.

Throughout this and the next chapter, I show that Tzu-chi takes a transcendent and hybrid view by appropriating certain traditional Chinese concepts, not exclusively Buddhist, in its reading of environment-related issues. What Tzu-chi offers is a cultural translation of global environmentalism by contextualising the problems into a local religious and cultural understanding to develop a local solution: recycling. While the next chapter illustrates this view by analysing the traditional value Tzu-chi ascribes to environmental and social problems, this chapter focuses on the organisation's Buddhist identity. The core of this chapter is the investigation of the role of environmental work in the practice of religion and the role of religion in the practice of environmental work, i.e., recycling.

To do so, this chapter takes a body of literature which concerns 'religion and ecology' as the point of departure. The religious ecology scholarship concerns the ways in which religions understand nature and their approaches to addressing today's environmental challenges. A number of studies in this field have presented Tzu-chi recycling as an example of religious environmental activism (e.g., Swearer 2006; Mohamad et al. 2012; Köhrsen 2018). They nevertheless fail to investigate properly the relation between the 'activism' of recycling and the organisation's religious views. This chapter contributes to this understanding. However, in reading Tzu-chi's Buddhism-inflected environmental discourse, the aim is not to evaluate the accuracy or doctrinal authenticity of Tzu-chi's claims about historical and philosophical Buddhist concepts in relation to environmental protection, nor it is to advocate particular ecological values as Buddhist or reflective of Buddhist tradition. This is not because of my limited knowledge of Buddhist philosophy and scriptures, which make me ill-equipped to engage in this specialised task properly. It is rather because many scholars in Buddhism studies have questioned the historical and philosophical soundness of the idea that Buddhism contains ancient ecological knowledge on living sustainably and overcoming today's environmental problems. Mark L. Blum (2009), for example, has described this tendency in Buddhist-inflected environmental activism, namely ecoBuddhism, as a process of 'mining tradition' if not 'supermarketing religion'.

Bearing these scholarly discussions in mind, my approach is to investigate how Tzu-chi incorporates environmental concepts and concerns into the organisation's overall religious teaching and goals. In other words, I continue with the view that Tzu-chi recycling is a secular environmental movement. It results from and contributes to Taiwan's waste management, industrial transformation, structural population change, and community-based movement, as discussed in previous chapters. This chapter furthers the investigation by examining the spiritual and religious dimension of this 'secular materialist mission' of the Buddhism-based organisation. I consider Tzu-chi recycling against the backdrop of the humanistic Buddhism phenomenon, a Buddhist modernism which emerged and has dominated Taiwan's religious landscape since the last part of the 20th century. In this way, I clarify the motives which link environmental interests to religious ones. I contend that environmental concerns and the mundane act of recycling are a means to realise Tzu-chi's religious goals of, first, creating a this-worldly Pure Land in a physical environment, and second, realising a core objective of humanistic Buddhism: to reform and secularise Buddhism. Collecting and sorting rubbish, in this context, becomes a religious training and purifying ritual. It is a two-sided project: to sacralise the public with the purpose of secularising a religion.

2.   From 'Religion for Environment' to 'Environment for Religion'

2.1   Green Religion Movement

In addressing environmental issues, religious actors and faith-based organisations have become increasingly visible. A global outreach expectation is that religions can contribute effectively to the momentum for change. The United Nations launched one of its environmental programmes, the 'Faith for Earth Initiative' in 2017, claiming that faith-based organisations are key partners in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals,[208] and Pope Francis has addressed environmental degradation and global warming in his encyclical 'Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home'. Scholars have described major faith traditions' move toward becoming more and more environmentally friendly—in terms of imparting pro-ecological values and worldviews through sermons and religious teaching, or undertaking projects to contribute to conservation and

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[208] Environment Programme, the United Nation. 2016. 'Faith for Earth Initiative'.
https://www.unenvironment.org/about-un-environment/faith-earth-initiative

sustainability—as a green religion phenomenon (Gottlieb 2006; Taylor 2016; Köhrsen 2018).

A wide range of Buddhist scholars, teachers, and practitioners, too, have engaged in the work of religion and ecology, a movement sometimes referred to as ecoBuddhism or Buddhist environmentalism. In addition to examining textual and scriptural sources to develop Buddhist environmental tenets, individuals and organisations undertake a variety of activities. Well-known examples include the Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama, who proposed making Tibet an international ecological reserve, and the Vietnamese Zen monk Thich Nhat Hanh's tangerine meditation exercise. Furthermore, in South Korea, the nun Jiyul has spoken against the construction of a railway tunnel and the national Four Major Rivers Project (Yoon and Jones 2015); Thai 'environmental monks' ordain trees and consecrate the forest to teach Buddhist villagers how to connect with nature (Darlington 2009), and Tibetan monks organise 'Eco Pad Yatra'—green foot-pilgrimage—to walk mountain routes across the Himalayas to re-instil the connection between people and nature through various activities, including picking up litter (for more international examples, see Badiner 1990; Batchelor and Brown 1992; Tucker and Williams 1997; Darlington 2018; Kaza 2019).

In the case of Taiwan, in addition to Tzu-chi's concern with waste, Buddhist groups and individuals deal with different environment-related issues and translate their concern into activism. These include animal rights, which are upheld by the Buddhist organisation Life Conservationist Association (關懷生命協會[209]); the nuclear waste problem, which Shih Zhao Hui (釋昭慧; b.1957) focuses on; and river pollution, the concern of Shih Chuan-dao (釋傳道; 1941-2014). The large-scale Buddhist organisation Blessing and Wisdom (福智[210]) regularly organises a 'creature release ceremony' which, in principle, frees the animals and fish in captivity; another large organisation, Buddha Light Mountain (佛光山[211]), has established a university department which specialises in vegetarian diet and science. Moreover, Buddhist scholarly organisations, such as the Association for Modern Buddhist Studies (現代佛教學會[212]) and the Hongshi Buddhist Cultural and Educational Foundation (佛教弘誓學院[213]), address environmental issues through numerous Buddhist scholarly events and

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[209] guanhuai shengming xiehui
[210] fu zhi
[211] fo quan shan
[212] xiandai fojiao xuehui
[213] fojiao hongshi xueyuan

publications, including the essay collection *Academic Conference of Buddhism and Social Care: Essays on Life, Ecology, and Environmental Care*, which was published in 1996.[214]

2.2   Religious Ecology Scholarship

Concomitant with the green religion phenomenon, scholarship on religion and ecology has grown, adding 'religion' to the array of environmental humanities subjects along with history, literature, and philosophy. For several decades, religious practitioners and academics have explored the ways in which religious traditions can fruitfully address the question of the environment while documenting and analysing the green religion phenomenon. One major part of such study is the 'Religions of the World and Ecology' conferences organised at Harvard by the Forum on Religion and Ecology in the late 1990s and the related book series, as well as the subsequent establishment of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology.

With regard to religion's role in the environment, religion and ecology scholarship confronts the idea that theology and religion may not seem to be the ideal source of environmental solutions. To advocate otherwise, the scholarship underlines the social influence and institutional resources of faith-based organisations and religion's relevance in the construction of social ethics and worldviews.

To register the more 'visible' impacts of religion, Bergmann (2016), among others, has highlighted religion's transnational network, financial capacity, ownership of land, and participation in the educational system, in addition to the fact that more than 80% of the world population identifies as belonging to religious traditions. Köhrsen (2017) has noted that large-scale religious organisations offer spaces for dissidents to create intellectual niches for sustainable innovation, and they use institutional resources to implement and grow the initiatives. Additionally, scholars have noted that religion forges shared values to build collective identity and provides cultural skills of meaning-making that help bring environmental actions to the fore (Gottlieb 2006; Tucker and Grim 2017; Bergmann 2016; Miller 2017).

Nevertheless, most scholarly claims concerning the saliency of religious traditions in solving environmental problems rest on arguments about religion's holistic worldview, normative sentiments, or ethical nature. James Miller, for example,

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[214] 佛教與社會關懷學術研討會：生命、生態、環境關懷論文集 fojiao yu shehui guanhuai xueshu yantao hui: shengming , shengtai, huanjing guanhuai lunwen ji.

whose work explores the relation between Chinese religions and sustainability, has asserted that ecological crisis suggests not only the physical degradation of the natural environment and ecosystem, but also a crisis of how we have come to frame 'the world' and the place of human beings in it. As a consequence, a question of the 'environment' is essentially a question of 'the values inculcated in humans by the modern social imagination' (2017, 8). Miller contends that the assumption that religion ought to be a private affair, not the subject of environmental discourse, precisely reflects our problematic, fragmented imagination, which is divided into distinctive realms of the inner mind (philosophy), the external nature (science), and the transcendent being (religion). According to him, transcendent views of religious tradition become particularly relevant for reconciling and reconnecting fragmented realms, providing 'the methodologies of linking the self to locality, community, environment, and the universal' (Duara 2015, 2). Furthermore, Anna M. Gade has noted in her work on the Muslim environmental movement that secular environmentalism eventually 'extends in scale to religious questions of ultimate concern' when a 'humanistic problem scales up to scenarios like annihilation' (2019, 25). In this register, religion's fundamental teaching of eschatology functions as an ethical and sentimental framework for people to act upon and cope with anxiety and despair.

2.3   EcoBuddhism

To address moral problems at the heart of modern environmentalism, religious ecology scholars often find support in a famous article by the historian of science Lynn White, Jr., 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis' (1967). The article is this most printed of all time from the journal *Science*, and in the conclusion, White writes: 'Since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not'. Viewing the environmental problem as a result of the anthropocentrism of Christian religious teaching and its philosophy of domination over nature, White treats religion as a decisive variable that could reverse environmental decline in favour of religious biocentrism. Religion is therefore divided into two types, environmentally friendly and not. Buddhism, in Lynn White's dichotomous division, falls into the eco-friendly zone because of its holistic and egalitarian worldview, in contrast to that of Christianity. A similar categorisation can also be found in the writings of those who promote deep ecology. For instance, Bill Devall and George Sessions (1985, 110-101) consider Eastern traditions such as Daoism and Buddhism an expression of a 'particularly powerful bio-centric philosophy'; in addition, Arne Naess (2005, 12) has commented on the 'intimate relations between some forms

of Buddhism and the deep ecology movement' because they both articulate a philosophy based on the interdependence of humankind and nature.

It is not surprising that many writings on Buddhist ecology share this normative position that Buddhism has traditionally held nature in veneration and has therefore fostered ideas akin to modern environmentalism (cf. Macy 1990; Henning 2002; Loori 2007; Johnston 2006). Some find evidence in Mahayana Buddhist teachings of breaking through the delusion of the false self, the ego that sees itself as the centre of the universe, as a direct rejection of an anthropocentric worldview. Some have addressed the belief of reincarnation, which encourages vegetarianism and respect for other animal beings because they could be one's own past or future. For many Buddhist environmentalists, the link between ecology and Buddhism is rooted in the doctrine of 'dependent co-arising' (pratītyasamutpāda). This reading of the concept suggests the nature of ecology itself, as Badiner (1990, xiv–xv.) has described it: 'a massive interdependent, self-causing dynamic energy-event against a backdrop of ceaseless change'. For similar reasons, Bron Raymond Taylor has posited Buddhism as a 'dark green religion' and categorised it as a kind of 'Spiritual Animism' and 'Gaian Spirituality' in his typology. The type denotes a belief in which 'beings or entities in nature have their own integrity, ways of being, personhood, and even intelligence' (2010, 15).

Without denying the potential of Buddhist philosophy to cultivate environmental awareness and actions, scholars in Buddhism studies have questioned the appropriateness of assuming that there is such a thing as Buddhist environmental ethics. In his criticism of ecoBuddhism, Malcolm David Eckel has described the words 'Buddhism' and 'environmentalism' as 'an awkward combination' which falls into a 'morass of contradictions' (2010, 161). Critics of ecoBuddhism argue that there is no one definitive Buddhist perspective of nature; there are multiple, and they differ across time periods and cultures. Furthermore, they consider the search for the 'green' in Buddhism a shift away from traditional Buddhist cosmology (Harris 1995). Mark L. Blum (2009) and Henrik H. Sørensen (2013), for example, have respectively noted that, from the doctrinal standpoint of canonical Buddhism, there is a negation of the natural realm and 'the absence of any implication of ethical imperative toward the physical world other than respect and compassion for living beings' (Blum 2009, 235). The core belief of Buddhism, as these scholars emphasise, is spiritual development in pursuit of soteriological liberation, i.e., nirvana, from endless reincarnation so that one can finally leave the phenomenal world. The biological values are inferred from

foundational concepts such as samsara. In other words, the Buddhist tradition is primarily anthropocentric, not bio-centric (Sponberg 1994; Swearer 2006; Blum 2009). In this register, according to some scholars of Buddhism studies, it is a far stretch to say that the idea that the earth has a mind capable of knowing and a personality, as well as creatures with their own equal rights, is a claim derived from Buddhism.

2.4   What Does Environmentalism Do for Religion?

The considerable reinterpretation of Buddhism in ecoBuddhism resembles a consequence of what the anthropologist Poul Pedersen has called 'the religious environmentalist paradigm': 'the urgent appeal to traditional religious values in the global concern about the environment' (1995, 271). In this pragmatic approach, environmentalism, represented by secular stakeholders such as academia and the United Nations, turns to religious traditions as a pool of resources and 'an extractive industry' (Gade 2019) where alternative ideas and values, often non-Western ones, are instrumentally deployed in order to elevate environmental concerns and to counter the grand narrative of progress and modernity.

To move beyond the impasse wrought by simplified, modified religious representation for the sake of environmental goals, recently, scholars have begun to approach the green religion phenomenon from the opposite direction. Instead of asking how religion can serve the environment, they reverse the instrumentality by focusing on the role of environmentalism *for* religion. This expanded approach explores how people deploy environmental concerns to further religious goals and examines the ways religious agencies interpret, negotiate, and adapt these green ideas. For example, Yeh's (2014) research on Tibetan environmental actions highlights the diversity in seemingly monolithic Tibetan environmental issues. She further argues that the accumulation of individual good karma underlines the motives of Tibetan Buddhist environmental engagements. Moreover, by examining the case of Muslim scholar-activists working outside the secular conservation-development influence in Indonesia, Gade contends that, when Muslim environmentalists turn to apocalyptic paradigms to foster environmental concerns, 'environmentalism' itself becomes a means to the ultimate end in the life to come, to 'cultivate positive sentiment in the present around recognition of the inevitable moment of death, and ensuing resurrection and judgement' (2019, 197). Another scholarly work which unpacks the entanglement between religion and environmentalism in relation to regional

historical and social context is Aike P. Rots's research on Shinto's environmental movement in Japan. While demonstrating that the notion of Shinto as a primordial tradition of nature worship is rather a 'modern' construction, Rots suggests that the Shinto environmentalist paradigm was developed for the purposes of identity politics. Describing the movement as a 'reconceptualisation of Shinto as a *nature religion*', Rots notes that the new symbolic significance of the environment contributes to the religion's discursive depoliticalisation project to 'dissociate it from more controversial issues such as those related to war memory and imperial patronage' (2017, 209). Additionally, the 'refreshed' and depoliticised Shinto becomes closely associated with the contemporary rebirth of Japanese cultural identity. When this society asks what it means to be Japanese, the ideas are often coupled with environmentalist discourse and characterised by 'social cohesion, *harmony with nature*, and traditional values such as respect for ancestors and national pride' (*ibid.*, 217).

In the analysis of Tzu-chi's institutional environment-related engagement, I share a standpoint that is similar to that of this new approach in religious ecology scholarship. I examine the role of environmental issues, waste and recycling in particular, in the religious practice, self-identity, and transformation of Tzu-chi and humanistic Buddhism. Therefore, I ask: how have environmental ideas been appropriated and adapted into Tzu-chi's religious teaching? What kind of religious goals are achieved through the recycling programme and environmental concerns? What does waste recycling do in the development of Buddhism in Taiwan? Although I emphasise the role of the environment for religion, this does not mean that I shy away from the question of religion's role for the environment. Instead, I propose that this answer can be found by investigating the impacts of environmental issues on religion. The next section first examines the representation of environment-related issues and waste recycling in Tzu-chi's institutional discourse.

3.   Tzu-chi's Institutional Discourse of the Environment and Recycling

3.1   Polluted Mind, Polluted Land

One recurring theme in Tzu-chi's institutional discourse on the environment is the quest for 'purity' and the idea that recycling is a work of purification. For example, in the Tzu-chi Almanac, the recycling programme is described as 'an

engineering project of body and mind purification',[215] while the elderly recycling volunteers are depicted as 'silver-haired Bodhisattvas' with a 'pure and determined heart' in the English quarterly magazine.[216]

However, the extensive application of the concept of 'purification', or the word *jing* (淨), meaning 'clean' or 'pure', found in the Buddhist organisation's discourse is by no means strange or novel. By convention, in Mahayana Buddhist teachings, *jing tu* (淨土), or Pure Land, denotes an idealised realm of tranquillity and solemnity. Giving the concept of environmental significance representing an adjustment, the prosperity, quality, and material affluence that Pure Land depicts are nevertheless traditionally the symbols of spiritual profundity that exist in parallel to the archetypal Buddhist heaven, the 'Ultimate Bliss World' (極樂世界;[217] Lin 2005).

In contrast to the spiritual Pure Land, there is the mundane Dirty Land, where the *five turbidities* of the Buddhist belief system prevail. The Buddhist *turbidity* (濁[218]) generally denotes a status in which the original purity of one thing is adulterated and distorted by its mixture with another with an incompatible nature, causing affliction, karma, and suffering. When describing environmental degradations, Tzu-chi founder Cheng-yen often uses the term 'the evil world of the five kinds of turbidity' (五濁惡世[219]) to describe the current society, where ceaseless natural and manmade disasters happen.[220] The disorders and disasters of the current natural environment are, in Cheng-yen's eyes, caused by people's defiled thoughts—the Buddhist *five poisons* (*kleshas*): greed, anger, delusion, arrogance, and doubt (貪瞋癡慢疑[221]). Similar to how a clean environment is polluted by waste materials, Cheng-yen sees the *five poisons* as the 'invisible trash of minds'[222]

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[215] See, for example, Yang, X. 揚歆. (2007). 'jinghua shen xin de qingliu gongcheng, huanbao yu ciji renwen zhiye' 淨化身心的清流工程 環保與慈濟人文志業 [An Engineering Project of Body and Mind Purification, Tzu-chi missions of environment and humanity]. *Tzu-chi Almanac 2006*, 104-106.

[216] Xu, Q.H. (2016). An Ordinary Yet Extraordinary Life. *Tzu Chi Quarterly* 23(4), 87-89.

[217] Ji le shijie

[218] zhuo

[219] wu zhuo e shi

[220] Tzu-chi Foundation 慈濟基金會, 'Tan *wu zhuo*' 談「五濁」, *Tzu-chi official website*, 3 March 2010, www.tzuchi-org.tw/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2852%3A2010-03-01-07-42-33&catid=62%3Amaster-other-speeches&Itemid=186&lang=zh (accessed 17 September 2019).

[221] tan chen chi man yi

[222]shi de xuan 釋德宣, ' <sui shi xing ji> zhengyan shangren nalu zuji (5)'《隨師行記》 證嚴上人衲履足跡, Ciji Yuekan 慈濟月刊 [Ciji Monthly] 397, 25 December 1999,

that adulterates the original purity of a person's *zhen ru* (真如) or 'True Suchness'. True Suchness denotes the highest level of consciousness and spiritual purity, an unadulterated Buddha Nature, which is the ultimate goal of Buddhist enlightenment (Her 2017).[223]

To elaborate on the idea that impure minds are the source of all problems, environmental and social, Cheng-yen declared the following in the organisation's monthly magazine:

> In today's society, human minds are occupied with ignorance, piling up afflictions. [...] This is an age of turbidity of all defiled conscious beings. [...] Karma-causes start from a single thought and progress to the activities of word, thought, and deed; all human beings need to be awakened quickly to return to the 'fountainhead of clean purity'. [...] If everyone has a pliant mind, an unobstructed will, and is without affliction, then such harmonious energy will bring peace on earth.[224:225]

In Tzu-chi discourse, the mind rubbish of the Buddhist *five poisons* gives rise to and results from the expansion of industrial production and the exploitation of natural resources. While environmental degradation and climate change constitute the shared karma of humankind's unwholesome actions (惡業),[226] there is also the 'evil cycle' (惡的循環[227]) of our socio-economic structure: a cycle of production, consumption, and waste.[228] To illustrate this line of thought, in the

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http://web.tzuchiculture.org.tw/tpenquart/monthly/397/397c6-5.htm (accessed on 17 September 2019).

[223] See, for example, Tzu-chi Almanac 1998, 'wuzheng wuchang buhui ciji xing' 悟證無常 不悔慈濟行, 61.

[224] See Appendix, quotation 7.3 for Chinese text and pin-yin. The English translation is the author's.

[225] Cheng-yen 釋證嚴 and Editors of Ciji YueKan 慈濟月刊編輯群, "Ciji 45 zhounian xingru chanhui famen" 慈濟 45 周年 行入懺悔法門, *Ciji Yuekan* 慈濟月刊 [Ciji Monthly] 533, April 2011, http://web.tzuchiculture.org.tw/?mp=2061#.W6zt6sIyW70 (accessed on 17 September 2019).

[226] Shi De-fan 釋德帆, 'si ri ~ wu ri   zhi e, xiu shan' 四日~五日止惡，修善, Ciji Yuekan 慈濟月刊 [Ciji Monthly] 512, 29 July 2009, http://web.tzuchiculture.org.tw/?book=512&mp=1170#.XYJNGkxuK70 (accessed on 17 September 2019).

[227] e de xunhuan

[228] Tzu-chi Foundation 慈濟基金會, 'ziwo jiaojing duan e xunhuan' 自我教淨 斷惡循環, *Tzu-chi official website*, 24 March 2013 https://www.tzuchi.org.tw/waterdharma/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=

two-decade anniversary book of Tzu-chi's environmental mission *Qingjing Zai Yuantou* (清境在源頭), Cheng-yen states:

> Originally, human beings did not need much. They could live in this world depending on just soil, water, and air. The pursuit of pleasure, however, leads to the squandering of resources. For gourmands, livestock is raised in large quantities. The quantity of foodstuffs and water used to feed the animals exceeds the needs of human beings by far, resulting in an evil cycle with environmental damage and pollution.[229] [230]

> Under the encouragements of industrial-commercial society to consume, human minds are blinded by the desire for material goods and become impure. Life becomes extravagant with immoderate greed. […] We need to guide everyone to maintain the purity of humanity. Every person relies on the earth and materials given by Earth. […] Materials last. If we can cherish the blessings, there is no waste.[231] [232]

Although it mentions the problems of the capitalist system and industrial production, in tracing the 'fundamental' cause of the waste problem and environmental degradation, Tzu-chi's Buddhist conception focuses instead on the source of the problem: hedonistic human desire. In this view, modern industrial production and consumer culture are products of the incarnate pollution of the human mind. Thus, to break the evil cycle and save the planet, the solution lies not in treating the 'symptoms' but in the shaping force of ideas. Tzu-chi's religious mission is to remove the defiled thoughts that prevail in society. Selfless endeavours such as recycling volunteering therefore create the so-called 'heart-house effects' (心室效應[233]) and a 'benevolent cycle' (善的循環[234]) in contrast to

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17282:2017-03-24-04-54-50&catid=59:daily-speech&Itemid=1 9 (accessed on 17 September 2019).

[229] See Appendix, quotation 7.4 for Chinese text and pin-yin; the English translation is the author's.

[230] Cheng-yen 釋證嚴, *Qingjing Zai Yuantou* 清境在源頭. (Hualian: Ciji wenhua chubanshe 慈濟文化出版社, 2010), 61.

[231] See Appendix, quotation 7.5 for Chinese text and pin-yin; the English translation is the author's.

[232] *Ibid*, 33-34.

[233] xinshi xiaoying

[234] shan de xunhuan

greenhouse effects and an 'evil cycle'. As a 'clear stream', this benevolence washes off the pollutants of the mind.

Using religious concepts in its interpretation of environmental issues, Tzu-chi discourse not only moralises but also spiritualises environmental problems while inserting religious goals to propose the solution. Subsequently, the meaning of recycling expands well beyond secular environmentalism into a realm of religious altruism and training. When one is voluntarily surrounded by other people's refuse, cleaning and sorting it becomes a religious ritual to purify minds and cultivate spirituality. Therefore, Tzu-chi recycling sites are described as a religious training space, 'places of awakening' (道場[235]), and the recycling volunteers as 'grassroots *Bodhi*' (草根菩提[236]).[237] Rubbish and the dirty, malodorous qualities waste embodies thus become part of the 'training infrastructure' to create such a religious environment. In other words, when waste materials are interpreted as religious symbols of spiritual impurity, the act of waste cleaning is sacralised as a religious ritual of purification.

3.2   Recycling as Material Reincarnation

In addition to an act of purification, recycling is described as a process of 'material reincarnation' (物命輪迴[238]) in Tzu-chi discourse. To illustrate this interpretation, I refer to Cheng-yen's statement in the 2010 book:

> Like the cycle of four seasons—spring, summer, autumn, and winter— there is a cycle of all matters and beings—the eons of formation, existence, decay and disappearance. [...] Recycling is to reuse resources, resurrecting disposed materials from the phase of decay and returning them to that of formation.[239;240]

Using the Buddhist concept of samsara, Tzu-chi embeds the circularity of recycling materials in a larger system consisting of layers of interlocking

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[235] daochang

[236] cao gen pu ti

[237] HHY, 'Caogen puti' 草根菩提, *Tzu-chi official website*, 14 April 2008, http://www.tzuchi-org.tw/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=86%3A2008-11-14-03-34-51&catid=56%3Aenvironmental-protection-about&Itemid=310&lang=zh (accessed 17 September 2019).

[238] wuming lunhui

[239] See Appendix, quotation 7.6 for Chinese text and pin-yin; the English translation is the author's.

[240] Cheng-yen 釋證嚴, *Qingjing Zai Yuantou* 清境在源頭. (Hualian: Ciji wenhua chubanshe 慈濟文化出版社, 2010), 32-33.

phenomenal cycles. Analogous to the Buddhist circularity of 'arising, abiding, decaying, and disappearing' (成住壞空[241]) in the mental realm, and that of birth, ageing, sickness, and death (生老病死[242]) in the physiological world, the material world can be divided into phases of 'formation, existence, change, and extermination' (生住異滅[243]).[244] Following its interpretation of Buddhist concepts, Tzu-chi's philosophy narrates the practice of recycling as an act that 'extends to the life of materials' (延續物命[245]). By reconfiguring the discarded, it brings objects back into their embryonic form and gives 'deceased' objects new life.

To explain this transcendent imagination of circularity, Tzu-chi discourse not only refers to the contemporary term 'recycled paper' in the Chinese language, *zai sheng zhi* (再生紙), literally meaning 'reborn paper,' It also traces it to the traditional expression, *huan-hun zhi* (還魂紙), literally meaning 'return soul paper'. In an article entitled 'Soul-Return and Reborn' published in the Tzu-chi monthly magazine, the well-known Taiwanese essayist and Buddhist Lin Ching-hsuan wrote that, through recycling, the paper and trees become 'the sentient beings alike' whose existence follows the samsara—the beginningless cycle of repeated birth:

> *Huan-hun zhi*, what a beautiful name. It symbolises a kind of 'sentient beings', the sentient beings of trees, the sentient beings of writing papers. It reincarnates and circulates through the space-time. It does not lose its sentience but [is] only reborn in a new appearance. [246;247]

However, in the Buddhist theological tradition, sentient beings (*sattva*—those with consciousness and sentience, or any existence with the Buddhist five

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[241] cheng zhu huai kong

[242] sheng lao bing si

[243] sheng zhu yi mie

[244] Tzu-chi Foundation 慈濟基金會, 'San li si xiang' 三理四相, Tzu-chi official website, 1 April 2004, http://www.tzuchi-org.tw/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1073%3A2009-07-14-07-04-12&catid=62%3Amaster-other-speeches&Itemid=186&lang=zh (accessed 17 September 2019).

[245] yan xu wu ming

[246] See Appendix, quotation 7.7 for Chinese text and pin-yin; the English translation is the author's.

[247] Lin Ching-hsuan 林清玄, 'haihun yu zaisheng' 還魂與再生, *Ciji Yuekan* 慈濟月刊 [Ciji Monthly] 209, Jan 1991, http://web.tzuchiculture.org.tw/tpenquart/monthly/290/290c6-1.HTM (accessed on 18 April 2020).

aggregates (*pañca-skandha*; 五蘊[248])—do not include inanimate objects or plants. From the doctrinal standpoint of canonical Buddhism, similar to the arguments of scholars who have criticised ecoBuddhism, it makes little 'Buddhist sense' to claim that trees, paper, or waste materials *actually* reincarnate. To understand this, Tzu-chi's narratives can perhaps best be considered a communicative strategy. This strategy largely involves a pattern of that the discourse is filled with metaphorical narratives characterised by the tendency that environment-related topics are addressed through a Buddhist concept, and the Buddhist concept is then explained in terms of social phenomena or actions. To my knowledge, Tzu-chi's environment-related narratives rarely involve theological discussions to explain or debate, for example, whether recycled materials can *actually* be reincarnated sentient beings and how this description resonates with traditional Buddhist doctrines.

As another example, in addition to the narrative of recycling as material reincarnation and material reincarnation as the cycle of four seasons, a similar communicative pattern is found in Tzu-chi's discussion of global warming. In the first environment-themed book Tzu-chi published, *Co-exist with the Earth*, a two-page book chapter articulates the topic in this way: it first briefly mentions the term 'greenhouse effect' as a cause of natural disaster and climate abnormality; second, it describes how the 'heated earth' has a status 'similar to' the 'fire house' in Lotus Sutra, in that both are filled with disasters; third, the narrative provides more detail on observed environmental problems and the consequences of the greenhouse effect; in the last part of the chapter, the organisation argues that all kinds of natural irregularity and environmental degradation are the results of a disruption of the Buddhist ethics *jie* (戒). Without clarifying which *jie* it refers to, given the fact that the Buddhist concept entails various codes of conduct, the chapter then concludes that global warming is a result of human desires.[249] This somewhat poetic and religiously inflected interpretation reflects a transcendent worldview in which all phenomena are in a transformative process, and it evokes a sense of moral sentiment towards the environment. In this rhetoric-oriented communication style, Buddhist concepts (e.g., reincarnation, sentient beings, fire house, *jia*) are metaphorical forms that resonate with the organisation's religious readers and followers. By using these Buddhist concepts as metaphors, the

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[248] wuyun

[249] Cheng-yen 釋證嚴, Yu diqiu gong shengxi ── yi bai ge tengxi diqiu de sikao yu xingdong 與地球共生息── 100 個疼惜地球的思考與行動. (Hualian: jingsi renwen zhiye gufen youxian gongsi 靜思人文志業股份有限公司, 2015 [2006]), 40-41.

rhetorical narrative leads its audience to an attitude of collaborative expectancy towards the concern and practice based on their acceptance to the Buddhist terminology, regardless of whether they agree with the proposition (e.g., that recycling is like material reincarnation), or whether the application and reading of these Buddhist concepts are theoretically clear and sound.

4.   Recycling for Buddhism

Environmental work is not only a religious means to cultivate one's spirituality at the individual level, but also, at an institutional level, it aims to realise the organization's religious goal. This becomes clearer, as this research argues, when we read Tzu-chi's recycling engagement against the backdrop of the development of humanistic Buddhism—a reformative Buddhist school with which Tzu-chi identifies itself—and the organisational structure and projects of Tzu-chi. This section therefore sheds lights on the religious identity of Tzu-chi and its dual identity of being secularly religious. By doing so, I highlight the two religious goals underlying the work of environment care: to establish a terrestrial Pure Land and to secularise and revive Buddhism.

4.1   Humanistic Buddhism and Terrestrial Pure Land

The interpretation of the rapid growth of capitalist production and environmental degradation as the result and manifestation of a poisoned mind is not unique to Tzu-chi. Instead, a wide variety of Buddhist organisations and monastics worldwide promote this view. In particular, as a solution to environmental and social disorder, the religious ideal of creating a Pure Land through mind purification is common in other humanistic Buddhist monastics and organisations in Taiwan, including Shih Hsing-yun (釋星雲) of Buddha Light Mountain and Sheng-yen (釋聖嚴) of Dharma Drum Mountain.[250] In fact, the pursuit of spiritual purity and the establishment of a terrestrial Pure Land represent a core premise of humanistic Buddhism (Lin 1999; Clippard 2012).

Humanistic Buddhism (人間佛教[251]) is a reformative school of Buddhism that first came to the fore in the first half of the 20th century and has come to dominate the Taiwanese Buddhist society. By the end of the Cold War, and particularly after

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[250] It is important to note here that several environmental concepts I discuss in this chapter, including the axiom as well as the idea of spiritual pollution, are not exclusive to Tzu-chi, but also widely appear in the discourses of other humanistic Buddhist organisations and are discussed in depth by different monastics (see, for example, Lin 1999; Clippard 2012).

[251] renjian fojiao

the lifting of the state of emergency in 1987, there was an unprecedented proliferation of religious groups and followers in Taiwan, which were accompanied by dramatic social change. This contemporary boom in religion, which Richard Madsen (2007) has described as the 'Taiwanese religious renaissance', inspired a body of literature (cf. Chiu 1997; Katz 2003; Chaing and Chang 2003; Kuo 2008). Among the new and re-emerging religions, Buddhism experienced the most rapid growth in regard to numbers of participants, visibility, and social influence (Chiu and Yao 2006). In particular, the humanistic Buddhism Tzu-chi represents has flourished. [252] The drastic growth of Tzu-chi commissioner exemplifies this. Founded in 1966 by Cheng-yen with 30 housewives and her five disciples, 20 years later, Tzu-chi certified commissioners, who numbered around 700, increased 17-fold to over 12,000 in 1997, and they quadrupled again in the next decade.[253] The same development is also observed in Tzu-chi's total membership, which grew to slightly more than 100,000 in 1986 and surpassed four million by 1994.[254] By the late 1980s and early 1990s, the lifting of martial law ended nearly four decades of authoritarian rule and opened up space for a newly emergent civic society. [255] Despite the significant decrease in Buddhism in the whole Taiwanese population in the last two decades,[256] today, Tzu-chi claims to have more than 10 million members and 90,000 certified

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[252] However, there has long been a debate in Taiwanese Buddhist scholarship about which Buddhist organisations 'qualify' as humanistic Buddhist. In particular, questions have been raised as to whether Tzu-chi should be considered a humanistic Buddhist organisation. Some scholars have argued that, although Cheng-yen was ordained and influenced by Yin-shun, and one of the Tzu-chi mottos follows Yin-shun's teaching of 'for Buddhism and for all sentimental beings' (為佛教為眾生 wei fojiao wei zhongsheng), Yin-shun himself disclaimed any direct influence on the establishment of Tzu-chi (Zhang 1990). Moreover, the Taiwanese sociologist Ting Jen-Chieh (2007a) has noted that, while Yin-shun's Buddhist ideas were based on the middle-path principle (Madhyamika's philosophy), which presumed a dialectical relationship between theory and practice, Cheng-yen does little to address this aspect. Other scholars have argued that the teachings and philosophies of Yin-shun have shaped Cheng-yen's religious thinking and inspired her social devotions, thereby making Tzu-chi a humanistic Buddhist group regardless (Chen 1990).

[253] Tzu-chi Almanac 1993; 1998; 2008.

[254] Tzu-chi Almanac 1992; 1995.

[255] From the 1950s to the 1970s, under martial law, there was no genuine NGO sector that could have engaged in any legitimate or genuine dialogue or exchange between state and civil society. There were only local associations, closely monitored by the ruling political party, the KMT; upper-class foundations; and 'transplanted', Western philanthropic organisations and middle-class social clubs (Hsiao 2005).

[256] According to the Taiwan Social Change Survey conducted by Academia Sinica, the proportion of Buddhists in the whole Taiwanese population has dropped from nearly 40% in 1994 to 15% in 2008, with a significant aging population of Buddhist deveotees.

commissioners worldwide, and it operates in more than 90 countries.[257] It is currently the foremost formal association in Taiwan. It and the three other largest humanistic Buddhist organisations—Buddha Light Mountain (佛光山), Dharma Drum Mountain (法鼓山), and Zhongtai Mountain (中台山)—are sometimes referred as the 'four great mountains' (四大山頭[258]), implying that they are the four most powerful associations in the Taiwanese religious landscape. Together with two other Buddhist organisations, Ling-jiu Mountain (靈鷲山) and Fu-chih (福智), these six organisations once claimed the membership of over 20% of Taiwan's adult population (Shack and Hsiao 2005).

The features of humanistic Buddhist groups largely adhere to the philosophical teachings of two Buddhist monastics and thinkers, Shih Tai-xu (釋太虛; 1890-1947) and Shih Yin-shun (釋印順; 1906-2005), who are recognised as the founding figures of humanistic Buddhism. The main theological departure point of humanistic Buddhism from traditional Chinese Buddhism is that it emphasises the dimension of everyday life and the secular world. As opposed to conventional sutra chanting and other-worldly mysticism, secular social participation, such as recycling or environmental care, is a main way to pursue becoming *bodhisattva* (the 'enlightenment being'). From this theological perspective, the Pure Land as envisioned by humanistic Buddhism differs from how it is understood in traditional Buddhist teachings. In advocating Pure Land in a terrestrial sense, Yin-shun proposed that the idealised cosmos should not only signify some faraway paradise of Amitābha but should also be realised in the *present* and *physical* world through the spiritual production of bodhisattva *enlightenment;* thus, a humanistic Pure Land is attained when tranquillity is found among all sentient beings.[259]

To articulate this interpretation of Pure Land, humanistic Buddhist monastics and organisations refer to the famous axiom 'pure minds mean pure (country) land' (*心淨則國土淨*[260]). The axiom derives from the first chapter of the Buddhist scripture Vimalakirti *Sutra* (維摩詰所說經[261]), titled 'Buddha Lands' (佛國品第一[262]). A brief analysis of this particular influential scripture clarifies the somewhat basic philosophical reasoning for humanistic Buddhism's narrative of the

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[257] Tzu-chi Almanac 2019.

[258] si da shan tou

[259] Yin-shun, Shih. "Jingtu Xinlun" 淨土新論. In *Miaoyunji* 妙雲集, vol. A17 Jintu yu Chan 淨土 與禪, 1-75. Hsinchu: Zhengwen Publishing. https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw/zh/Y0017_001

[260] Xin jing ze guo tu jing

[261] Wei-mo-chieh so shuo ching

[262] fo guo pin diyi

terrestrial Pure Land as well as Tzu-chi's environmental discourse. In the chapter referred to, the Buddhist scripture[263] describes a chain of cause and effect which can be summarised in the following circular scheme: purity of mind → purity of all conscious beings → purity of the land → purity of mind.[264] Three interlocking assumptions constitute the continuous ideological loop. The first sheds light on a person's inadvertent enlightenment as a result of a his or her pure mind, and that one person's pure mind can purify those around him or her. The second is that the establishment of the Pure Land is a result of the development of all sentient beings' enlightenment. The third is a mirroring process, indicating that the purity of the land not only reflects the internal status of a person but also enables the purification of thoughts and minds on a collective and individual level when the practitioner spreads and preaches a sermon of purity. Therefore, at the end of the paragraph, the Buddha concludes, 'When the mind is pure, the Buddha land will be pure', hence the famous axiom of 'pure mind means pure land'. Following this line of thought, Tzu-chi sees the necessity of purifying people's minds as an essential step in achieving Pure Land. This sequence of purity—mind, society, environment—is the foundation of Tzu-chi's environmental discourse. I return to this discussion in the next chapter to include the non-Buddhist narratives found in the institutional discourse for a more comprehensive analysis.[265]

4.2   Secularly Religious: The Tzu-chi Missions and Organisational Structure

As they aim to establish a this-worldly Pure Land, humanistic organisations and monastics propose a variety of ways to realise the Buddhist conviction. In the case

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[263] There are translated versions of the 'Sutra of the Teaching of Vimalakirti' in various languages, including Sanskrit, Chinese, Japanese, Tibetan, and English, including eight Chinese versions. I use the 'Wei-mo-chieh so shuo ching' (維摩詰所說經) version because it is widely used by Taiwanese humanistic Buddhist monastics and scholars, as well as Tzu-chi. It is the version translated in Cháng-an, in 406 by Kumarajiva. The English translation is a reference to Burton Watson's work, *The Vimalakirti Sutra* (1997).

[264] Based on the script paragraph, a complete cause-and-effect chain should be: 'upright mind' → 'action' → 'mind-searching' → 'controlled will' → 'acts in accord with teaching' → 'merit to others' → 'expedient means' → 'others' enlightenment' → 'pure land' → 'pure sermon' → 'pure wisdom' → 'pure mind'.

[265] It is important to note that, while emphasising that Pure Land can be realised immanently, here in the scripture as well as the one promoted by humanistic Buddhism, a Pure Land still represents more of an adjective that describes the idealised status of tranquillity and solemnity, rather than a noun of a physical territory on the earth, i.e., a clean place. Further, although Tzu-chi uses the axiom in its institutional discourse of the environment and recycling to address interdependence between mind and environmental purity, what the environmental purity—with or without waste pollution—represents is nevertheless a symbolic reference for the spiritual purity of all peoples.

of Tzu-chi, environmental protection is only one of many means, and it exists alongside other Tzu-chi philanthropic missions. Apart from waste recycling, Tzu-chi engages in various public affairs which the institution summarises as its 'Four Major Missions' (四大志業[266]): charity, medical care, education, and culture. In addition, there are four subordinate projects: international relief, bone marrow donation, environmental protection, and community volunteering. Together, these aims comprise Tzu-chi's philanthropic pursuits, the 'Eight Great Seals' (八大法印[267]). Corresponding to its eight extensive programmes of humanitarian service, Tzu-chi runs four state-of-the-art hospitals; a secular university with a medical school and affiliated primary and secondary schools; a technical college; the world's third-largest bone marrow registry; various media outlets, including a television station, a radio station, and two publishing houses; and numerous centres for environmental education and recycling. In the last decade, Tzu-chi has delivered emergency relief to nearly 50 countries and raised, for example, more than 7.6 billion NTD (190 million euros) in 2014, excluding international and emergency funds.[268] While all the missions are categorically differentiated, they work jointly under the umbrella organisation of Tzu-chi. The variety of social engagements and the number of affiliated secular entities are not specific features of Tzu-chi but correspond to those of many other large-scale, humanistic Buddhist organisations discussed above, as well.

In short, the growing humanistic Buddhism has developed towards secularisation. With the term 'secularisation', I take into account Rots's (2017) reading of Charles Taylor's (2011) discussion of the initial meanings of 'secularity', as well as the second type of secularisation proposed by Larry Shiner (1967). When explaining Japanese Shinto's contemporary secularisation phenomenon, Rots points to the contested nature of categorically differentiating 'secular' and 'religion'. By referring to Taylor's theoretical framework, Rots suggests a reconsideration of the meaning of 'secularity' as 'immanent, public, and concerned with the common good of the world in which we live' (Rots 2017, 184). Secularisation, according to this line of thought, does not necessarily imply the lack of gods, nor monastic orders concerned with transcendent matters; rather, it refers to a development to prioritise the world here and now. Similarly, to characterise secularisation, Shiner

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[266] si da zhiye

[267] ba da fayin

[268] Tzu-chi Foundation, 'Fuwu chengguo ji shouzhi baogao' 服務成果際收支報告, 2015, http://tw.tzuchi.org/financial/103charity/index_charity1.html (accessed 26 September 2019).

has proposed a type of secularisation as 'conformity with *this world*'. He explains that this type of secularisation has a tendency in which religious groups turn away from an ethic motivated by the orientation to 'conform to the group's ethical tradition towards an ethic adapted to the present exigencies of the surrounding society'. The culmination of this secularisation, Shiner claims, 'would be a society absorbed with the pragmatic tasks of the present and a religious group indistinguishable from the rest of society' (1967, 211).

The reformative tone of humanistic Buddhism in its criticism of conventional Buddhist practice and its desire to develop this world resonate with the ideas of secularity and secularisation according to Rots and Shiner. For humanistic Buddhism, social engagement is a means to realise religious goals. Secular and religious are thus overlapping and mutually constitutive categories. This intimate interconnectedness is reflected in Tzu-chi's labyrinthine organisational structure. With reference to the official diagram and Julia Huang's (2009) redrawing of the Tzu-chi organisational structure, Figure 7.1 depicts the dual nature of Tzu-chi.

On the right-hand side of the diagrams, the Tzu-chi Merit Society (慈濟功德會[269]) is the focal point for the volunteer laity of Tzu-chi and helms the charity mission. The religious volunteer association was the first Tzu-chi institution, and it now includes its headquarters and a proliferation of local congregations. The headquarters is the Still Thoughts Abode (靜思堂[270]) in Hualian, where Cheng-yen and her monastic disciples reside. On the left-hand side of the diagram is the Tzu-chi (Charity) Foundation (慈濟慈善基金會[271]), the legal (non-profit) body and secular arm of Tzu-chi. Registered in 1980 when the issues, resource flows, and number and social backgrounds of members grew, the Foundation primarily

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[269] Ciji Gongdehui

[270] jing si tang

[271] ciji cishan jijinhui
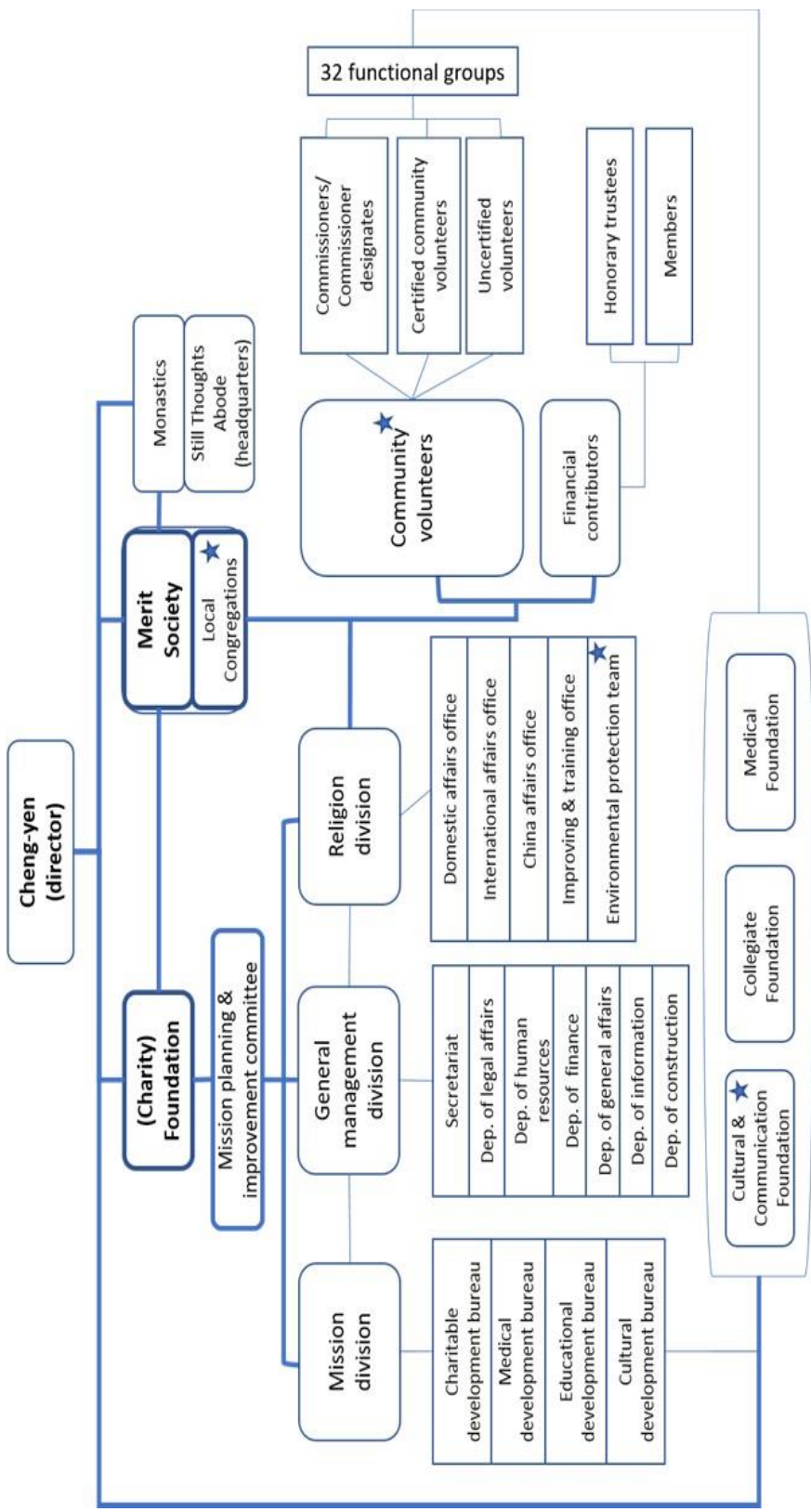
Figure 7.1 Redrawing of the Tzu-chi organisational structure (drawing by the author)

focuses on the coordination, planning, and management of all Tzu-chi's this-worldly engagements. [272]

To capture the intimate interconnectedness between secularity and religiosity, Julia Huang (*ibid.*) has described Tzu-chi as a 'fluid organisation and shapeless bureaucracy' in a book chapter title. Moreover, it is important to note that, despite the significant bureaucratisation, Cheng-yen has remained the charismatic leader and the direct source of Tzu-chi's religious authority even today. Thus, as Tzu-chi staff members repeatedly noted when explaining an outline of the organisation to me, although the organisation has two names, the foundation and the volunteer association, both of which are printed on staff identity cards, the two institutes represent one organisation, Tzu-chi, and they work towards the same goal to realise the leader's teaching.[273] The inseparable 'secular-religious' nature of Tzu-chi, in terms of its institutional structure, becomes evident with the Tzu-chi recycling programme. The affiliated entities and individuals are dispersed across the organisation, both the religious and secular sides. To illustrate that, in figure 7.1, I have added a star sign next to the institutional entities with a more direct relationship with the recycling programme. This includes (1) the religion division of the Foundation, to which the administrative task force of Tzu-chi recycling belongs (see Chapter Three), and (2) the non-profit entity of the Tzu-chi Culture and Communication Foundation,[274] the missionary institute under which the Tzu-chi recycling programme is officially registered (see Chapter Eight). However,

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[272] I have divided a total of 12 offices and bureaus of the Foundation into three categories: (1) mission-related, (2) general management, and (3) religion-related. The mission division is the charitable, medical, educational, and cultural development to which the bureaus belong. Except for the charitable developmental department, the other three departments are responsible for the management of its affiliated foundations (shown at the bottom of the diagram) and their associated missionary bodies (志業體 chiye ti), such as the schools of the Collegiate Foundation, the hospitals of the Medical Foundation, and Da-ai TV at the Cultural and Communication Foundation. The general management division functions as the administrative support for the organisation as a whole. Third, the religion division coordinates and regulates the regional affairs of volunteers at local congregations in Taiwan, China, and further afield in order to ensure the incorporation of Cheng-yen's values and concepts in missionary projects and activities. The division within the secular foundation in charge of tasks regards the laity. Additionally, there is the assembly—the Mission Planning and Improvement Committee (志業策進委員會 zhiye cejin weiyuanhui)—at which every Tzu-chi affiliate is represented. The assembly includes the CEO and three vice-CEOs of the Tzu-chi Charity Foundation, a representative of each mission affiliate (Da-ai TV, Tzu-chi University, Hualian Medical Centre, etc.) and the head of each bureau or office.

[273] Interview with the Tzu-chi Environmental Protection Team (25 May 2016, Hualian).

[274] 慈濟傳播人文志業基金會 Ciji chuanbo renwen zhiye jijinhui

the operation and management of Tzu-chi recycling is nevertheless coordinated through (3) the local congregational laity system of the Merit Society (see Chapter Six). Even so, the recycling works depend on Tzu-chi's volunteer system, as discussed in Chapter Four, and the (4) community volunteers are not necessarily Tzu-chi commissioners nor religiously motivated.

In short, the double-sided characteristic of being 'religiously secular' includes the religious identity of humanistic Buddhism, whose teachings highlight the creation of a territorial Pure Land and which is reflected in Tzu-chi's organisational structure and recycling programme.

4.3 Syncretism-Translation: A Strategy for the Buddhism Revival

For those who study the prevalence of humanistic Buddhism, its significant expansion in the 1990s and 2000s is closely associated with their secular missionary approach, which meets the increasing practical, social, psychological, and spiritual needs in a condensed, changing Taiwan (Chiu 1997; Laliberté 2004; Kuo 2008). Moreover, scholars have argued that the secular approach of humanistic Buddhism is not only a case of 'religion's modern adaptation' (Lin 2012, 94), but also a transitional strategy to elevate the social position of Buddhism after a long period of political suppression. During the authoritarian regime of the Cold War, the Nationalist political party, KMT, attempted to weaken local religious power by, for example, establishing control over national religious institutions, including the Buddhist Association of the Republic of China. Furthermore, in contrast to Christianity, which is associated with Western power and is relatively welcome in elite political circles, Buddhism, together with Taiwanese folkloric religion—a diffused religion mixing Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist beliefs—was characterised as superstitious at the time (Chen and Deng 2003, 30-31).

Taiwanese society's political openness starting in the late 1980s opened a transitional opportunity for Buddhism. Scholars have suggested different strategies humanistic Buddhism pursues to revive itself. The sociologist of religion Richard Madsen, for example, uses the case of Tzu-chi's participation in the earthquake relief work after September 21, 1999 in Taiwan to highlight how humanistic Buddhist organisations developed through their collaboration with the government. The secular religious groups, in Madsen's view, are 'belt buckles joining private and public sector in a tighter embrace', which contributes to building a democratic society (Madsen 2007, 135). The Taiwanese sociologist Ting Jen-chieh considers Madsen's view on Tzu-chi's 'civic' contribution rather

simplistic and over-optimistic and has explained the prevalence of humanistic Buddhism in general and Tzu-chi in particular by addressing the institutionalised character of Buddhism. Classifying Buddhism as an 'institutionalised religion', in contrast to a 'diffuse religion' such as Taiwanese folkloric religion, Ting contends that the institutionalised nature of Buddhism not only allows it to withstand political suppression and the prevalent Western ideology, but also to expand rapidly once the social atmosphere changes. Therefore, the diffuse Taiwanese folk religion, which was devastated due to political and cultural suppression, eventually lost its predominant position to Buddhism in the Taiwanese religious landscape. Furthermore, to distinguish itself from the 'superstitious' belief system of the folklore religion, as Ting suggested in his earlier work, Buddhist organisations and monastics have spoken against the mixture of Buddhism with Confucianism and Daoism in its 'come-back' revitalisation (2004, 108).

In expressing her disagreement with Ting's emphasis on the principle of 'distinction and exclusion', Lin Wei-ting has instead proposed that a strategy of 'syncretism-translation' (調和轉化[275]) is the key to understanding the spread of humanistic Buddhism. *Syncretism*, Lin argues, implies the co-existence and co-construction of different elements, and *translation* denotes a contemporary Buddhist reinterpretation of different Buddhist or non-Buddhist elements to allow them to be included as a part in contemporary Buddhism (Lin 2012, 93). Lin notes that, although Buddhist associations endeavour to 'legitimate' themselves by addressing the differences between superstitious belief and rightful belief, they are also aware of the risk of losing those who believe in the Taiwanese folklore religion if they are antagonistic. To illustrate this, in reference to the Buddhist historian Cheng-Tseng Kan (2004), Lin uses the example of the founding figure of humanistic Buddhism, Yin-shun, who instead interpreted all the gods, deities, and immortals found in folk religion as different forms of the personification of the Buddhist bodhisattva Guan-yin. In other words, through a narrative strategy, Daoist and Confucian belief systems are reconciled to Buddhism.

A similar strategy, I argue, applies to Tzu-chi in its approach to environmental issues and waste recycling: grounded in Buddhist tenets, Tzu-chi syncretises environmental issues with the humanistic Buddhist narrative of terrestrial Pure Land. Moreover, as the next chapter shows, Tzu-chi's environment-related

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[275] diaohe zhuanhua

discourse also includes the tenets of Daoism and Confucianism and infuses them with Buddhist ones, which supports Lin's argument.

Nevertheless, the rhetoric of Tzu-chi uses terminology and concepts to culturally translate modern, secular problems into a religious problem. Two purposes, or two *timely* religious goals, underlie these efforts: to reform Buddhism by providing new (secular) meanings to the conventional terms such as Pure Land, and to revive the social status of Buddhism by seeking public endorsement. Environmental activism such as waste recycling in this context represents one of the Buddhist 'expedient means' (方便法, upāya)—a less theoretically oriented but situation-adapted method practitioners use to gain enlightenment without emphasising the ultimate 'truth' in the highest sense—which strengthened the theological and organisational links between temples and lay believers and popularised Buddhist narratives and practices (Chen 2011). This explains the heavy use of rhetoric and metaphors in Tzu-chi's environmental narratives without specifying the theological reasoning behind the chosen concepts and their connections, such as purity, turbidity, fire house, fountainhead, or *jie.* As long as they are rhetorically connected and Buddhism-inflected, these concepts are deployed to syncretise the popular ideas of environmentalism. Consequently, the mundane material of rubbish and waste recycling is sacralised.

5.   Concluding Remarks

This chapter concerns the interplay of religion and environmentalism in Tzu-chi recycling. To explore this intersection, this chapter analyses the institutional narrative of the environment and the organisation's recycling engagement in relation to Tzu-chi's Buddhist identity. The chapter first discusses a body of literature which investigates the role of religion in the environmental works and the role of environmental works in the practice of religion. Acknowledging religious actors' growing participation in secular environmental activism on a global and local level, including Buddhism, scholars have debated whether Buddhist environmentalism exists. Nevertheless, the scholarship has gradually shifted its focus from asking what religion can do for environmentalism to asking what environmentalism does for religion. The chapter is aligned with this approach, asking what recycling means to and does for the Tzu-chi organisation. Instead of claiming that Tzu-chi recycling exemplifies religious environmentalism, I propose that the social phenomenon of Tzu-chi recycling reflects and contributes to the religious phenomenon of humanistic Buddhism in Taiwan.

The chapter closely reads the institutional environment-related narratives to show that Tzu-chi's environment-related discourse is a manifestation and implication of the basic value orientation of Buddhist mind cultivation and its transcendent, circular worldview. Based on the humanistic Buddhist perspective of Pure Land, Tzu-chi's philosophy observes that a state of purity is the ultimate ideal, and that a key solution to a disorderly society and environment is to have people's minds purified. Through its syncretism-translation narrative strategy, rubbish is a symbolic object of humankind's spiritual unwholesomeness or an emblem of deceased sentient beings. Subsequently, a 'mundane' act of waste sorting in an everyday setting turns into a sacred public ritual to cultivate individual minds and reincarnate materials. The discursive operation endeavours to evoke a transcendent imagery to formulate representations of and links between physical surroundings with the profundity of spiritual beings. In this regard, the Buddhist organisation does not immediately lend itself to physical environmental concerns. Rather, through its rhetorical strategy, the organisation grounds the saliency of waste issue and recycling practice in the relation to one's spiritual status —people's minds—the Buddhist roots. On this basis, Tzu-chi turns the work of environmental care into the means for the organisation to practice its Buddhist identity.

In suggesting that Tzu-chi environmental discourse is a discursive manifestation of the organisation's vision of building a humanistic Pure Land, I must caution, however, that, as mentioned earlier and as I understand it, the organisation did not initially orchestrate and establish the recycling programme at an institutional level as part of a 'greater plan'. As discussed in Chapter One, the beginning of community recycling in Tzu-chi was a rather 'natural', grass-roots movement that was contextualised in the social situation of 1990s Taiwan, when the waste problem was one of the first environmental issues that confronted society on an everyday basis. However, a sense of urgency and the 'realness' of the waste issue align well with the overall philosophy and agenda of Tzu-chi because of its advocacy of spiritual degradation and the establishment of a terrestrial Pure Land. Therefore, the environment-related discourse becomes the confluence of the organization's religious thoughts.

In other words, environmental issues contribute 'new material' for religious preaching and training to Tzu-chi. The materiality of waste recycling to respond to the polluted environment, in a metaphorical as well as a realistic sense, becomes a means through which Tzu-chi realises its humanistic Buddhist goal of being socially concerned and secularly engaged and also of revitalising the once-

degraded social status of Buddhism. To explain this relation between Tzu-chi's religious identity and its recycling engagement, this chapter examines its overall organisational structure and its affairs other than recycling, and it contextualises these in the development and characteristics of humanistic Buddhism. Together, the spiritualisation of environmental work and the secularisation of religion depict the on-going dynamics between two forces at each end of a spectrum—this-worldly and other-worldly—which negate but reinforce one another.

Chapter Eight |
The Cultural Project of Recycling:
Traditional Order and Nostalgic
Environmentalism

1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I read Tzu-chi's environment-related discourse against the backdrop of Taiwan's humanistic Buddhism to examine how the narratives, particularly those articulated through Buddhist concepts, express Tzu-chi's religious identity. I have shown that Tzu-chi's institutional endeavour to engage in waste recycling is a part of the organisation's effort to establish a terrestrial Pure Land—a religious project to reform and popularise Buddhism. This chapter continues the reading of Tzu-chi's institutional narratives of the environment yet expands the examination's scope. By an expanded scope, I mean that, first, the analysis in this chapter focuses not only on the narratives directly linked to Buddhism; second, it examines the environment-related narratives in relation to another major mission of the Tzu-chi organisation, the cultural mission, with which the Tzu-chi recycling programme is institutionally affiliated; and third, the chapter contextualises the characteristics of the discourse in relation to Taiwan's rapid, condensed cultural shift in the age of globalisation.

Throughout the chapter, I illustrate that Tzu-chi's environment-related narratives are a concrete manifestation of the multifaceted traditional Chinese worldview rather than being exclusively Buddhist. By appropriating certain traditional

Chinese concepts in its reading of environment-related issues, Tzu-chi elaborates on their cultural and social concerns. In this register, the discourse is a part of the organisation's grand cultural project of reclaiming the social and cultural order in support of the religious goal of creating a humanistic Pure Land. From this, I propose that Tzu-chi's environmental concern is a form of nostalgic environmentalism: when constructing its cultural interpretation of environmental problems, the organisational narratives depend for their force on a contrast between a degenerate, modern, Western civilisation and its Other—which is seen as both a geographical and temporal Other lying in the historical past. In other words, Tzu-chi's environmental discourse is filled with criticism of modern conditions and cultures, including today's environmental degradation and wasteful society, and a yearning for the 'forgotten' cultural tradition.

To describe Tzu-chi's institutional nostalgia, this chapter proceeds in three stages. The first section introduces the cultural mission of Tzu-chi in relation to the organisation's developmental trajectory and explains its relation to the recycling programme, which is to restore order. The second section is a close reading of Tzu-chi's environment-related narratives to clarify its traditional and hybrid view of environmental issues. I formulate a symbolic system, the scheme of 'ordered purity', as a structural reference to understand Tzu-chi's (re)interpretations and (re)ordering of notions of the mind, society, the body, and nature. The final section aims to understand Tzu-chi's environmental discourse from a different angle by discussing the ways in which Tzu-chi uses concepts rooted in familiar and past worldviews to criticise contemporary conditions and to imagine an environmental, cultural, and social utopia. I consider making this discourse a process of local contextualisation and temporal de-contextualisation. The discourse represents a local cultural translation of a global environmental phenomenon yet is also a proposal to return to the past for the future. Therefore, by the end of the chapter, I contend that Tzu-chi's environment-related discourse is a product of nostalgia rather than of a specific religion or of environmentalism.

2.   Transitions of Tzu-chi: From Betterment to Redemption

The social engagements and humanitarian missions of Tzu-chi have undergone a transformation since its establishment in the 1960s. In reviewing the development of Tzu-chi, its founder and leader, Cheng-yen, believes that each decade marks a watershed for Tzu-chi's four major missions, charity, medicine, education, and culture. Instead of using the organisation's own missionary

projects to periodise Tzu-chi's developmental trajectory, I propose that three stages reflect Tzu-chi's changing views on the role of social works in the practice of religion. The stages mark a transition from 'ambulance aid' via an approach of 'institutional development' to the most recent, which I refer to as 'order reclamation', the category that encompasses the recycling programme. Reading Tzu-chi recycling in light of Tzu-chi's developmental stages, I argue that the 'environmental' works of waste cleaning and sorting are nevertheless part of Tzu-chi's cultural project, a means to materially and culturally bring order to replace disorder.

This section explains Tzu-chi's organisational transition and notes that it is embedded in the rapid social changes of Taiwan over the second half of the 20th century. After its establishment in the 1960s, Tzu-chi's religious volunteering association, the Tzu-chi Merit Society, remained a small, informal charity group without legal status until early 1980.[276] In its early stages, during Taiwan's post–Cold War poverty, Tzu-chi's missionary projects were almost exclusively on the level of charity to meet the daily needs of the needy and downtrodden members of society by providing material and financial support. By the end of the 1970s, Tzu-chi's mission had shifted towards more institutional and developmental priorities to build hospitals and, later, to build a medical school to train the much-needed professionals for the Tzu-chi hospital (cf. Huang 2009; Lee 2017).

The organisation's wide-ranging success, however, came at a dramatic time due to the socio-political and economic transformation in the late 1980s in Taiwan and is exemplified by the growth in Tzu-chi followers. The relaxation of authoritarian rule caused waves of social movements to surge with full force in almost every sector of society between the mid-1980s and early 1990s, relieving the long-suppressed public discontent. In addition to the political transformation, the late 1980s was also the period when Taiwan's economic development began experiencing unprecedented growth, wealth, and consumption. With national economic development, Taiwan was commonly described as 'drowning in money' (台灣錢淹腳目[277]) during that period, with citizens plunged into risky investments in the stock market and speculating on land prices, and there was also a boom in gambling (Weller 2011b). The political commotion and economic upheaval in the late 1980s and 1990s, in the eyes of Tzu-chi, produced disarray in

[276] For lengthier introductions to, and discussions of, Cheng-yen's life before ordination and of the early phases of the Merit Society, see the works of, for example, Madsen (2007) and Huang (2009).

[277] tai wan qian yan jiao mu, in Minan.

the social order. In response, the organisation became more of a cultural and religious force than one of humanitarian development, and it saw itself as having an important catalytic duty to stabilise society and bring back order.

An article written by Wang Duan-zhang, then the vice-chief executive officer of the Tzu-chi Foundation and the brother of Cheng-yen before her tonsure, titled 'A Lesson on Moral Reorganisation from Tzu-chi Experiences' was published in the first Tzu-chi almanac in 1992, and it illustrates the organisational attitude:

> There are many symptoms in today's society, yet just one pathogen. It is that life's value system has become vague, the social value system has become undisciplined, and appeals to morality have become complacent. […] While material life is improving, the cultivation of morals is diminishing. People are becoming indifferent about the fact that the trust and care for each other that consolidate society have gone. […] What is morality? […] It upholds two aspects—the internal and the external: the internal is our awareness of life's values; the external is our behaviour. The religious faith in kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity [in Buddhism] forms our internal awareness, and the [traditional] virtues of sincerity, integrity, trustworthiness, and honesty form our external behaviour.[278;279]

In the article, Wang suggests that religion, as the 'inner side' of morality, possesses wisdom about how to live. According to him, religion is therefore the serious stakeholder that represents the force to rectify the prevalence of violence, economic opportunism, and consequentialism caused by the pursuit of fame and profit in Taiwanese society.

By then, Tzu-chi had entered its third and most recent developmental stage of *order reclamation*, shifting its public participation from the betterment of people's temporal lives through social services and humanitarian action (back) to the salvation of beings. Accordingly, in the developmental stage of order reclamation, the fourth missionary institute of Tzu-chi—the Tzu-chi Culture and Communication Foundation (formerly, *the Culture Foundation* until 2005)—was established in the early 1990s. The cultural and communication foundation is

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[278] See Appendix, quotation 8.1 for Chinese text and pin-yin; the English translation is by the author.

[279] Tzu-chi Almanac 1992, 'ciji jingyan dui daode zhongzheng de qishi' 慈濟經驗對道德重整的啟示, 27-28.

essentially the media centre of Tzu-chi, an assembly of all sorts of media outlets, including publishing (Tzu-chi Companion Publication); magazines in Chinese, English, and Japanese (e.g., *Tzu-chi monthly* or *Rhythms monthly*); television broadcasting (Da-ai TV); and radio stations (Da-ai radio). Together, these outlets produce a wide variety of media content to realise the organisation's cultural goal of 'purifying people's minds, harmonising society, thus freeing the world from disaster' (淨化人心，祥和社會，天下無災[280]). To achieve this end, the publication and shows often centre on themes such as Buddhist teachings and traditional values.[281] For instance, Da-ai TV mostly broadcasts good news, even, for example, in reporting on a disaster; it does so to adhere to and rationalise the organisational view of the role of media—to purify thoughts—in contrast to the sensationalised news reports on commercial TV.

In addition to numerous media entities, another Tzu-chi organisational programme falls under the category of the culture and communication mission: the Tzu-chi recycling programme. On the one hand, in a direct sense, the timeline of Tzu-chi's community recycling movement runs parallel with the development of its cultural missions, which took place starting in the early 1990s. Moreover, the monetary profits from the recycling programme offer economic resources to support the operations of Tzu-chi's media institutes, specifically Da-ai television, which refuses to rely on commercial advertisement for its income. On the other hand, in Tzu-chi discourse, recycling represents the focus of Tzu-chi's latest missionary stage, that is, purifying polluted minds and bringing order to disorder. As discussed in Chapter Seven, rubbish and the social problems it causes are considered one of many social and environmental consequences of economic upheaval and political turbulence. Based on this interpretation, a primary statement in Tzu-chi's environmental discourse is that the practice of recycling not only removes physical refuse and urban dirt to restore a hygienic, organised environment, but it also has symbolic resonance because the process of waste recovery can be used as a tool to rejuvenate polluted minds, which are the 'pathogen' of contemporary Taiwanese society. In this context, the actions of removing discarded materials and undoing corrupt deeds are not simply aligned; they are two overlapping and mutually constitutive categories. In other words, recycling is an environmental programme and a religious practice, and also a cultural mission of 'order reclamation' in the Tzu-chi context.

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[280] jinghua renxin, xianghe shehui, tianxia wu zai
[281] Tzu-chi Almanac 1998, 'luoshi ciji wenhua nian' 落實慈濟文化年, 8-10.

3.   Traditional Order Reclamation

3.1   The Symbolic System of Ordered Purity

Based on the reading and analysis of Tzu-chi's environment-related institutional documents, I create a conceptual scheme and call it 'ordered purity' to illustrate the order Tzu-chi aims to reclaim in its cultural mission of environmental engagement. I formulate the 'ordered purity' scheme as a three-layer structure consisting of a system of minds, a system of interpersonal relations, and a system of physical entities. I present it in the form of concentric circles, with the system of minds at the centre of the scheme, followed by the system of interpersonal relations, and, moving outward, the system of organic entities (see Figure 8.1). The ordered purity scheme is a symbolic embodiment of the concepts and the relations among them in Tzu-chi's perception of individuals, actions, materials, and natures. These concepts, as this section aims to show, are not exclusively Buddhist but a mixture of Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist concepts; it is thus, I argue, a representation of traditional Chinese cosmology.

I formulate the scheme following two sources of reference. The first is Tzu-chi leader Cheng-yen's public statements on the process of reaching the end of environmental protection:

> Buddhism considers *absolute reality to come from our mind*. To protect the planetary environment, first we need to purify our hearts. […] With healthy minds, there is a happy family; with happy families, there is a harmonious society; within a harmonious society, people will genuinely be aware of and cherish their blessings; when people know and cherish their blessings, they will stop exhausting the planet's resources.[282;283]

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[282] See Appendix, quotation 8.2 for Chinese text and pin-yin; the English translation is the author's.

[283] Tzu-chi Almanac 1992, 'jinghua xinling dadi, tuidong diqiu huanbao' 淨化心靈大地　推動地球環保', 520-521.
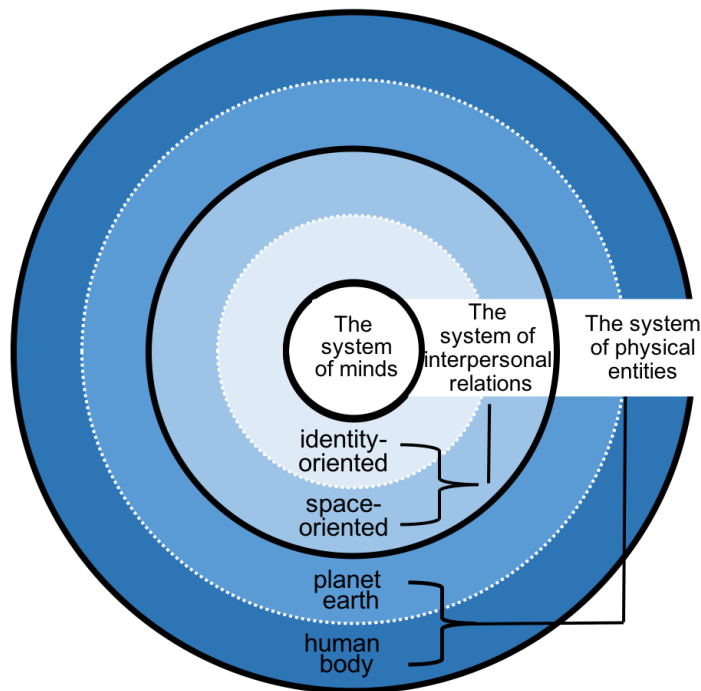
Figure 8.1 Scheme of ordered purity

What Cheng-yen suggests is an order of progression (mind → family → society → planet) required to achieve a sustainable environment. This categorised order indicating the direction of dissemination of constructive power is similar to the chain of cause and effect presented in the Buddhist scripture the *Vimalakirti Sutra*: from individual minds to the altruistic and enlightened collective, and thus to a Pure Land (see Chapter Seven). Thus, I formulate the purity scheme based on a similar relational order: minds→ social relations→ physical entities.

Furthermore, when formulating the scheme of purity, the system of *harmony and the equilibrium of the cosmology* proposed by the anthropologist Li Yih-yuan (1988) offered conceptual inspiration. Derived from his study on the folk culture of Taiwan and Southern Fukien, as well as from his an embodiment research project on 'Culture, Qi, and Medicine', Li, too, identifies three strata systems—in the order of the system of *tian* (cosmic order), *ren* (individual organism), and *she-hui* (society)—to depict the process through which the Chinese explain the operation of nature and society. Similar transcendent views and reasoning

principles are recognised in Tzu-chi's philosophical ideas on the environmental issue. However, in contrast to the scheme Li proposed, the ordered purity scheme of Tzu-chi reflects its Buddhist 'roots'—that is, a tenet emphasising mind-determinism and an eschatological view that all materials, including natures and bodies, are temporal. Hence, Cheng-yen opened her statement by saying, 'Buddhism considers *absolute reality to come from our mind*'. Therefore, unlike in Li's equilibrium scheme, where the material aspect of an individual organism is emphasised, and the system of the individual organism is placed before the system of society, in Tzu-chi's basic value orientation, the mind is at the centre.

I now follow this value orientation to briefly explain each system and its representative form of purity. First, the system of minds is at the centre of the whole scheme of purity. Similar to when rocks are thrown into water, the splash of thought creates ripples of effect that flow out to interpersonal relationships, then to the natural environment of the earth, and then to the bodily environment of an individual. In Tzu-chi discourse, as discussed in Chapter Seven, purity in the system of minds appears in the form of a person's *zhen ru* (真如) or 'true suchness'. This is the ultimate goal of Buddhist, the status of *enlightenment* in a religious pursuit.

Second, the system of interpersonal relations consists of two sub-categories: identity-oriented relations, such as family and teacher-student relationships, and space-oriented relationships, such as neighbourhoods and communities. In both sub-categories, the ideal status of purity is situated in traditional propriety. The Confucian concept of filial piety (孝[284]), for example, is considered the basic principle governing the order of identity-oriented relations and is extended to other dyads of social relations. For the organisation, compliance with traditional norms is a form of self-cultivation that brings harmony into society and provides the foundation for a humanistic Pure Land.

Third, the outermost layer of the Tzu-chi discourse scheme is the system of physical entities. It also consists of two sub-categories: the planet and the human body. In Buddhist perception, both the body and the natural world are *qi* (器), that is, vessels or receptacles that represent the objective world, which is formed by mundane and temporal matters with illusory natures. Shaped by such a perception, Tzu-chi describes the human body, for example, as either an unwholesome object, the 'vile skin-bag' (臭皮囊[285]), or a 'vessel to convey *dao*' (載

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[284] xiao

[285] chou pi nang

道器[286]). In this mode of thinking, both the human body and the planet are manifestations of the systems of minds and society, and they respond to the statuses of the two inner systems. This is why waste materials are represented as symbols of 'mind rubbish' in Tzu-chi's environmental discourse. Furthermore, because both the physical entity of the body and the earth are made of the same objective matter and follow the same cosmic principles, in that discourse, narratives are articulated to address the compatibility and correspondence between the two organisms. The ideal state of the system of physical entities is the state of harmony and equilibrium between its different elements and components. This mode of thinking is closely linked to Daoist tradition yet gradually becoming an overall representation of the traditional Chinese worldview. A folk practice example of this is the process of compensating for deficiencies in the diet. Traditional Chinese medicine is a more general example of following such principles to pursue a balanced environmental status.

In short, for Tzu-chi, the ideal environment, as well as the realisation of a humanistic Pure Land, represents a state in which the optimum status of the three systems, that is, the three forms of purity—the True Suchness, traditional propriety, and cosmic harmony—are all realised at once. In the previous chapter, although without using the term 'the system of mind', I examined how Tzu-chi links the disorder of people's minds with environmental degradation through its humanistic Buddhist approach; the organisation thus engages in environmental works and uses waste recycling as a means to purify people's minds in its realisation of an orderly Pure Land in this world. In this section, the discussion continues and focuses on the other two systems, the interpersonal relations and the physical entities, to shed lights on Tzu-chi's overall cultural project of bringing order and its religious goal of creating a terrestrial Pure Land, with a focus on the role of environmental issues and waste recycling. To do so, I 'disassemble' and rearrange the organisation's environment-related narratives according to the ordered purity scheme. I show that, although the ultimate concern of Tzu-chi's institutional environmental engagement is (humanistic) Buddhist, to create a Pure Land, its social vision of *how to do so* builds on ideas of how things *were*. In other words, the order that Tzu-chi aims to recover in order to realise an orderly Pure Land is an orderly version based on traditionality.

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[286] zai dao qi

3.2   The System of Interpersonal Relations: 'Subduing Oneself and Restoring Traditional Propriety'

According to Tzu-chi philosophy, the contamination of people's minds and hence the contamination of the physical environment are concomitant with the laxity of traditional moral discipline—*li* (禮), propriety. The traditional Confucian virtues and social norms that regulated principles of order in interpersonal relations and that were used to prioritise collective well-being over individual interests, in Cheng-yen's eyes, were impoverished during Taiwan's rapid industrial modernisation in the second half of the 20th century. Without traditional ethics, society lost control of its mental desires, resulting in a materially wasteful and culturally 'rootless' society.

Following this line of thinking, the organisation believes that a key to building a humanistic Pure Land within society is restoring traditional propriety, the purity of the system of interpersonal relations, to curb hedonistic human desires. This advocacy is framed as the cultural movement of *ke ji fu li* (克己復禮), or 'subduing oneself and restoring propriety', in the organisational discourse. Illustrating the relations between individual desire, traditional propriety, and ecological nature, Tzu-chi states:

> *Ke ji* is to subdue personal desire; if one cannot control one's desire for pleasure-seeking and wastes resources all the time, this not only harms one's own body but also the earth. As for *fu li*: what is the beauty of the relationships between people? It is propriety. One can truly express the cultivation of oneself with propriety. I wish that everyone would work towards to a society based on propriety, with subdued personal desires, in which the quality of humanity is elevated and traditional etiquette, such as respect for authority, the rule of law, and filial piety, is revived. If this were to happen, I believe that the ecology of the future would also be different. By bringing loving hearts together, the problem of the greenhouse effect and abnormal climate would gradually be alleviated.[287;288]

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[287] See Appendix, quotation 8.3 for Chinese text and pin-yin; the English translation is the author's.

[288] Tzu-chi Foundation 慈濟基金會, '*keji fuli* cong ziji zuo qi'「克己復禮」從自己做起, Tzu-chi official website, 14 November 2008, http://www.tzuchi-org.tw/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=131%3A2008-11-14-00-29-03&catid=93%3Aculture-project&Itemid=386&lang=zh (accessed 17 September 2019).

The above quotation is an extract from an article published by Tzu-chi's cultural mission department. This statement illustrates how the organisation approaches cultural issues by finding legitimacy in environmental matters. In addition, the examples given to explain what traditional propriety is—respect for authority and the rule of law (尊師重道[289]) and filial piety—have strong Confucian connotations.

Scholars have noted that, while Buddhist beliefs provide the formal identity of the Tzu-chi organisation, they are nonetheless thoroughly intertwined with neo-Confucian moral ideals (Madsen 2007; Ting 2009). In his study of Taiwanese humanistic Buddhism, Richard Madsen has stated that, although Tzu-chi's 'ultimate concerns are Buddhist', its social vision and morality '[build] on a Confucian notion of expanding family loyalties to encompass an ever-wider circle of humanity' (2007, 18; 151). Neo-Confucian tenets assume that there is no fundamental distinction between individual and beyond-individual realms, and that mutuality and immediacy among individuals, society, and nature require a continuous effort of self-cultivation to follow the 'heavenly principles' (天理[290]) to ensure that order is fully realised (Tu 2004). In this sense, the renowned scholar of Confucianism Tu Wei-ming has argued that, in a neo-Confucianist view, the natural principle is one reference point for (re)constructing social and political orders alongside personal actions (Marek Jeziorek [Tu Wei-ming] 2018). Influenced by this mode of thinking, in the context of Tzu-chi, the synthesis between the philosophical aspirations of Buddhism and Confucianism is that individual sentiments and mind purity can be realised through behaviours based on the moral doctrines of Confucianism (Her 2017).

Tzu-chi addresses interpersonal relations in the local community, which I refer to as the 'space-oriented' relationship in the purity scheme, and filial piety, which I refer to as the 'identity-oriented' relationship in the scheme, as the kinds of traditional propriety that should be restored. While the communitisation of the Tzu-chi laity system and the development of the local recycling collection network resemble the projects Tzu-chi performs to restore space-oriented interpersonal relations (see Chapter Six), over the years, Tzu-chi has also actively advocated filial piety through its educational and cultural missions. For example, Cheng-yen and other monastic associates have frequently included the teachings of the Sutra

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[289] shi zhong dao
[290] tian li

of Filial Piety (父母恩重難報經[291]) in their public speeches and publications. In 2018, Tzu-chi organised a total of 28 rounds of 'Praying for Blessings Event of Luck and Filial Piety' (吉祥孝親祈福會[292]), which took place across the country, where thousands of attendants watched family-related theatrical and dance performances and listened to personal stories celebrating filial piety that were shared on stage.

Naturally, a sense of local community and filial piety are not the only moral values Tzu-chi wishes to restore. In the 2009 Tzu-chi Almanac, an article titled 'Reviving the Beauty of Ancient Virtue' (恢復古德之美[293]) documented one of Cheng-yen's public speeches, in which she called for a revitalisation of the 'five constant virtues' (五常[294]) and the 'four social bonds' (四維[295]) of Confucianism:[296]

> *Benevolence, justice, propriety, wisdom*, and *sincerity* [the five constant virtues] are the beauty of Chinese humanity and noble virtues. But because of the spread of the western model in the East, children nowadays forget the wisdom of our ancestors. […] Under the new influences of the current cultural model, ancient humanity has been forgotten; therefore, human nature is continuously being obscured […] I hope every child can return to their pure nature, which is the Buddha Nature; that is wisdom. […] Hence, wouldn't that make this society the Pure Land in the human realm? [...] Let children understand and comprehend the sense of '*propriety*, *justice*, *integrity*, and *honour'* [the four social bonds], understand filial piety, and be aware of the virtues

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[291] fu mu en Zhong nan bao jin

[292] ji xiang xiao quin qi fu hui

[293] huifu gu de zhi mei

[294] wu chang, denoting '仁 benevolence, 義 justice, 禮 propriety, 智 wisdom, and 信 sincerity'

[295] si wei, denoting '禮 propriety, 義 justice, 廉 integrity, and 恥 honour'

[296] The value that Tzu-chi attaches to Confucian virtues, and the inclusion of these social norms in the organisation's symbolic structure, to some extent reflect the historical context and educational background of Tzu-chi members' upbringing. The Confucian ethos that Tzu-chi values greatly and refers to frequently— including the five constant virtues, the four social bonds, and the eight cardinal virtues—was also actively promoted by the Chinese Nationalist Party, the KMT, as part of the cultural reform during the New Life Movement (新生活運動) and has been mandatorily included in the school curriculum since the 1930s.

of hard work and frugality. [...] To save the planet, we must start with human minds.[297;298]

By formulating a binary opposition with Eastern humanity as the ancient and forgotten mode and Western culture as the new, problematic mode (which is associated with the younger generation), Cheng-yen's nostalgic call to save the planet by reviving the Confucian ethos exemplifies the role of the norms and virtues in Tzu-chi's environment-related discourse. They are the purity of the social system, the 'rooted' cultural identity that represents the only way in which the purity of the mind can be attained, and ecological nature can be recovered.

3.3   The System of Physical Entities: Microcosm and Macrocosm

Tzu-chi frequently 'borrows' notions which are mostly associated with Daoism and traditional Chinese medicine to elaborate upon the relations between natural environment and human body. The idea is that the physical entities of both the body and the earth share similar constitutive elements and follow the same cosmic principles. In Tzu-chi's environment-related discourse, narratives are articulated to address the compatibility and correspondence between the two organisms.

For example, in response to the news of an estimated 3.5-degree Celsius global temperature increase in 2015, a Tzu-chi monastic wrote a short article entitled 'Overcoming Desire' in *Tzu-chi Monthly*:

> The master [Cheng-yen] wailed and said, 'Human beings can only be at peace when the earth is in good health. However, negligent humankind has made mischief in *da qian kun*, giving the earth a fever and causing it to become sick, creating disasters'. The master emphasised that the principles of the human body's *xiao qian kun* are compatible with the world's *da qian kun*—once bacteria have done mischief in the human body, the human being gets sick; once humankind has destroyed the natural environment, it will cause the world to suffer the *si da bu diao*.[299;300]

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[297] See Appendix, quotation 8.4 for Chinese text and pin-yin; the English translation is made the author's.

[298] Tzu-chi Almanac 2009, 'hui fu gu de zhi mei' 恢復古德之美, 44-47.

[299] See Appendix, quotation 8.5 for Chinese text and pin-yin; the English translation is the author's.

[300] Shi De-fan 釋德凡, 'er ri zhansheng yuwang' 二日 戰勝欲望, Ciji Yuekan 慈濟月刊 [Ciji Monthly] 588, 25 November 2015,

In this warning statement, Cheng-yen and the monastic use two sets of traditional concepts to interpret environmental degradation and global warming: the 'da/xiao qian kun' (大小乾坤) and the 'si da bu tiao' (四大不調). 'Da qian kun', meaning a macrocosm, is used to signify the earth, and 'xiao qian kun', meaning a microcosm, to describe the human body. The characters 'qian' (乾) and 'kun' (坤), in the canonical Daoist script *Yi Jing* (易經), are two opposing parts in the hexagram: 'qian' is the signifier of heaven or *yang* (陽), while 'kun' is the signifier of earth or *yin* (陰). The combination of the two symbols, 'qian kun' (乾坤), therefore indicates the whole of a complex structure and denotes the cosmos or an organism. By referring to *da qian kun* and *xiao qian kun*, the rhetoric of Tzu-chi uses local, familiar vernacular to evoke transcendent imagery for its followers to understand global phenomena and scientific figures, while suggesting the power of the intangible cosmic principles that govern the statuses of and relations between the earth and bodies.

The reference to the concept *si da bu tiao* shares a similar motive and effect. The term, meaning the 'disharmony of the Four Great', originates from a phrase in traditional Chinese medicine that is used to describe human health. The rhetoric uses the Buddhist concept of *si da* (四大), or 'the Four Great'—the four constituent elements of the objective world—whose disharmony indicates an imbalance among the four constitutive elements of the physical body. According to Tzu-chi, the four elements are (1) Earth, which constitutes the solid physical parts of the human body (hair, bone, muscle, skin, etc.); (2) Water, which constitutes bodily liquids (saliva, blood, sweat, tears, etc.); (3) Fire, which constitutes bodily energy and temperature; and (4) Wind, which constitutes bodily motions (breathing and digesting, for example). Tzu-chi applies this Buddhist-specific concept to interpret the ecological crisis and natural disasters as symbolising the planet's illness. Therefore, earthquakes and landslides are regarded as symptoms of the disharmony of the Earth; floods and droughts indicate the disharmony of the Water; and wildfires and manmade fires suggest the disharmony of the Fire on earth. An analogy of human beings as 'earthly' bacteria and (selfish) human activities as mischief is thereby formed to explain the abstract environmental issue in daily life experiences and cultivate an ethical way of thinking about humanity's relationship with nature.

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http://web.tzuchiculture.org.tw/?book=588&mp=4967#.XYUWeExuK71 (accessed on 17 September 2019).

The application of transcendent imagination to relate a person's body to broader environments is not limited to the organisation's institutional discourse. It is also common for volunteers to refer to this narrative in their recycling practices. At Tzu-chi recycling stations, when a volunteer's shirt is soaked with sweat from recycling efforts, other volunteers congratulate him or her. When I saw this, the volunteer in question explained to me that this is because the sweating volunteer has 'successfully expelled bodily poisons, thus becoming a happy, healthy person'.[301]

A volunteer made a similar statement at the monthly gathering of Tzu-chi recycling cadres in Taipei. The 60-year-old commissioner earned nods of approval from the audience despite his shaking voice and nervous body language when he said:

> Before I came to volunteer with Tzu-chi, my hospital test results were all 'red'. My whole body had deteriorated by the age of 50 because of social niceties and drinking over the years. And now I'm here 'zuo *huanbao*' [recycling]. Oh, sometimes this is such exhausting work. Moving things, running around, and dismantling things. [...] But this work has made me sweat and made me feel so happy. [...] And the hospital results have now all turned green [audience applauds]! Even my doctor said I should not quit Tzu-chi for the sake of the planet and my body [laughing].[302]

Instead of simply being considered an environmental task, the physical work of recycling was in this case presented as healthy exercise to remove 'bodily rubbish'—that is, sweat. According to Tzu-chi, our metabolic waste has accumulated and affects our health, since economic activities and labour have transitioned from being physical jobs to mental ones in modern society. Without enough physical exercise to facilitate excretion, human bodies are 'polluted' by modern lifestyles. Recycling practice, therefore, not only removes mental clutter and material waste, but also cleanses one's body and restores one's physical health. In this context, engaging in recycling not only extends the 'useful life' of discarded artefacts, but also of humans. Therefore, the male commissioner concluded his testimony by stating, 'I am a person recycled by Tzu-chi'.

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[301] Fieldwork diary, Tzu-chi Bade recycling station, Taipei, 12 July 2016.
[302] Fieldwork diary, Tzu-chi Chung-shan gathering hall, Taipei, 6 July 2016.

4.   A Discourse of Nostalgic Environmentalism

4.1   *Tianrenheyi* : Anthropocosmicism

In the previous chapter, I noted that Tzu-chi's environmental discourse exemplifies the tenets of humanistic Buddhism and draws upon the concept of Pure Land to depict an optimum environmental world. By presenting the symbolic systems of interpersonal relations and physical entities, I show that the narratives also feature other key concepts from different classical Chinese philosophical domains, mainly Confucianism and Daoism. All these concepts— ranging from 'pure mind means pure land' to 'filial piety leads to altruistic love'; from 'disharmony of the Four Great' to 'material reincarnation'—together represent a traditional Chinese vision of nature and cosmology. It is an anthropocosmic worldview, that is, according to Same Micky's definition, an ethic principle in which 'the values of humanity and of the environment are not spoken of in terms of an opposition between centre and periphery, but in terms of an intimate intertwining of humans (*anthropoi*) with the world (*cosmos*)' (2007, 227). This anthropocosmic approach is best summarised through the common Chinese reference to the 'unity of nature and humanity'—*tian ren he yi* (天人合 一)—which is literally translated as 'heaven, human, unite, one'.

Weller (2011a) has noted that, although *tianrenheyi* anthropocosmicism is most closely associated with Daoism, it has spread far beyond any specific religious realm into the broader culture of East Asia. In the transcendent perception of *tianrenheyi*, nature is 'all-inclusive, the spontaneously self-generating life process which excludes nothing' (Tu 1989, 70). Thereby, there is 'unity', implying a harmonious alignment of people's behaviours and social institutions with the cosmic order. The word *tian* (天), literally meaning 'sky' and signifying 'heaven', generally refers to all the spheres representing cosmic forces, excluding human society, which is represented by the word *ren* (人), human.[303] The basic distinction between *tian* and *ren* has been expanded and developed into various conceptual applications in different philosophical domains. For instance, this-worldly and other-worldly in Buddhism; the 'heavenly principle' (天理[304]) and

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[303] Note that the concepts dealt with here have no exact equivalents in English and Chinese, and that some 'cosmological imagination' might therefore be required to better grasp the meanings behind the abstract Chinese terminology. In this thesis, I have chosen to use the word 'nature' as the translation for the Chinese word *tian* in order to illustrate how the traditional philosophical imaginary underscores Tzu-chi's environmental discourse.
[304] tian li

'human desire' (人欲[305]) in Confucianism; and 'qian' and 'kun' in Daoism. Although articulated through different terminologies, the two concepts are found in all of these traditions and present 'order' through highly elaborated and dialectical theories of essence, elements, universal patterns, and merits (Yu 2014). Although the development of the *tianrenheyi* thesis can be traced to ancient China, the notion is by no means a fossilised idea of merely historical interest. Instead, the thesis of *tianrenheyi*, as the historian Yu Ying-Shih has said, is so 'surprisingly resilient that it continues to haunt the Chinese mind in the 20th century' (2003, 63). According to Weller (2006), the dominance of the traditional worldview can be found, for example, at today's dinner table, where different foods and ingredients from Chinese medicine were often understood as sources of different *qi* to adjust one's bodily balance, or in bookshops and homes, where *fengshui* compasses and guidebooks and *tung shing* almanacs (通勝黃曆), calendars based on the Chinese lunar year, were commonly available.

4.2   Globalisation and local contextualisation

Around the turn of the 19th century, traditional understandings of how humans relate to the environment experienced a dramatic shift when the anthropocosmic worldview relinquished its dominant position in East Asian societies to the competing global discourse, the Western sundering view on nature/culture that was rooted in post-Enlightenment philosophy (Weller 2011a). The changing meaning of words such as *dili* (地理) and *ziran* (自然), for example, document this transition. The word *dili*, denoting 'the order of the earth', originally referred to the cosmic geomantic balance of *fengshui*; however, it took on the idea of 'geography' in the Western sense of an insensate physical world at the end of the 19th century, borrowing a term that the Japanese had coined to translate Western texts (*ibid.*, 130). Likewise, the word *ziran*, which initially meant 'self-so' to capture the spirit of the intrinsic spontaneity of *dao*, was now used in modern Chinese to translate the English word 'nature' to denote the environmentalist notion of the non-human world (Tu 1989, 71).

Most of these changes regarding the view of the environment were pervasively secular. Unlike historical Chinese views on a person's position in relation to the natural world, which were tied closely to religious ideas, the new ideas claimed their legitimacy from quantified measurement and rationalised calculation. However, it is not my intention to reduce a complex set of Western ideas about

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[305] ren yu

nature into a single thought. Early voices championed embracing nature in ways that varied from the ideas of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and transcendentalism to the writings of John Muir and references to the American origins of national parks. Still, among all this diversity, the developmentalist paradigm, which emphasises human control over the environment, dominated in the first half of the 20th century, when Western discourses were entering Asian regions. As a reflection of this, slogans such as 'Man Must Conquer Nature' (人定勝天) appeared in campaigns of both the Nationalist Party and the Socialist Mao era, while railways, canals, and dams were celebrated as feats of domination (Shapiro 2001; Weller 2011a).

A new evaluation of nature from the perspective of conservationism began to emerge in the late 1970s in Taiwan, when the environmental movement began to take hold. Western ideas about the environment—both environmentalist and developmentalist—gained currency in the public sphere. This occurred largely through education and, in relation to environmental movements, is seen most clearly among the top political and academic leaders, who tend to have Western graduate degrees and speak most clearly in familiar Western idioms of economic growth versus environmental protection (Weller and Hsiao 1998). The earlier Chinese worldview was discarded, at least at the level of the intelligentsia who made policy and wrote textbooks, in favour of Western views. This situation remains the same today. During my interviews with seven current or former cabinet-level executive officers and administrators of the EPA of the Executive Yuan between 2014 and 2017, I asked if they had used or considered using traditional anthropocosmic, Buddhist, or Confucian concepts in official communications with colleagues or the public. All the respondents quickly rejected the possibility of doing so. Furthermore, some responses were accompanied by a grin or a confused frown. As one former EPA executive officer asserted, 'These [concepts] are just not suitable in public settings'.[306] However, when we look beyond the official secular discourse and examine the views of the general population, we find attitudes that appear much more complex.

In 1985, 1994, and 1999, the national academy of Taiwan, Academia Sinica, conducted three waves of the national Taiwan Social Change Survey to access the core values of the Taiwanese people using the central theme of the 'culture, value

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[306] Interview with Mr. Jian (18 November 2015, Taipei).

judgement.'[307] The survey aimed to explore different dimensions of Taiwanese people's value orientation, including the question on human relationship with nature. The data analyses showed that, the majority of responses selected the 'harmonious' category, meaning the idea that individuals should live in balance with natural forces. This indicates that this was the core orientation of the general Taiwanese population rather than the attitudes of 'mastery' or 'submission'. Furthermore, the dominance of the 'harmonious' responses increased across the period studied, to the extent that the difference between 1985 and 1999 was statistically significant (Huang and Chu 2011). The survey result as a whole suggested that, between 1985 and 1999, that is, during roughly the same period when Tzu-chi recycling emerged and developed rapidly, Taiwanese value orientations were significantly focused on the optimum state of harmony. It reflected the traditional cosmology of *tianrenheyi*, seeking the interconnectedness and mutual alignment, rather than placing value on particular ends—the self or the environment (Huang 2006). Nevertheless, the estrangement between the policymakers' environmental concerns based on instrumental rationality and the general population's harmonious view offers a snapshot of the cultural struggle in 1980s and 1990s Taiwan.

For Tzu-chi, this struggle between the spiritual culture of traditional society and the contemporary rationalism results from society's industrial modernisation and economic upheaval and that acts as the foundation of the problems of environmental degradation and waste. This view is manifested in Tzu-chi's institutional description, which holds that indigenous traditions has been uprooted and discarded in the course of the dissemination of Western modernity due to the spread of the 'Enlightenment mentality' and the unleashing of instrumental attitudes. As a result, society became disorderly. Cheng-yen explained this idea in a commissioner gathering event in 1995:

> Over the last few decades, our life and culture have changed, and the traditional Eastern spiritual culture has been disturbed because of the spread of the Western model in the East. Now there is a severe generation gap, which has developed into the alienation of family

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[307] The three waves of the national social change survey are the '1984 Taiwan Social Change Survey (Round 1): Interpersonal, Relations, Mass Communication, Economic Attitudes, Political Participation', the '1994 Taiwan Social Change Survey (Round 2, Year 5): Culture, Value Judgment' and the '1999 Taiwan Social Change Survey (Round 3, Year 5): Culture and Value Judgment'. In 1984, there were more than 4,000 collected and valid samples. In the 1994 and 1999 surveys, each collected almost 2,000 valid samples.

relationships, followed by the disturbance of families. Society is in disorder and some rules have been derailed.[308] (cited in Ting 2009, 209)[309]

In this respect, Tzu-chi's discourse, which features spiritual narratives and local worldviews in its reading of the environmental problem and waste works, advocates a restoration of the traditional order as a solution to modern problems. In other words, Tzu-chi regards environmental problems as a cultural issue. Such interpretation represents a regional, localised account in which the global language of environmentalism is contextualised. In a contextual discourse, as Jim Cheney has described, 'each word bears and locates our meeting with the world […] revealing and nourishing [its] interdependence' (1995, 26). To illustrate the conceptual features of a contextual discourse, Cheney contrasts it with what he calls a 'totalising language' that provides abstract understanding by cutting through individual differences to 'assimilate the world to it' (*ibid.*, 25). To some extent, the environmental views and concerns found in the narratives of political elites and activities could be seen as a kind of totalising language. This kind of views and concerns addresses environmental issues at a global scale or articulates arguments through references to scientific facts and numbers based on rational, logical principles. These scientific narratives can appear rather hypothetical and perhaps beyond local residents' understanding or concerns. In contrast, Tzu-chi's environment-related discourse locates those grand, abstract ideas in a familiar setting by assimilating recognised concepts with the observed environment-related problems in one's living spaces—for example, waste piling up in one's neighbourhood. This effort serves the purpose to bind a society together and to the land, and to that end, to call forth effective, 'appropriate' responses. With this recycling, unmaking and remaking process of worldviews, issues of argumentative coherence, and uprooting concepts from their original philosophical context are not the organisation's primary concern.

4.3   Problematic Presence and Selective Past

Tzu-chi's institutional account of environmental issues as a cultural problem reveals the organisation's temporal belonging to the past. Tzu-chi's institutional

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[308] See Appendix, quotation 8.6 for Chinese text and pin-yin; the English translation is the author's.

[309] Shih Cheng-yen 釋證嚴. 'quanqiu ciji jingshen yanxihui jiangyi yuanxing di pusa yun laiji' 全球慈濟精神研習會講義 遠行地菩薩雲來集 (unpublished document, 19-23 April 1995), 15, conference handbook.

narrative often describes the rapid change of contemporary Taiwan as an irreversible temporal disjuncture between modern and traditional that strongly favours the latter. In addition to the statements mentioned earlier in the section of the traditional property and Western's influence on cultural orientation, another example is that   in her 2010 book on Tzu-chi's environmental mission, *Qingjing zai Yuantou*, Cheng-yen asserts that, despite the commonality of higher education, people in modern society fall into 'indolence, therefore without the power of assuming responsibility'. [310] Cheng-yen describes how changing lifestyles, such as mothers no longer using washable nappies or decreased breastfeeding rates, contribute to environmental degradation because 'trees are cut down to make disposable diapers', and 'cows and goats are bred to provide milk for humans'.[311] These statements directly contrast with the descriptions of traditional society in the same book chapter paragraph, which state that, in the past, people followed 'the cycles of the natural world' and 'the wisdom of the progenitor to cherish blessings and materials in daily life'.[312] These statements reflect Tzu-chi's concern with a loss of historicity and a sentiment of mourning for temporal irreversibility. In other words, the organisation formulates its environmental discourse based on contradictions 'between a degenerate, modern Western civilisation and its *Other*', which is not only geographical, but also temporal. This disposition reflects the feature Mukta and Hardiman (2000) have identified as a nostalgic ecology.

To understand the temporal aspect of Tzu-chi's nostalgic environmentalism, let us return to the national survey on value orientation for a reference to the broader social milieu. In addition to the dimensions of 'humanity and natural environment', 'motives for behaving', and 'relationships with other people', the fourth dimension to access the Taiwanese public's value orientation is 'time'. When asked if the Taiwanese primarily focused on the past, present, or future, statistics indicate that 'present-oriented' was the core value in Taiwanese minds throughout the 1980s and 1990s, while there was an increasing tendency towards a 'future-oriented' focus and a decreased development of the 'past-oriented' focus across three waves of survey (Huang and Chu 2011, 17-19). It was the time of seizing moments and opportunities, a time of 'narcissistic presentism', a term Pickering and Keightley (2006) coined to describe when valuation is weighted in favour of the present rather than the past, and the future was regarded as vague

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[310] *ibid.*, 108

[311] *ibid.*, 81

[312] *Ibid.,* 79

and unpredictable. In other words, although most Taiwanese core values were rooted in traditional worldviews, people paid less attention to events of the past and were less consciously focused on preserving and maintaining traditional teachings and beliefs.

In a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheaval, nostalgia inevitably appears as a defence mechanism to recapture a putative continuity and coherence that is unavailable in the fragmented modern or late-modern environment (Lowenthal 1989, 21). Bonnett has postulated that, when 'societies that experience such uprooting and change that fundamental assumptions and ways of living are shaken […] the past becomes a site of ideological investment' (2016, 4). Reading Tzu-chi's nostalgic environmental discourse and its cultural mission against this social context sheds light on how the present shapes our relationship with the past. Corresponding to our present needs and interests, aspects of memory are sharpened into what Bergson (1988 [1896]) has called the 'memory-images' which '[become] part of perception in the present, thus [the past] borrow[s] their vitality from the present' (May 2017, 406). In other words, the articulation of how the present differs from the past gives rise to the accounts of Tzu-chi's temporal belonging, which resembles 'belonging from afar' (May and Muir 2015). To understand nostalgia from the perspective of a sense of belonging, May and Muir use that term to describe a person's feeling of a greater connection to a time that lies in the past than to the present. This belonging is clearly shown in Tzu-chi's environment-related discourse. In her first long book on the issue of the environment, *Co-exist with the Earth*, Cheng-yen stated:

> 30 or 40 years ago, Taiwanese society was so guileless, and life was simple. Although material life was not so rich, [....] it felt like a more humane way of living, a humane environment, and a humane ecology. [...] Younger people would perhaps tell me those things are in the past; but people my age perhaps remember them vividly. If I had the choice, I would choose the past time that I remember. It feels as if the circle of ethics and virtue was unhindered. [...] [Now,] people damage

the earth endlessly; minds make chaos restlessly to a dead-end. [313]
[314]

The past which Cheng-yen sentimentally longs for is not a living past in the present, but rather one which is 'fondly reconstructed out of selectively idealised features' as a counterpoint to the features of modernity (Pickering and Keightley 2006, 7). While meanings of a negative present and a positive past are formed through a dichotomous contrast, Tzu-chi's nostalgia involves a process of prioritising positive accounts of the past while excluding less-than-romantic aspects of experience (Jameson 1991, 281). For example, close, interdependent relations with the earth and being observant of and compliant with natural patterns, labour, and frugality—that is, the features of an agricultural society— are memories chosen to represent the past and are contrasted with the contemporary fascination with and dependence on technology, affluence and materialism, cyberspace, and the virtual world. Meanwhile, the low life expectancy, poverty, wars, political oppression, a highly class-hierarchical and patriarchal society of the past are excluded from remembrance. Svetlana Boym's writing echoes this point. Nostalgia, as she elegantly puts it, is 'a romance with one's own fantasy', a love for the past that 'can only survive in a long-distance relationship; the moment we try to force it into a single image, it breaks the frame or burns the surface' (2001, XIII-XIV).

I thus propose that Tzu-chi's institutional nostalgia resonates with restorative nostalgia in Boym's typology, a kind of longing for the past which is more about 'the past' than about 'the longing'. According to Boym, because restorative nostalgia does not consider itself nostalgia but rather truth and tradition, the rhetoric of restorative nostalgia therefore does not explore the ambivalence and complexity of history and the specificity of modern circumstances but elaborates on a trans-historical plot of a transcendental worldview, universal values, family, nature, homeland, and truth. The past, in other words, thus becomes 'de-contextualised' in the process of culture recycling and the formation of (regional) contextual narratives. Just as those chosen cultural concepts of Confucianism and Daoism are 'uplifted' and 'extracted' from their initial philosophical domains, memories, and elements from the past, in Tzu-chi's environment-related

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[313] See Appendix, quotation 8.7 for Chinese text and pin-yin; the English translation is the author's.

[314] Cheng-yen 釋證嚴, Yu diqiu gong shengxi — yi bai ge tengxi diqiu de sikao yu xingdong 與地球共生息—— 100 個疼惜地球的思考與行動. (Hualian: jingsi renwen zhiye gufen youxian gongsi 靜思人文志業股份有限公司, 2015 [2006]) 37-39.

discourse, are selected and estranged from their historical context, driven by utopian impulses to depict an image of a utopian Pure Land. A difference is that, while in the former, the traditional concepts find their 'landing ground' and are contextually embedded in the setting of everyday lives and practices, the latter seems to remain an essentialist, irreversible imagination for the future.

5.   Concluding Remarks

In a study of Tzu-chi's public engagement, the Taiwanese sociologist Ting Jen-chieh has described the organisation as a 'new type of social group that is built upon Buddhist institutional forms to enhance the original ethics of Confucian society' (2009, 221). Instead of seeing the rise and spread of Tzu-chi as part of the emergence of civil society or simply the work of a religious charity, Ting (*ibid.*, 70-77) has argued that Tzu-chi represents an exemplary case of 'social reproduction' that rejects modernity. In reading Tzu-chi's environment-related discourse, I largely share Ting's view on Tzu-chi's self-ascribed role as a guardian of traditionality. As the chapter analysis shown, Tzu-chi's environmental discourse is not only Buddhist, but also inflected by Confucianism and Daoism. Moreover, Tzu-chi translates and combines the contemporary concept of environmentalism with traditional understandings of how humans relate to nature, reflecting a broader traditional Chinese worldview of *tianrenheyi*. Through its rhetorical and discursive operation of formulating representations of waste and the environment, the organisation links the issue of environmental disorder to cultural disorder and extends these merged ideas to encompass aspects of spirituality and social responsibility.

By doing so, the traditional moral imperatives not only carry the lived reality of fact, but those historical concepts and terminologies are also 'recycled' through Tzu-chi's cultural translation and further 'reproduced' through convergence with 'modern' concepts such as ecological crisis, global warming, and the waste problem. Tzu-chi's environmental discourse is a product of cultural recycling. It offers an eclectic mix of traditional cultural concepts on the edge of being discarded in the era of globalisation. Illustrative ideas from different fields—Buddhist, Confucian, or Daoist, but always rooted in a familiar and past worldview—are selected and 'extracted' from their original philosophical packages, bent and remade to fit into the story Tzu-chi wishes to tell about the problematic relationships contemporary Taiwanese individuals have with themselves, others, and the Earth. Nostalgia, a deep longing for an idealised,

selective past, is the driving force of this process of cultural recycling and remaking, or what Ting Jen-chieh considers the 'social reproduction' of Tzu-chi. It becomes the sentimental foundation for the organisation to moralise about environmental issues. It supports the social position the Tzu-chi organisation formulates for itself to criticise contemporary society by finding legitimacy in environmental degradation and waste pollution. Regarding a type of nostalgia that is restorative rather than reflexive, Boym has written, 'The stronger the rhetoric of continuity with the historical past and emphasis on traditional values, the more selectively the past is usually presented' (2001, 42). This longing for the past, in the vein of restoration and return, is found in Tzu-chi discourse.

Chapter Nine |
Conclusion

This dissertation examined Tzu-chi recycling, a volunteer-operated, community-based, Buddhism-associated national waste recycling movement in Taiwan that started in the early 1990s. My aim has been to elucidate the sociological significance of waste recycling by exploring what non-object values are retrieved, recovered, and repurposed alongside the process applied to discarded materials. The core inquiry is sociological in that it focuses on social process and change. The dissertation began with a thumbnail sketch that suggested how the multi-faceted nature of Tzu-chi recycling embodies a thematic perspective of the dissertation. That is, recycling is not merely a waste solution nor one event of material conversion; rather, it concerns people, their relation to materials and environments, networks of interactions, and modes of thought. Noting that the phenomenon of Tzu-chi recycling has been concomitant with drastic social transitions in contemporary Taiwan, the introduction stated the dissertation's objective in the following terms: to read post-authoritarian Taiwan through the lens of waste recycling and to understand waste recycling through Taiwan—i.e., the management, practice, understanding and representation of waste recycling in Tzu-chi, and its reflection of and contribution to different social developments in late 20th- and early 21st-century Taiwan.

Throughout the dissertation, the relation between waste recycling and Taiwanese society examined through the case of Tzu-chi shifted across the levels of the individual, community, and institution. And each of the preceding chapters

investigated Tzu-chi recycling with a specific focus, sometimes in a dialectical and complementary manner, on its management, volunteers, community, and discourse. The main argument of this dissertation claims that as a redemptive tool, waste recycling enacts the cultural politics of nostalgia. In different forms of action and ways of seeing, Tzu-chi recycling volunteers and associated members redefine recycling as a past-oriented strategy to deal with all that modernity entails. This leads to the second thematic perspective of this dissertation. That is a 'circular' account of temporality, seeing it as a process of entanglement between memories and imaginations, idealised past and utopian future. The nostalgia enactment through recycling emerges from a sense of trepidation shared by a specific group of people, those who are predominantly the elderly and women, whose sense of belonging lies in in the past more than in the present. Through waste engagement, they re-enact their memory identity, mobilising the past to enliven or criticise the present as an endeavour to create a temporal continuum of self. In the process, what Tzu-chi recycling 'recycles' alongside discarded materials, as the dissertation sets out to explore in the beginning, is disposable labour, omitted skill, an aged population, the traditional mechanisms of social interaction, abdicative religion, and worldview.

In order to address the research themes that are informed by the discipline, the dissertation has drawn on two main bodies of scholarly literature. One belongs to the social science study of waste, including studies on the topic of recycling, and the other analyses nostalgia. This dissertation turned to waste studies primarily in order to frame its object and approach to develop its research design, while both studies of waste and nostalgia provided theoretical tools and orientations that could be applied to approach the empirical material collected through fieldwork. The arguments and observations are the results of an approximately four-year period of engaging in the field of Taiwanese recycling between 2014 and 2018. The analysis draws on participation in waste-related activities and work; listening to stories, concerns, and interests; observing daily tasks and interactions; sensing emotions; identifying relationships among the actors; and reading related printed and published documents. A dialectically analytical approach is central throughout the investigation. The dissertation sees waste as a cultural symbol and its material agency, explores waste labour from both individual and structural perspectives, examines the mutuality between sacralisation and secularisation, and considers constructive and restorative aspects of nostalgia.

Taiwan and Tzu-chi Recycling

This dissertation hopes to draw scholarly attention to the case of Taiwan. As identified at the outset, the island society has undergone drastic political economic transitions over the last century, from an agricultural society to a world factory of light commodities to high-tech and capital-intensive manufacturing, from a Japanese colony to Chinese nationalist authoritarian regime to democratic society. Although it has constantly been caught in the status of interim and limbo, given its unclear political sovereign status in relation to People's Republic of China, Taiwan has been in motion with peculiar kinetic energies. The dissertation has sought to give an integrated understanding of the island society by 1) situating the analysis in relation to a number of social changes that occurred in the second half of 20th-century Taiwan, namely the industrial transitions, demographic restructuring, politics of localisation, religious resurgence, and cultural rifts; 2) indicating the role of waste recycling in these phenomena; and 3) demonstrating how nostalgia as a cultural political force has been central to a society undergoing drastic and compressed changes. A brief sketch of post-war and post-authoritarian Taiwan in the introduction chapter provided the historical background for the analysis in the following chapters.

The dissertation overall illustrates that Tzu-chi recycling movement happens in a historical conjecture of waves of Taiwan's contemporary transitioning. First, Tzu-chi recycling is a result of the political economic moment of post-industrial Taiwan, its demand for waste material treaments as well as its abandonment of 'unskilled' and aging labour when the industry transferred from manual manufacturing to high-technological production; second, Tzu-chi recycling strategically took advantage of the uneven political moment of post-authoritarian Taiwan and its craving for local identity in a communal setting when political force dispersed from central to local, which allowed religious forces to take part in secular engagements; and third, the development of Tzu-chi's concerns for environmental disorder rooted in the moment of struggle between the spiritual culture of traditional society and the secularism of contemporary rationalism that the organisation perceives. In short, Tzu-chi's recycling movement builds on emerging and remaining social, cultural, and material resources which, at the time, were in a process of reshuffling and redistribution while new systems were still under construction.

The case study of Tzu-chi recycling in Taiwan was chosen for its scale and complexity, and for its unfamiliar semiotics yet embedded systems. It is an ideal

empirical entry point into broad theoretical topics in the social sciences. Although one basic ambition of this dissertation was to contribute to area studies of Taiwan, the explorative approach of this dissertation should not be limited to an individual case; rather, it is applicable to societies undergoing drastic social changes. From the vantage point of waste, the approach investigates the entanglement between a society's developments and its discards as an examination of its present/past continuum and rupture. By exploring the structural alignment of what is defined as waste and how, why and which 'waste' is brought back to life to be 'recycled', the approach of this dissertation sheds lights on the role of cultural politics of individual and collective memory and affection in social changes.

How Does Tzu-chi Recycling Work?

This dissertation focuses on the environmental project of Taiwan's foremost non-governmental organisation, Tzu-chi, one of its numerous institutional developments. By recognising Tzu-chi as a humanistic-Buddhism-based organisation which came into being in the 1960s and has since actively engaged in a variety of non-religious social tasks, the findings of this dissertation contribute to the study of Tzu-chi by situating its development and social engagements in the networks of materials, people's networks, belief systems, and social changes. Overall, this dissertation uses the term 'Tzu-chi recycling' to indicate a collection of situated local communities across Taiwan that are associated with the Tzu-chi organisation and that collect discarded objects from local neighbouring areas and then sort, separate, and dismantle the materials before selling them to each station's local recycling business partners. Varying in size, Tzu-chi recycling communities together represent a non-governmental conduit of waste disposal, encompassing the sections of downstream, intermediary, and upstream waste collection in Taiwan's recycling logistic scheme, and they are parallel to the conduits of private business and local government.

The dissertation suggests that there are three key mechanisms which make Tzu-chi recycling work: community-based operation, dependency on non-commissioned individual volunteers, and institutional support from the headquarters.

First, in each Tzu-chi recycling community, the assembly of waste materials accompanies with the assembly of people. The formation of the social/material network is an ongoing process of rearranging existing sets of social relations or a

call to form the new ones, through the continuous intersecting and overlapping networks of Tzu-chi recycling volunteers' personal and geographical relations. Grounded in the concreteness of everyday life and the intersections of knowing the place and the people of one's living area, Tzu-chi recycling communities become hubs for cultivating local identity and solidarity. Based on this observation, the dissertation argues that the Tzu-chi recycling community is not an isolated event inside the Tzu-chi world, but one with close connections with other local networks and affairs outside of Tzu-chi. The non-commissioned local volunteers from a variety of walks of life are the mainstay of Tzu-chi recycling. This nevertheless challenges the commonly held view in which the image of Tzu-chi recycling volunteers is that of Tzu-chi commissioners. The dissertation argues that this localised characteristic of Tzu-chi recycling is a key to its success starting from its earliest stages. With a ride on the national localisation project in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Tzu-chi volunteers mobilised their own local resources—people, materials, and properties—to develop a recycling community. Through the reciprocal mechanism of social exchange, recycling converted those resources into political and economic ones. Along with monetary income from waste trades, the political economic resources further contributed to the continued mobilisation of human and material resources. From there, the locally embedded and self-sustained operational system of the Tzu-chi recycling community is formed, and, as shown in the case of Jiaoxi Linmei, expands beyond the realm of Tzu-chi. Moreover, the localised characteristic of Tzu-chi recycling gradually turns the recycling site into a community centre, while the accumulated resources transform into social welfare functions, such as providing meals, health check-ups, and social activities. As Taiwan's aged population has grown without sufficient social facilities, Tzu-chi recycling became an alternative geriatric destination for local retired and elderly individuals to spend time through their volunteering.

Second, inside the stations, a wide variety of discarded household and business materials undergo several stages of treatment, from classification to separation, dismantling to storing. All waste works are performed by human power, by the 'free' labour of the volunteers. A central feature of Tzu-chi's waste work, in comparison to that of governmental and private business systems, is that it is fixated on minute details. Without professional training, Tzu-chi volunteers gain their technical knowhow through each other's shared experience and by relying on flexible 'rules of the thumb' rather than abstract principles. This kind of 'immethodical expertise', which can only be implemented with respect to specific physical objects in a concrete scenario through interactions with others,

contributes to the sociality, the sense of community within Tzu-chi recycling. People talk and exchange experiences, ideas, and stories while working with their hands to engage in either mindlessly repetitive or focus-demanding explorative work. Meanwhile, the people squatting on plastic stools are surrounded by piles of unprocessed and half-processed objects. The characteristics and surroundings of Tzu-chi recycling works present a typical industrial working environment, which is familiar to volunteers with a history as atypical and manual workers. In this setting, the meticulous labour of unmaking becomes a purpose in itself for the volunteers, who can achieve a sense of temporal belongingness and who perform their subjectivity through the mutual enhancement of habits, material perception, and social connection.

Third, although Tzu-chi recycling communities operate rather locally and independently, it would be inaccurate to conclude that there is no centralised system. This dissertation considers three aspects of the institutional disposition that sustains Tzu-chi recycling: the administration team, communication network, and discursive representation. First, the environmental protection team at the headquarters embodies the central administrative system of Tzu-chi recycling. The team is in charge of logs of volunteers, sites and incidences, bureaucratic and legal affairs, financial arrangements, and cross-institution collaborations. In addition, the communication network indicates the institutionalised arrangement through which information is transmitted. The communicative network closely corresponds to Tzu-chi laity's system, through which ideas about, for example, waste categorisation, recycling techniques, volunteer stories, or site management travel and are exchanged. The third institutionalised disposition concerns the representation of waste and recycling. Narratives of what environmental degradation and waste material and recycling practice mean are articulated in a variety of Tzu-chi's organisational media content. The publication and broadcast are the works of the Tzu-chi missionary institute of culture and communication, the institute under which the Tzu-chi recycling programme is registered. Like filling new bottles with old wine, Tzu-chi uses its cultural capital to bring old thoughts and concepts forward with new terms in the production of its environmental discourse. This dissertation regards this strategy of eclectic syncretism as a regional contextualisation and cultural translation of global environmentalism. The aim is multi-faced, counting underlying goals of religious revitalisation and reproducing tradition, in addition to the apparent encouragement for waste recycling. In sum, the administrative, communicative, and discursive institutional arrangements represent an overarching supporting

system that connects dispersed Tzu-chi recycling communities with shared identities and motifs.

Recycling the Past and the Cultural Politics of Nostalgia

This dissertation maintains that the Tzu-chi recycling movement is itself a societal mechanism of recycling. The movement recycles that which represents 'the past' of Taiwanese society—those who are left behind in the progressive scheme. The recycled past in Tzu-chi recycling is an admixture, including pre-industrial collective lifestyles, religious worldviews, outdated labour skills, aged populations, and former commodities. From this perspective, the case of Tzu-chi recycling not only gives a concrete illustration of Neville and Villeneuve's rhetoric on recycling as a 'mixing of temporalities' (2002, 7), it also exemplifies the scholarly view on the structural alignment of different forms of refuse. The objects, people, thoughts, actions, and systems which were once incapable of 'useful' production now create a parallel world where the waste materials are the centre that holds many discarded together. The dissertation has attempted to go a step further, suggesting a structural alignment of 'the redeemable' which made the waste redemption possible. For scholars interested in recycling, one important issue is redeeming the value of the discarded, either by reintegrating it with the production system or by recognising the production value. This view is tinged with the rhetoric of recycling as redemption, implying a process of recovering its declining value. The dissertation proposes that the value redemption of one refuse is made by other refuse, as the entanglement between disposed-of skills and objects discussed in Chapter Four demonstrates.

This way of examining the notion of waste, seeing it not as fixed according to its negative valuation but open to varied forms of expression and transformation, opens out the 'ontological politics of waste' (O'Brien 2012). Subsequently, the case of Tzu-chi recycling answers the open question Alexander and Reno posed in their edited book *Economies of Recycling: The Global Transformation of Materials, Values, and Social Relations*, namely, 'how remaking remakes us all' (2012, 1). In Tzu-chi recycling, waste practice provides the volunteers a means to enact their subjectivity and practice autonomy; at the level of community, waste materials weave local networks to realise the state project of locality-building; at the level of the institution, waste practice allows the Tzu-chi organisation to realise its religious goals to secularise and revitalise Buddhism. Instead of being an incidental ephemera of society's productive activities, rubbish matter is at the

centre of meaningful, coordinated social activity. Waste not only serves as a lens to reflect a society, but it is in fact the constitutive element which makes a society, making us who we are. Nevertheless, the dissertation recognises and emphasises that the material agency of waste lies in its rhetorical affordance. It is its symbolic resemblance of discarded skills and lifestyles and its association with forgotten traditional values and religious concepts which bestow waste's power to make and regenerate. This nevertheless bridges the division found in existing scholarly works in waste studies, in which the material-agency and symbolic-structure terms of waste are treated as two separate attributes. Instead, this dissertation has sought to show how metaphors of waste shape the roles it plays in the making of Taiwanese society. In short, waste contributes to a society because of what it symbolises.

Tzu-chi's past recycling happened in a temporal situation created by the fundamental transition in Taiwan in the 1990s and 2000s. This temporal situation implied a rupture between past and present, making nostalgia a desire. As dirt resembles matter in a status of 'caught in between', discarded yet to be allotted its cultural and social space, in reference to Mary Douglas's (1966) view, in a context of highly compressed social changes, the remnants of the proximate past coexist but outside of present system, lingering in the busy new world without their 'placedness' (O'Brien 1999b, 274). Taking a temporal perspective, if a fundamental element of belonging is a time in which people feel at home, then Tzu-chi recycling elderly volunteers represent a group of temporally homeless people in our contemporary society. Tzu-chi recycling stations, in this register, are the new social placement for an emerging new generation of the temporal homeless. At the communal level, the sense of lost traditionality and temporal disjuncture is entwined with the dissonance brought by the changed environment of one's living place and fragmented social relationships. In this context, nostalgia finds an expression in locality longing, a yearning for a sense of place.

While the disturbance and challenges brought by the discarded past reveal the systems of the new, recycling the past nevertheless reflects the project of modernity to order and manage its chaos and ambiguity. Taiwan in the 1990s and 2000s was also at a point when the future was open for construction. Facing future possibilities and increasing problems, what was once discarded appeared to be a pool of resources and solutions. All of these adds up to a cultural politics of nostalgia. A specific group of people take actions, to volunteer, to (re)construct locality, to reproduce traditionality, in response to their experience of loss endemic tradition and life discontinuity. Resources of the past—knowledge, skills,

labour, materials, networks, perspectives—were mobilised and (re)made available and repurposed for further development as Taiwan develops its societal system of value recovery, of 'recycling'. Waste recycling becomes the political field for nostalgic actions.

While this dissertation contends that Tzu-chi recycling is a manifestation of the cultural politics of nostalgia, it nevertheless endeavours to show that the political force of nostalgia in Tzu-chi recycling takes numerous forms and embodies various meanings. This finding gives an empirical illustration of different aspects scholars have conceptually identified in nostalgia. In the attempt to conceptually reconfigure nostalgia, as discussed in the literature review chapter, scholars have pointed to the key of value transaction of memory to make nostalgia 'positively charged' (Pickering and Keightley 2006, 936). This involves a 'reflexive relationship with the past', in comparison to a negative account which a mass production of memory, made by people other than individual selves, a problematic one which follows a single plot of identity and gravitates toward collective symbols (Boym 2007, 18; 49).

The value transaction is seen in the ways in which the volunteer individuals enact their past in the present as they engage in habitual ways with materials and surroundings. In the process, the memory no longer represents a past to them; it acts it. This is akin to Bergson's (1988[1896]) 'memory-in-action', or the living past that Coleman (2008, 93) has described in which 'the past is not what happened [...] but what is [still] happening', so that the 'mind does not make a separation between past and present' (cf. Bergson 1988[1896], 82). For the volunteer individuals, memories of the hardship and possibility from the past are relived as the ethical self in the present through recycling tasks. In other words, this is a memorial practice which resonates with a positive account of nostalgia recognized by the scholars, i.e., making the past prospective and productive. It implies a non-essentialised, contextualised and reflexive process to revive the memory identity while providing it with new forms and functions.

In a similar vein, at a communal level, the sociality of the local environment encompasses the networks and operational mechanisms to foreground the past. In the nexus of physical surroundings inside the recycling stations and the familiar modes of social interactions outside the station, the past is re-encountered and re-experienced through Tzu-chi's community recycling tasks. In these scenarios, nostalgia functions as a mechanism to have the past and the present exist simultaneously and intersect, transforming the past and assemble it

anew such that it intensifies the present. Based on these observations, this dissertation further demonstrates a 'materialist' aspect for this value transaction of nostalgia to take place. That is, the happening of memory de-contextualisation (mobilisation) and re-contextualisation (assimilation) is situated in the constellation of relations between the object and subject and is grounded in a concrete physicality. This could be a physical environment—a recycling station or neighbourhood; it could also be a physical entity—one's body. It is through an action which interacts with(in) a physical environment that transforms and regenrates memory values.

In addition to highlighting the materialist aspect of 'productive' nostalgia, this dissertation contributes to the scholarship by shedding light on the challenging nature of nostalgia's value transaction. This argument draws from the analysis of the case of the Jiaoxi Linmei. The challenging nature of nostalgia's value transaction is that recycling the past is not only a work of conversion but also reinsertion. The lost past is never 'fully lost', as if there were a historical vacuum waiting for a complete constructive restoration. Like secondary materials have to 'return' to the raw material market after recycling, the new local networks of the recycling community as emblems of the reconstructed, idealised past join in the traditional game of local politics. While conflicts arise, the less romantic aspects of tradition emerge, such as competition over interests and resources. In short, the findings of this dissertation resonate with the kind of view Mutka and Hardiman have posed on the past: the dialectical and materialist aspects which 'understand[s] that what was positive in the past at the same time contained its own negations' (2000, 126).

Finally, with regard to the operation of nostalgia at the institutional level, this dissertation considers first that Tzu-chi's environmental discourse is the organisation's manifesto on its nostalgia motif, and second, that environmentalism is a reference source that provides a futuristic connotation and modern legitimacy to the organisation's grand nostalgic project. Tzu-chi's environmental discourse describes a transcendent social order of ecology—it is a combination of habitual customs, the morals of a traditional society, and an anthropocosmic worldview, all of which have roots in pre-industrialised society. Tzu-chi's pure land vision, by finding a sustainable ecological future in its interpretation of the past, resembles the 'Edenic motifs' which Mutka and Hardiman (2000) find in the development of modern environmental theories. In a way, Tzu-chi's past recycling exemplifies the argument of the scholars, including Davis (2010), Bonnett (2016) and Iambacher (2017), that nostalgia is a powerful

political force to bring forth environmental actions. However, as Mutka and Hardiman (2000) remind us, the problematic aspect of searching for a past Eden, which comes into view in Tzu-chi's institutional discourse, is that the idealist and essentialised account of the past entails work not to transcend it, but to realise it once more. In other words, the past which appears in Tzu-chi's discursive nostalgia is not a living past that exists simultaneously with the present, but a kind of 'memory-image' (Bergson 1988 [1896], 81). While its turn to old images of past impressions contributes to the widespread of the ideas connecting spirituality and ecology, it is worthy to seriously consider if the proposal of restore the past can contribute to an honest confrontation with our changing and complex relationship with nature, and with the issues of current production system of exhaustion and disposal.

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Appendix
List of quotations in Chinese characters and pin-yin

Chapter 1.

1.1.　　垃圾變黃金，黃金變愛心，愛心化清流，清流繞全球 。
Laji bian huangjin, huangjin bian aixin, aixin hua qingliu, qingliu rao quanqiu.

Chapter 5.

5.1.　　供養佛，供養法，供養僧， 供養一切眾生；願修一切善，願斷一切惡，誓度一切眾生 。Gongyang fo, gongyang fa, gongyang seng, gongyang yiqie zhongsheng; yuan xiu yiqie shan, yuan duan yiqie e, shidu yiqie zhongsheng.

5.2.　　台灣一年有寶特瓶 45 億支，都是由低下階層的「艱苦人」去撿、整理、回收，然後送到彰化一家紡織廠，做成回收布，做成衣服、毯子。那些「艱苦人」每月可有 5000-6000 元的收入，台灣一年約有 20000 人左右靠它來過生活。現在變了，慈濟設起回收桶，靠免費的慈濟義工回收，而後自己設起家工廠做起毯子來，而後有很多錢再來買土地。宗教慈善團體應肩負著台灣向上的提升，不應與「艱苦人」爭利。台灣有宗教團體設的「慈善」醫院，薪水都比其他醫院薪水低，美其名為「大家做公益」，實者，把這個社會帶入一個惡性循環，做好事要靠研發的競爭力，而非大家來做公益。韓國有個八十萬人的宗教團體負責人最近被判刑，台灣呢，政府不敢動這些「慈善」單位，各宗教的慈善單位其財務也該公開的。有次，我在台北忠孝東路看到一群人，一個一個排隊，跪下，把一包一包的錢，兩手高攀給一個「高人」，我很感嘆，你(妳)對父母有這種禮遇嗎?我相信宗教，但我反對宗教團體的財務不公開，及對社會公益的曲解。二十年來，我叫太太所有慈善妳都可以做，但不可把錢用「戴勝通」的名堂捐給 XX 慈善機構，寫此文，我只想喚起這個社會，正義感大於慈善心 。Taiwan yinian you baoteping 45 yi zhi, doushi you dixia jieceng de 'jiankuren' qu jian, zhengli, hui shou, ranhou songdao zhanghua yijia fangzhi chang, zuocheng huishou bu, zuocheng yifu, tanzi. Naxie 'jiankuren' meiyue ke you 5000-6000 yuan de shouru, taiwan yinian yue you 20000 ren zuoyou kao ta lai guoshenghuo. xianzai bianle, ciji sheqi huishoutong, kao mianfei de ciji yigong huishou, erhou ziji sheqi jia gongchang zuoqi tanzi lai, erhou you henduo qian zailai mai tudi. Zongjiao cishan tuanti ying jianfu zhe taiwan xiangshang de tisheng, buying yu 'jiankuren' zhengli. Taiwan you zongjiao tuanti she de 'cishan' yiyuan, xinshui doubi qita yiyuan xinshui di, meiqiming wei 'dajia zuo gongyi', shizhe, ba zhege shehui dairu yige e-xing xunhuan, zuo haoshi yao kao yanfa de jingzhengli, er fei dajia lai zuogongyi. Hanguo youge bashiwan ren de zongjiao tuanti fuzeren zuijin bei panxing, taiwan ne, zhengfu bugan dong zhexie 'cishan' danwei, ge zongjiao de cishan danwei

qi caiwu ye gai gongkai de. Youci, wo zai taibei zhongxiao donglu kandao yiqun ren, yige yige paidui, guixia, ba yibao yibao de qian, liangshou gaopan gei yige 'gaoren', wo hen gantan, ni(ni) dui fumu you zhezhong liyu ma? Wo xiangxin zongjiao, dan wo fandui zongjiao tuanti de caiwu bu gongkai, ji dui shehui gongyi de qujie. Ershi nian lai, wo jiao taitai suoyou cishan ni dou keyi zuo, dan buke ba qian yong 'dai sheng tong' de mingtang juangei XX cishan jigou, xie ciwen, wo zhixiang huanqi zhege shehui, zhengyigan dayu cishanxin.

Chapter 7.

7.1.   人心淨化，天下蒼生所依賴的大地才能淨化；大地淨化，世間災難才能消弭。Renxin jinghua, tianxia cangsheng suo yilai de dadi caineng jinghua; dadi jinghua, shijian zainan caineng xiaomi.

7.2.   資源回收是讓物品已被廢棄的生命，能收回來再利用，如同回魂般發揮再生的生命，這是物命的輪迴。Ziyuan huishou shi rang wupin yi bei feiqi de shengming, neng shou huilai zai liyong, rutong huihun ban fahui zaisheng de shengming, zheshi wuming de lunhui

7.3.   當今社會，人心無明，煩惱層層疊疊 [...] 正是「眾生垢重」的「劫濁」亂時。[...] 業因的種子，從一念心而起，由身口意造業；人人要趕緊覺醒，回歸清淨源頭 [...]讓心靈回歸清淨 [...] 人人心輕安、意自在，沒有煩惱，這片祥和之氣就能讓大地平安。Dangjin shehui, renxin wuming, fannao cengceng diedie […] zhengshi 'zhong sheng gou zhong' de 'jiezhuo' luan shi. […] yeyin de zhongzi, cong yinianxin er qi, you shenkouyi zaoye, renren yao ganjin jiaoxing, huigui qingjing yuantou […] rang xinling huigui qingjing […] renren xin qingan, yi zizai, meiyou fannao, zhe pian xianghe zhi qi jiuneng rang dadi pingan.

7.4.   人類原本所需不多，靠著地表的土壤、水、空氣，就能維持一切生活所需；卻追求享受而過度耗費資源，諸如為了滿足口慾，大量飼養牲畜，餵食動物的糧食、水源遠遠超過人類自身所需，造成惡性循環，也在天地間造成許多破壞、汙染 。Renlei yuanben suoxu buduo, kaozhe dibiao de turang, shui, kongqi, jiuneng weichi yiqie shenghuo suoxu; que zhuiqiu xiangshou er guodu haofei ziyuan, zhuru weile manzu kouyu, daliang siyang shengchu, weishi dongwu de liangshi, shuiyuan yuanyuan chaoguo renlei zishen suoxu, zaocheng exing xunhuan, ye zai tiandi jian zaocheng xuduo pohuai, yuran.

7.5.   工商社會鼓勵消費，人心被物慾遮蔽，變得不單純，所以生活奢侈、貪婪無度 [...] 我們要引導大家保有人性的純潔，人人都依賴著大地與萬物生活 [...] 人人若能惜福，物命耐用，如何會有垃圾？Gongshang shehui guli xiaofei, renxin bei wuyu zhebi, biande bu danchun, suoyi shenghuo shechi, tanlan wudu [...]women yao yindao dajia baoyou renxing de chunjie, renren dou yilai zhe dadi yu wanwu shenghuo [...] renren ruo neng xifu, wuming naiyong, ruhe hui you laji?

7.6.　「春、夏、秋、冬」四季在一年之中循環，萬物也有「成、往、壞、空」[...] 回收能讓資源再製，就如物命重生，從「壞」轉為「成」。Chun xia qiu dong, si ji zai yi nian zhi zhong xunhuan, wanwu ye you "cheng zhu huai kong" [...] huishou neng rang ziyuan zai zhi, jiu ru wu ming zhongsheng, cong "huai" zhuan wei "cheng".

7.7.　「還魂紙」的名字真是美極了，它象徵了一種有情，樹木有情、字紙有情，在時空中輪迴流轉，其情感並不失去，只是換了一種面目再生。'hai hun zhi' de mingzi zhenshi meiji le, ta xiangzheng le yizhong youqing, shumu youqing , zizhi youqing, zai shikong zhong lunhui liuzhuan, qi qinggan bingbu shiqu, zhishi huan le yizhong mianmu zaisheng.

Chapter 8.

8.1.　現在社會的病徵很多，病源只有一個，那就是人生的價值觀越來越模糊，社會價值體系越來越散漫，道德的訴求越來越鬆懈。[...] 物質生活不斷在提升，道德修養不斷在沉淪，人與人之間變得相當冷漠，用以凝聚社會力量的彼此間應有的互信與關懷蕩然無存了。[...] 什麼是道德，[...] 它包括內斂與外顯兩部分：內斂是對人生價值的認知；外顯是表現在外面的行為。[...]，宗教的慈悲喜捨就是思想的內斂，道德的誠正信實就是行為的外顯。xianzai shehui de bingzheng henduo, bingyuan zhiyou yige, na jiushi rensheng de jiazhiguan yuelai yue mohu, shehui jiazhi tixi yuelai yue sanman, daode de suqiu yuelai yue songxie. [..] wuzhi shenghuo buduan zai tisheng, daode xiuyang buduan zai chenlun, ren yu ren zhijian biande xiangdang lengmo, yong yi ningju shehui liliang de bici jian yingyou de huxin yu guanhuai dangran wucun le. [..] Shime shi daode, [...] ta baokuo neilian yu waixian liang bufen: neilian shi dui rensheng jiazhi de renzhi; waixian shi biaoxian zai waimian de xingwei. [...] Zongjiao de ci bei xi she jiushi sixiang de neilian, daode de cheng zheng xin shi jiushi xingwei de waixian.

8.2.　佛教說「一切唯心造」，我們要做好地球環保，首先必須先淨化我們的內心。... 人心健康，家庭就幸福，社會就祥和；社會祥和，自然人人就會知福、惜福。人人知福惜福，地球的資源就可以消耗。Fojiao shuo 'yi qie wei xin zao', women yao zuo hao diqiu huanbao, shouxian bixu xian jinghua women de neixin .. renxin jiuhui hen jiankang, renxin jiankang, jiating jiu xingfu, shehui jiu xianghe; shehui xianghe, ziran ren ren jiu hui zhi fu xi fu. Ren ren zhi fu xi fu, diqiu de ziyuan jiu keyi.

8.3.　所謂「克己」，就是克服自我欲念；若是人人不能克制自己享樂的欲望，處處浪費資源，不僅損害個己的身體，也對地球造成損傷。還有「復禮」，人與人之間美在哪裡？就是「禮」，有禮才能表達出自我的修養。 期待大家努力朝向有禮的社會邁進，克服自我欲念，提升人文氣質，復興尊師重道、孝道等傳統禮儀。若能如此，相信未來的生態定會改變，人人愛心共聚，溫室效應、異常氣候，都會慢慢地緩和 。Suowei 'ke ji', jiu shi kefu ziwo yunian; ruo shi ren ren bu neng kezhi ziji xiangle de yuwang, chu chu langfei ziyuan, bu jin sunhai geji de shenti, ye dui diqiu zaocheng sunshang. hai you 'fu li', ren yu ren zhijian mei zai nali? jiu shi 'li', you li

cai neng biaoda chu ziwo de xiuyang. qidai dajia nuli chaoxiang you li de
shehui maijin, kefu ziwo yunian, tisheng renwen qizhi, fuxing zun shi
zhong dao, xiao dao deng chuantong liyi. ruo neng ruci, xiangxin weilai de
shengtai ding hui gaibian, ren ren ai xin gong ju, wenshi xiaoying, yichang
qihou, dou hui manman di huanhe.

8.4.   「仁、義、禮、智、信」是中華文化很美的人文，也是很高尚的品德，
        但是近代西風東漸，現在的孩子逐漸把老祖宗的智慧給淡忘了。[...] 接
        受到新潮的文化，卻把我們古老的人文都淡忘了，於是人的本性也跟著
        不斷模糊掉 [...] 希望每一個孩子的人品都能回歸於清淨的本性，那就是
        佛心，就是智慧。[...] 如此，這個社會不就成了人間淨土嗎？[...] 要讓孩
        子從小就明白禮義廉恥，懂得孝順，知道勤儉 [...] 我們救護地球，就要
        從人心開始 。"Ren, yi, li, zhi, xin" shi zhonghua wenhua hen mei de
        renwen, ye shi hen gaoshang de pinde, danshi jindai xi feng dong jian,
        xianzai de haizi zhujian ba lao zuzong de zhihui gei danwang le [...] jieshou
        dao xinchao de wenhua, que ba women gulao de renwen dou danwang le,
        yushi ren de benxing ye genzhe buduan mohu diao [...] xiwang mei yi ge
        haizi de renpin dou neng huigui yu qingjing de benxing, na jiushi foxin,
        jiushi zhihui, zhege shehui bu jiu cheng le renjian jingtu ma? [...] yao rang
        haizi cong xiao jiu mingbai li yi lian chi, dongde xiaoshun, zhidao qinjian
        [...] women jiuhu diqiu, jiu yao cong renxin kaishi.

8.5.   上人感嘆：「地球健康，人類才能平安。但渺小的人類，卻在大乾坤作
        怪，讓地球發燒、生病，導致災難。」上人強調，人體「小乾坤」與天
        地「大乾坤」道理相通——病菌在人體裏作怪，人就會生病；人類破壞
        環境，就會讓天地四大不調 。Shangren gantan "diqiu jiankang, renlei
        caineng pingan. Dan miaoxiao de renlei, que zai da qiankun zuoguai, rang
        diqiu fashao, shengbing, daozhi zainan. Shangren qiangdiao, renti 'xiao
        qiankun' yu tiandi 'da qiankun' daoli xiangtong —— bingjun zai renti li
        zuoguai, ren jiuhui shengbing; renlei pohuai huanjing, jiuhui rang tiandi
        sida budiao.

8.6.   這幾十年來的生活文化，因西風東進，很多人被西方的風氣擾亂了固有
        的東方的精神文化。所以現在的上一代和下一代之間有很大的鴻溝。因
        而演變成親情的脫離，接著是家庭破碎邊緣，社會型態秩序混亂，有些
        規矩脫軌了。Zhe jishinian laide shenghuo wenhua, yin xifeng dongjin,
        henduoren bei xifang de fengqi raoluan le guyou de dongfang de jingshen
        wenhua. Suoyi xianzai de shangyidai he xiayidai zhijian you henda de
        honggou. Yiner yanbian cheng qinqing de tuoli, jiezhe shi jiating posui
        bianyuan, shehui xingtai zhixu hunluan, youxie guiju tuogui le.

8.7.   三、四十年前的台灣社會是那麼的純樸，生活也很簡單。雖然當時的物
        質生活不是那麼豐富，[...]，不過感覺起來真的是人的生活，人的環境，
        人的生態。[...]若讓我選擇，我要選擇那個過去我所記憶的時代，感覺起
        來，人倫道德真正是很順暢的循環。[...]眾生，人類在地球上不斷破壞，
        人心不斷作亂、走入死胡同。san, si shi nian qian de taiwan shehui shi
        name de chunpu, shenghuo ye hen jiandan. Suiran dangshi de wuzhi

shenghuo bushi name fengfu, [...] buguo ganjiao qilai zhende shi ren de shenghuo, ren de huanjing, ren de shengtai. [...] ruo rang wo xuanze, wo yao xuanze nage guoqu wo suo jiyi de shidai, ganjiao qilai, renlun daode zhenzheng shi hen shunchang de xunhuan. [...] Zhongsheng, renlei zai diqiu shang buduan pohuai, ren xin buduan zuoluan, zou ru si hutong.

Summary

This dissertation investigates the relationship between waste recycling and contemporary society from a cultural sociological perspective, asking how the process of unmaking materials remakes a society. Taking Tzu-chi recycling in Taiwan as an empirical focus for the exploration, this dissertation shows post-authoritarian Taiwan through the lens of waste recycling and to understand waste recycling through Taiwan. Tzu-chi, a Buddhism-based lay organization and Taiwanese foremost non-governmental organization, has galvanized an army of more than 90,000 volunteers in Taiwan, female elderly in particular, to participate in community recycling as one of the organization's philanthropic endeavours since the early 1990s. In a system of resource recovery formed primarily through the amalgamation of governmental administration and market operations, which make Taiwan one of the societies with highest recycling rates internationally, Tzu-chi recycling stands as a peculiar yet embedded case.

Drawing from a broad ethnographic study in the period from 2014 to 2018, this dissertation examines how and in what contexts Tzu-chi recycling movement came to be, in addition to what social roles and cultural meanings rubbish embodies. The empirical materials that inform the analysis include a series of participant observation at multiple Tzu-chi recycling sites and events, and interviews with the official representatives, administrative and ordinary volunteers, coupled with the analysis of relevant documents and institutional publications.

Two thematic perspectives inform the thinking behind the analysis. First is that recycling is not just about transforming objects but also about transforming people, concerning their relation to materials and environments, their networks of interaction, and modes of thoughts. From there, this dissertation inquires what object/subjective values are retrieved, recovered, and repurposed alongside the process for discarded materials. The second proposition is a circular account of temporality, seeing it as a process of entanglement between memories and imaginations, between social developments and discards. Based on this view, this research illuminates those which are once 'left behind' in Taiwan's contemporary development and the ways in which they are mobilized and fostered by waste recycling in the aspiration for betterment and progress. Thus, this dissertation is of relevance for an understanding of a society's present/past continuum and rupture in relation to waste.

Throughout the chapters, the dissertation analyses four aspects of Tzu-chi recycling: management, people, community and discourse, in order to understand how Tzu-chi recycling has corresponded and contributed to the social changes of Taiwan. Accordingly, in six substantive chapters, each (sometimes as part of a pair with another) corresponds to one of the four aspects of Tzu-chi recycling, and is associated with a specific social development. The social changes examined are those of the national industry's transformation (Chap. 4), an aging society (Chap. 5), a localisation movement (Chap.6), a religious movement (Chap. 7), and shifts of value orientation (Chap. 8).

From a more detail-oriented perspective, Chapter One, *Introduction*, begins with a thumbnail sketch of Tzu-chi recycling, introducing its formation, scales, narratives and endeavours. In addition to the clarification of research inquiry, objects and arguments, the introduction chapter provides a brief overview of contemporary Taiwan in the second half of 20th century, outlining its political, economic, religious and environment-related landscapes as a backdrop to the whole dissertation. The chapter ends with the dissertation structure and research methods. Chapter Two, *Theoretical Points of Departure: Waste and Nostalgia*, discusses two main bodies of scholarly literature. One belongs to the social science study of waste, and the other to the analysis of nostalgia. The chapter explains how each of these two bodies of work has contributed to the formulation of this dissertation's research position and analytic approaches.

The main body starts with Chapter Three, *Recycling Scheme: Taiwan and Tzu-chi*. While locating the Tzu-chi recycling programme in Taiwan's national recycling system, this chapter explains five components of the Tzu-chi recycling programme: volunteer types, recycling sites, material classifications, the administrative task force, and institutional partners. A brief overview of Taiwan's contemporary recycling movement is illustrated. In addition, the chapter presents the industrial logistics networks with a comparative sketch of three national recycling conduits: local government, private business, and Tzu-chi.

Chapter Four, *Disposable and Recyclable Labour*, and Chapter Five, *The Volunteers and their Volunteering*, both concern the characteristics of recycling labour and the ways volunteers make sense of their recycling engagements with Tzu-chi. However, each provides a different yet complementary perspective, one from an economic structural point of view and the other from that of personal lived and living experience. Both chapters challenge the existing wisdom of Tzu-chi recycling which is dominated by an assumption that emphasises the ideological

impetus and a focus on the commissioned volunteers. Chapter Four elucidates how people's voluntary participation in Tzu-chi recycling is embedded in Taiwan's historical development of industrialization. Chapter Five, argues that as remains from the past, the industrial and labour-intensive aspects of recycling in Tzu-chi – the somatic knowhow, tacit knowledge, and the communal working environment – evoke a sense of a familiar self for the elderly and retired volunteers with new meanings in an aged society.

Chapter Six, *(Re)Making the Communities and Locality*, turns the attention to the Tzu-chi recycling community and local networks of waste collection. By analysing the case study of Jiaoxi Linmei community recycling, this chapter shows the pervasive role of (Tzu-chi) recycling in Taiwan's national community-based movement in the 1990s and 2000s, and further demonstrates that the development of Tzu-chi recycling communities is a realisation of a nostalgic yearning for locality. Waste objects in this context become symbolic resources in the course of social exchange; and recycling as an old-fashioned practice is 'recycled' to construct modern civic society. The chapter ends with a twist to propose that Jiaoxi recycling network exemplifies a new type of local faction which emerged through the localisation movement, illustrating how local politics is complicated by the lucrative profits and political opportunities of recycling.

Finally, Chapter Seven, *Recycling and Religion: A Humanistic Buddhist Approach*, and Chapter Eight, *The Cultural Project of Recycling: Traditional Order and Nostalgic Environmentalism*, analyse Tzu-chi's institutional environment-related discourse. Both chapters argue that for Tzu-chi, environmental problems are cultural issues. What the Tzu-chi organization offers is a discourse of cultural translation of global environmentalism and a regional contextualized solution as recycling. Chapter Seven explores the Tzu-chi recycling narrative in relation to the organization's Buddhist identity, while Chapter Eight focuses on the organisation's broader cultural belongingness. In a dialogue with a body of literature which concerns religion and ecology, Chapter Seven shows how Tzu-chi employs Buddhist concepts to explain what environmental degradation and recycling means. The chapter argues that recycling is one of many intermediaries for the organization to achieve its religious goal of secularising Buddhism and revitalising Buddhism's social status in Taiwan. Chapter Eight emphasises the narrative tinged with other classical Chinese philosophical domains, namely Confucianism and Daoism. It proposes a conceptual scheme of 'ordered purity' to understand the representations of ideal environment/being in Tzu-chi's view. Instead of speaking of a nature/culture binary, Tzu-chi articulates a transcendent

view to connect mind, interpersonal relations, and physical organisms (the planet and human body). This chapter concludes that Tzu-chi's environmental discourse is a cultural product of the organisation's nostalgia to advocate traditional order.

The concluding chapter brings this dissertation to a close and summarises the key findings and arguments in three parts: Taiwan and Tzu-chi recycling, how Tzu-chi recycling works, and recycling the past and the cultural politics of nostalgia.

As a whole, this dissertation contends that Tzu-chi recycling is a movement made possible through the enactment of nostalgia. In the cultural politics of nostalgia, the past is a resource for sentimental longing and utopian imagining, as well as a coping mechanism. In different forms of action and ways of seeing, Tzu-chi associated members, who represent a group of temporally homeless people in our contemporary society, redefine recycling as a past-oriented strategy and a redemptive tool to deal with different consequences that modernity entails. In the process, what Tzu-chi recycling 'recycles' alongside discarded materials are those of outdated labour and skills, an aged population, an abdicative religious worldview, and traditional morality and social mechanisms. Accordingly, this dissertation argues that the phenomenon of Tzu-chi recycling itself is a manifestation of a societal system of value recovery, recycling 'the discarded past' of Taiwanese society.

Furthermore, the dissertation ultimately illustrates that, instead of being an incidental ephemera of society's productive activities, rubbish matter is at the core of meaningful and coordinated social activity; it makes us who we are. In Tzu-chi recycling, waste practice provides the volunteers a means to enact their subjectivity and practice autonomy; at the level of community, waste materials weave local networks to realise the state project of locality-building; at the level of the institution, waste practice allows the Tzu-chi organisation to realise its religious goals as well as its grand, nostalgic project of reproducing traditionality.

More specifically, the dissertation demonstrates that the Tzu-chi recycling movement happened in a historical conjecture of waves of drastic social change in Taiwan in the 1990s and 2000s. It is a result of the political economic moment of post-industrial Taiwan, its demand for waste solutions, and its abandonment of labour when industry transferred from manual manufacturing to high-technological production. Moreover, Tzu-chi recycling strategically takes advantage of the uneven political moment of post-authoritarian Taiwan and its craving for local identity in communal settings, when political force dispersed

from the central to the local, creating space for religious forces to take part in secular engagements.

The dissertation further explains how Tzu-chi recycling works by suggesting three key mechanisms: community-based operation, dependency on non-commissioned individual volunteers, and institutional support from the headquarters. First, the assembly of waste materials accompanies with the assembly of people. Grounded in the concreteness of everyday life and knowing the place, Tzu-chi recycling communities become hubs for cultivating local identity and solidarity. Relying on reciprocal mechanism of social exchange, material resources are converted into social, political and economic ones and vice versa. Second, the non-commissioned local volunteers are the mainstay of Tzu-chi recycling. All waste works are performed using the free labour of the volunteers, who mostly are with histories as atypical, manual workers. The working characteristics and surroundings of Tzu-chi recycling depict a typical working environment familiar to volunteers, which makes the station a community centre that functions as an alternative geriatric destination with welfare services. Third, although Tzu-chi recycling communities operate rather locally and independently, there is the institutional disposition – the administration team at the headquarters, the laity's communication network and the discursive representations – functions as an overarching supporting system that connects dispersed Tzu-chi recycling communities with shared identities and motifs.

Samenvatting

Dit proefschrift onderzoekt de relatie tussen afvalrecycling en de hedendaagse maatschappij vanuit een socio-cultureel perspectief, en bekijkt hoe het proces van materialen uit elkaar halen een maatschappij opbouwt. Met empirische focus op Tzu-chi recycling in Taiwan bekijkt dit proefschrift post-autoritair Taiwan door de lens van afvalrecycling, maar wil afvalrecycling ook begrijpen vanuit Taiwan. Tzu-chi is een lekenorganisatie gebaseerd op boeddhisme en is Taiwans belangrijkste niet-gouvernementele organisatie. Het heeft een leger van meer dan 90.000 vrijwilligers bijeengebracht in Taiwan. De meesten van hen zijn oudere vrouwen. Zij nemen al sinds de vroege jaren '90 deel aan communautaire recycling als een van de liefdadigheidsactiviteiten van de organisatie Tzu-chi is een opvallend geval, ingeburgerd in een systeem van terugwinning van grondstoffen dat primair gevormd is door een combinatie van bestuur en marktwerking. Deze combinatie van factoren zorgt dat Taiwan internationaal gezien behoort tot de maatschappijen met de hoogste mate van recycling.

Op basis van breed etnografisch onderzoek van 2014 tot 2018 onderzoekt dit proefschrift de contexten waarin Tzu-chi recycling ontstaan is, en welke sociale en culturele betekenissen aan afval worden toegekend. De empirische materialen voor de analyse omvatten een serie participant-observaties bij meerdere Tzu-chi recycling lokaties en activiteiten interviews met officiële vertegenwoordigers, administratieve en normale vrijwilligers, gekoppeld met een literatuuronderzoek.

Twee proposities onderliggen de analyse. De eerste is dat recycling niet alleen gaat om het transformeren van objecten, maar ook om het transformeren van mensen als het gaat om hun relatie tot materialen en omgevingen, hun interactienetwerken, en hun denken. Van daaruit onderzoekt dit proefschrift wat voor object/subjectieve waarden worden teruggebracht, hersteld, en herbestemd in parallel met het recyclingproces. De tweede propositie is een circulaire weergave van tijd - waarin tijd gezien wordt als een vervlechting van herinneringen en fantasie, van sociale ontwikkelingen en afdanking. Gebaseerd op deze kijk werpt dit proefschrift licht op degenen die 'achtergelaten' zijn in Taiwan's hedendaagse ontwikkeling en de manieren waarop zij gemobiliseerd en gekoesterd door afvalrecycling, in een aspiratie naar verbetering en vooruitgang. Daarom is dit proefschrift relevant om begrip te krijgen van het continuüm tussen heden en verleden in een maatschappij, en een breuk met betrekking tot afval.

Het proefschrift analyseert vier aspecten van Tzu-chi recycling: management, mensen, gemeenschap en discours, om te begrijpen hoe Tzu-chi recycling heeft gecorrespondeerd met en bijgedragen aan sociale veranderingen in Taiwan De zes inhoudelijke hoofdstukken behandelen deze vier aspecten van Tzu-chi recycling en behandelen iedereen specifieke sociale ontwikkeling. De sociale veranderingen die onderzocht worden zijn de transformatie van de nationale industrie (hoofdstuk 4), vergrijzing (hoofdstuk 5), een lokalisatiebeweging (hoofdstuk 6), een religieuze beweging (hoofdstuk 7), en verschuivingen in waardenoriëntatie (hoofdstuk 8).

Hoofdstuk één, *Introductie* schetst Tzu-chi recycling, introduceert de opzet ervan, de schaal, verhalen en het werk. Naast het uiteenzetten van de onderzoeksvraag, doelen en argumenten, geeft dit hoofdstuk ook een kort overzicht van Taiwan in de tweede helft van de twintigste eeuw, met een overzicht van de politieke, economische, religieuze en milieu-gerelateerde landschap, als achtergrond voor het proefschrift. Het hoofdstuk eindigt met een overzicht van de structuur van het proefschrift en de onderzoeksmethoden. Hoofdstuk twee, *Theoretische uitgangspunten: Afval en Nostalgie,* bespreekt wetenschappelijke literatuur vanuit twee perspectieven. Het ene bekijkt afval vanuit sociologische invalshoek, en het andere focust op nostalgie. Het hoofdstuk legt uit hoe elk van deze twee bijgedragen heeft aan de onderzoekspositie en analytische benaderingen.

Hoofdstuk drie, *Recyclingprogramma: Taiwan en Tzu-chi* plaatst het Tzu-chi recyclingprogramma in de context van Taiwans nationale recyclingsysteem. Het hoofdstuk beschrijft daarnaast vijf componenten van het programma: soorten vrijwilligers, recyclinglokaties, materiaalindelingen, de administratieve krachten, en institutionele partners. Ook volgt hier een kort overzicht van de huidige recyclingbeweging in Taiwan. Verder presenteert het hoofdstuk de industriële logistiek-netwerken met een vergelijking tussen drie nationale recyclingkanalen: lokale overheid, private ondernemingen, en Tzu-chi.

Hoofdstuk vier, *Wegwerp*-arbeidskracht en hoofdstuk vijf, *Vrijwilligers en hun werk*, gaan allebei over de eigenschappen van recyclingswerk en de manieren waarop vrijwilligers hun werk voor Tzu-chi begrijpen. Ieder biedt een ander maar complementair perspectief; het ene vanuit een structureel economisch perspectief en het ander vanuit de persoonlijke ervaring. Beide hoofdstukken betwisten de bestaande wijsheid over Tzu-chi recycling, die wordt gedomineerd door aannames van ideologische drijfveren en een focus op gecomissioneerde vrijwilligers. Hoofdstuk vier belicht hoe de vrijwillige deelname in Tzu-chi

recycling verankerd ligt in de historische ontwikkeling van industrialisatie in Taiwan. Hoofdstuk vijf stelt dat de industriële en arbeidsintensieve aspecten van Tuz-chi recycling - de somatische expertise, de stilzwijgende kennis, de gemeenschappelijke werkomgeving - een bekend zelfbeeld oproepen bij de oudere en gepensioneerde vrijwilligers, en nieuwe betekenissen aannemen in een vergrijzende samenleving.

Hoofdstuk zes, *(Her)scheppen van de gemeenschappen en lokaliteit*, richt de aandacht op de Tzu-chi recycling-gemeenschap en lokale afvalverzamelingsnetwerken. Door een analyse van de casus van de Jiaoxi Linmei buurtrecycling laat dit hoofdstuk de wijdverbreide rol van (Tzu-chi) recycling zien in de nationale beweging met haar basis in de gemeenschappen in de jaren 1990 en 2000, en laat verder zien dat de ontwikkeling van Tzu-chi recycling gemeenschappen een realisatie is van een nostalgische zucht naar lokaliteit. Afval krijgt in deze context een symbolische waarde in sociale uitwisseling; recycling als een ouderwetse bezigheid wordt 'gerecycled' tot een moderne burgerlijke samenleving. Het hoofdstuk eindigt met de propositie dat het Jiaoxi recycling netwerk een voorbeeld is van een nieuw soort lokale factie die is opgekomen door de lokalisatiebeweging, en illustreert hoe lokale politiek gecompliceerd wordt door de winsten en politieke kansen die recycling met zich meebrengt.

Hoofdstuk zeven, *Recycling en religie: Een humanistisch-boeddhistische aanpak*, en hoofdstuk acht, *Het culturele project van recycling: Traditionele Orde en Nostalgisch Ecologisme*, analyseren Tzu-chi's institutionele milieudiscours. Beide hoofdstukken stellen dat milieuproblemen voor Tzu-chi culturele vraagstukken zijn. De organisatie Tzu-chi biedt een discours waarin wereldwijd ecologisme cultureel vertaald wordt, met recycling als een regionaal gecontextualiseerde oplossing. Hoofdstuk zeven verkent het verhaal van Tzu-chi recycling in relatie tot de boeddhistische identiteit van de organisatie, en hoofdstuk acht focust op de bredere culturele context van de organisatie. In dialoog met de literatuur rondom religie en ecologie laat hoofdstuk zeven zien hoe Tzu-chi boeddhistische concepten gebruikt om uit te leggen wat milieudegradatie en recycling inhoudt. Het hoofdstuk betoogt dat recycling een van vele tussenschakels is voor de organisatie om haar religieuze doelen te behalen: boeddhisme seculariseren en de sociale status van boeddhisme in Taiwan bevorderen. Hoofdstuk acht bekijkt de aspecten van het discours waarin andere klassieke Chinese filosofische domeinen naar voren komen: voornamelijk confucianisme en daoïsme. Het oppert een conceptueel schema van 'ordelijke puurheid' om Tuz-chi's representaties van een ideale omgeving/ ideaal bestaan te begrijpen. In plaats van

spreken van een tweedeling tussen natuur en cultuur, articuleert Tzu-chi een transcendente kijk om geest, menselijke relaties en fysieke organismen (de planeet en het menselijk lichaam) te verbinden. Dit hoofdstuk concludeert dat Tzu-chi's milieu-discours een cultureel product is van de nostalgische drang van de organisatie om traditionele orde te bepleiten.

Het laatste hoofdstuk vat de belangrijkste bevindingen van dit proefschrift samen in drie delen: Taiwan en Tzu-chi recycling, hoe Tzu-chi recycling werkt, en het recyclen van het verleden en de culturele politiek van nostalgie.

Dit proefschrift stelt dat Tzu-chi recycling een beweging is die mogelijk gemaakt wordt door uitvoering te geven aan nostalgie. In de culturele politiek van nostalgie is het verleden een bron van sentimenteel verlangen en utopische inbeelding, maar ook een coping-mechanisme. In handelen en standpunten herdefiniëren leden die met Tzu-chi samenhangen - tijdelijk daklozen in onze hedendaagse maatschappij - recycling als een strategie die gericht is op het verleden. Het wordt een instrument van verlossing dat zij gebruiken om om te gaan met de verschillende consequenties van moderniteit. In het proces 'recycelt' Tzu-chi recycling naast afval ook de mensen van wie de arbeidskracht en capaciteiten achterhaald zijn; een oudere populatie, met een abdicatieve religieuze kijk op de wereld, een traditionele kijk op moraal en sociale mechanismen. Dit proefschrift stelt dan ook dat het fenomeen van Tzu-chi recycling zelf een manifestatie is van maatschappelijk systeem van waardeherstel, waarmee het 'afgedankte verleden' van de maatschappij gerecycled wordt.

Verder illustreert het proefschrift dat afval de kern is van betekenisvolle en gecoördineerde sociale activiteiten; het maakt ons tot wat we zijn en is niet zomaar een vluchtig bijproduct van de productieve activiteiten in een maatschappij. Activiteiten rondom afval in Tzu-chi recycling geven de vrijwilligers een manier om hun subjectiviteit en autonomie in de praktijk te brengen. Op het niveau van de gemeenschap weven de afvalstoffen lokale netwerken om het nationale project van lokaliteitsvorming te verwezenlijken. Op institutioneel niveau staat het Tzu-chi toe om haar religieuze doelen en haar grote nostalgische project te verwezenlijken: traditionaliteit reproduceren.

Het proefschrift demonstreert dat de Tzu-chi recycling beweging plaatsvond in een historische samenloop van drastische sociale verandering in Taiwan in de jaren 1990 en 2000. Het is een resultaat van de politiek-economische momentum in post-industrieel Taiwan, de vraag naar oplossingen voor afval, en de afdanking van arbeid toen de industrie van handwerk overging op high-tech productie.

Daarnaast maakt Tzu-chi recycling strategisch gebruik van et ongelijke politieke momentum van post-autoritair Taiwan en haar zucht naar lokale identiteit in de context van gemeenschappen. Politieke macht decentraliseerde in die tijd en maakte ruimte voor religieuze machten om deel te nemen aan seculiere activiteiten.

Het proefschrift beschrijft verder door middel van drie mechanismen hoe Tzu-chi recycling werkt: werkzaamheden vanuit de gemeenschap, afhankelijkheid van niet-gecommissioneerde individuele vrijwilligers, en institutionele steun vanuit het hoofdkantoor. Ten eerste brengt de verzameling van afval de verzameling van mensen met zich mee. Gebaseerd in de praktijk van het dagelijks leven, en met lokale kennis worden Tzu-chi recycling gemeenschappen middelpunten waarin lokale identiteit en solidariteit worden gecultiveerd. Gebaseerd op wederkerige mechanismen van sociale uitwisseling worden materialen omgezet in sociale, politieke en economische en andersom. Ten tweede vormen niet-gecommissioneerde lokale vrijwilligers het merendeel van de kracht achter Tzu-chi recycling. Al het werk rondom afval wordt uitgevoerd door de gratis arbeid van de vrijwilligers, die meestal achtergronden hebben als atypische manuele arbeiders. De karakteristieken en omgeving van het werk voor Tzu-chi recycling laten een typische werkomgeving zien die voor vrijwilligers bekend is. Hierdoor wordt het recyclingsstation een buurtcentrum dat functioneert als een alternatieve bestemming, waar ook andere welzijnsondersteuning beschikbaar is. Ten derde opereren Tzu-chi recycling gemeenschappen weliswaar lokaal en onafhankelijk, maar er is wel een institutioneel karakter. Het administratieve team in het hoofdkantoor, het leken-communicatienetwerk en discursieve representaties: die vormen een overkoepelend institutioneel ondersteuningssysteem dat de Tzu-chi recycling gemeenschappen verbindt door middel van gedeelde identiteiten en motieven.

Curriculum Vitae

Yun-an Olivia Dung 董芸安 (1986) is a doctoral researcher at the Institute for Area Studies at Leiden University, the Netherlands. She received a B.A. degree in sociology from National Taipei University in 2010, and an MSc degree in sociology from Erasmus University Rotterdam in 2012. Dung co-founded the international knowledge platform and membership-based association – Oranje Express 荷事生非 – in 2011, and operated as the chief executive officer since then. She has been appointed as a guest lecturer to teach BA courses in 2021 semester for the International College of Innovation at National Chengchi University. Her public writing and speeches cover a range of topics, including knowledge communication, intimate relationships, and waste. Overall, her intellectual interest lies in exploring cultural-sociological implications of contemporary society. Dung's next project is a collaboration to create an online political action platform that integrates knowledge contribution with crowdfunding.

Propositions

*'Recycling the Past' : Tzu-chi Waste Recycling and
the Cultural Politics of Nostalgia in Taiwan*

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1. The sociological significance of waste recycling not only lies in its economic nature and environmental connotation, but also in its affective affordance, political opportunity, and cultural implication.

2. In the cultural politics of nostalgia, the past is a resource for sentimental longing and utopia imagining, as well as for developing instrumental mechanism in face of drastic social changes. Individuals and groups of people are mobilised to take action because of this relationship with their past.

3. The enactment of nostalgia takes place in Tzu-chi at three levels: individual, communal, and institutional. In different ways of seeing which give rise to different ways of relating oneself to the past, in Tzu-chi, the volunteers and associated members use recycling as a past-oriented strategy and a redemptive tool to deal with different consequences of modernity.

4. In Tzu-chi, the discarded objects, labour and skills of recycling, the social network of waste work, and related environmental narratives are the emblem of the participants' nostalgic past.

5. Rubbish matter is at the core of meaningful and coordinated social activity; it makes us who we are.

6. Waste redemption is often made possible by a structural alignment of the redeemable.

7. Being honest with data, i.e. to follow what one (unexpectedly) finds, is not only a matter of research ethics, but also a manner of courage, curiosity and a requirement of time to embrace the unknown and even the unwelcomed.

8. The experience of studying a 'local' issue in a 'foreign' setting in the time of academic globalization changes the question of *who* is self and *who* is the other into that of *when* is self and *when* is the other.

9. If doing research is to engage in an intimate relationship with knowledge, then conducting a PhD study is an experience of cohabitation status to have a taste of (yet not promised) lifetime partnership/marriage.

This dissertation investigates the relationship between waste recycling and social change. Instead of complying with a prevailing notion of recycling as an environmental solution, or as material conversion and trade, this research maintains that recycling is about people, their relation to objects and environments, their networks of interaction and modes of thoughts.

The empirical focus of this dissertation is Tzu-chi recycling: a volunteer-operated, community-based, Buddhism-associated national movement in Taiwan since the 1990s. This research analyzes Tzu-chi recycling at three levels: individual, communal and institutional. It studies Tzu-chi recycling against the backdrop of Taiwan's drastic social change: the economic and demographic restructuring, a movement of political localization, and the dynamic powers of religious phenomenon. By doing so, the dissertation shows post-authoritarian Taiwan through the lens of waste recycling, and understands waste recycling through Taiwan. Overall, it contends that in different forms of action and ways of seeing, Tzu-chi-associated members redefine recycling as a past-oriented strategy and a redemptive tool to deal with different consequences of modernity.

From the vantage point of waste, this research sheds light on the entanglement between a society's development and its waste as an examination of its continuum and rupture between present and past. Through the chapters of this dissertation, it becomes clear that, above all, rubbish is at the core of meaningful and coordinated social activity; it makes us who we are.

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