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

Dung, Y.A.

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

[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

[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

[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

[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

[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

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

269 Ciji Gongdehui
270 jing si tang
271 ciji cishan jijinhui

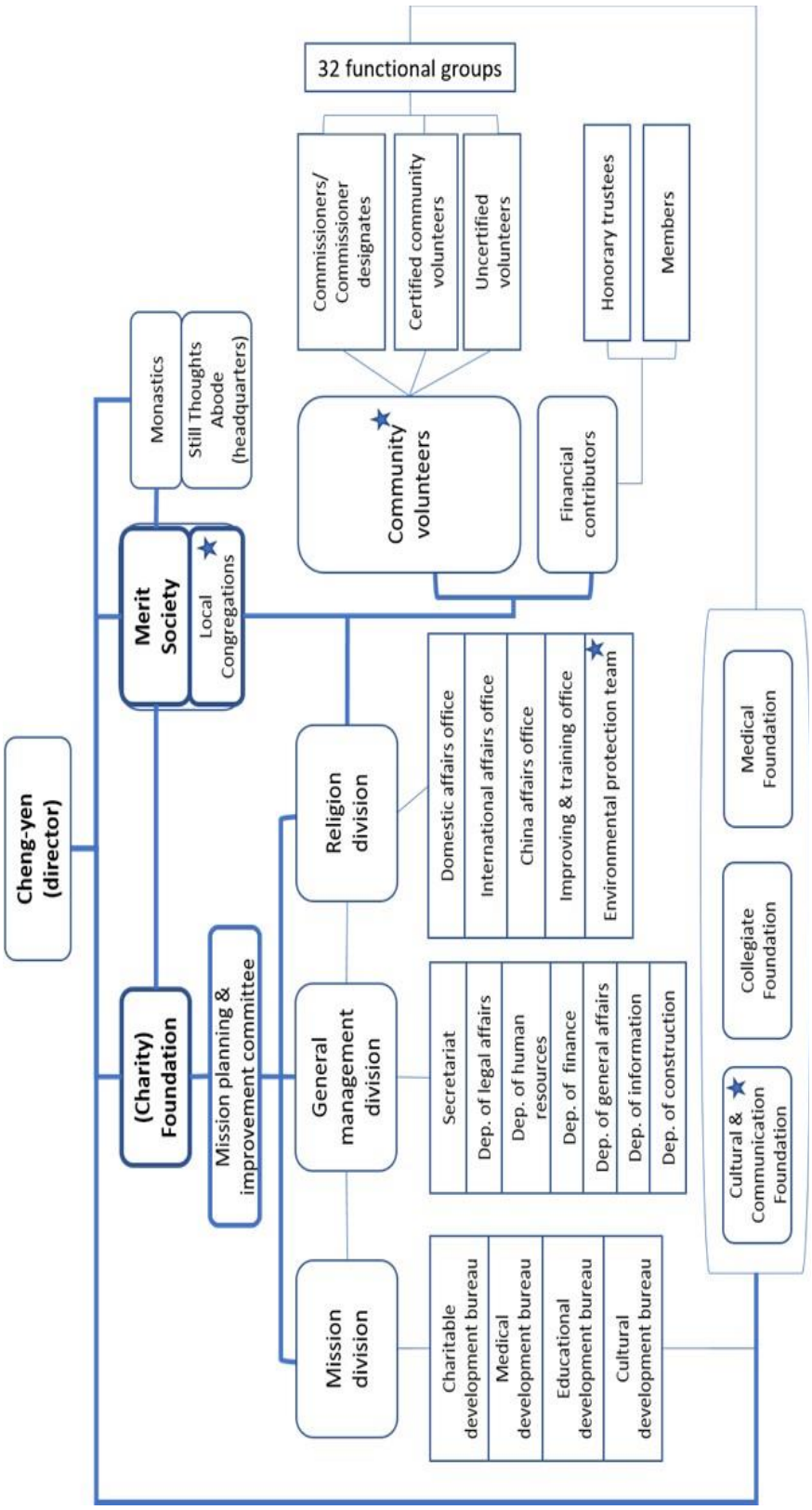

Figure 7.1 Redrawing of the Tzu-chi organisational structure (drawing by the author)

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

[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.