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

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Citation

Dung, Y. A. (2021, September 8). '*Recycling the past*': Tzu-chi waste recycling and the cultural politics of nostalgia in Taiwan. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3209240>

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Issue Date: 2021-09-08

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

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.

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}

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.

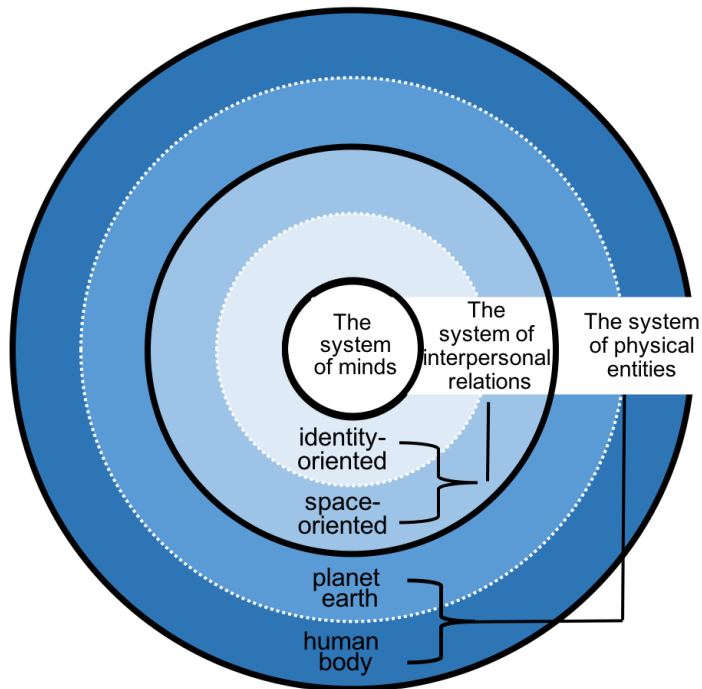


Figure 8.1 Scheme of ordered purity

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

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.

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}

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

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

²⁹¹ fu mu en Zhong nan bao jin

²⁹² ji xiang xiao qin 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}

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 釋德帆, 'er ri zhansheng yu wang' 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.

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'.

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

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

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 assess the core values of the Taiwanese people using the central theme of the ‘culture, value

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

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

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 lai' 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

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

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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

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.

