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台灣人間佛教的保環注意：以慈濟基金會為例 1990-2021
Environment in Taiwanese Humanistic Buddhism: The
Case
of the Tzu Chi Foundation 1990-2021

Student: Adrian Rapp Aparicio
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中華民國 111 年 6 月
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摘要

本論文的目的是研究佛教與環境主義之間的相互作用在台灣最大和最成功的佛教組織之一：慈濟基金會。我認為慈濟整合了環境話語和佛教中的修行。環保主義的採用是對其興起的回應由於自然條件的惡化而突出。環保主義有時會提供合法性的不確定性。這讓慈濟能夠適應新的語法並保持其作為宗教組織。為了支持我的主張，我收集了與佛教和環保主義。此外，我分析了慈濟的原始資料，例如文件和視頻，並進行實地考察，參觀了其中一家慈濟回收中心。

關鍵字：環保主義、宗教、佛教、慈濟

Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to research the interactions between Buddhism and environmentalism within one of the biggest and most successful Buddhist organizations in Taiwan: the Tzu Chi Foundation. I argue that Tzu Chi has integrated environmental discourses and practices within Buddhism. The adoption of environmentalism responds to its rise to prominence due to worsening natural conditions. Environmentalism offers legitimacy in times of uncertainty. This allows Tzu Chi to adapt to a new grammar and retain its power as a religious organization. In order to back up my claims, I have gathered desk literature related to Buddhism and environmentalism. In addition, I analysed Tzu Chi primary sources, such as documents and videos, and carried out fieldwork, visiting one of the Tzu Chi recycling centres.

Keywords: Environmentalism, religion, Buddhism, Tzu Chi

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Introduction

In this thesis, I will research about the world-making of the Tzu Chi Foundation (慈濟基金會), also known as the Compassionate Relief Foundation. This NGO inscribes itself as part of Humanistic Buddhism (人間佛教). During the last century, Chinese Buddhists spiritual leaders found that their religion needed to modernize if it aspired to survive. Guided by Buddhism's message of compassion, they developed this Humanistic Buddhism. The objective was to abandon Buddhism's traditional links to the afterlife in Chinese culture and develop a focus on human affairs (Jones, 1999). In this new Buddhist thinking, humans were at the centre and the aim was to bring happiness to the living. Among the new Humanistic Buddhism masters, we need to talk about master Yin Shun, who influenced new generations of monks like Ven. Cheng Yen, who later founded Tzu Chi, with an emphasis on social work and humanitarian aid. Since the conception of Tzu Chi as a Buddhist NGO, Venerable Cheng Yen has been its leader, deeply loved by its followers who see in her a motherly figure (Huang, 2001). She has many times condemned modern society and its consumerist ways to be behind environmental degradation. She affirms that we must restore a harmonious relationship with the environment. Her statements are the result of mixing traditional spirituality with modern activism (Lee and Ling, 2016). I discuss that the objective behind all her work in the Tzu Chi Foundation is to reshape society in a Buddhist way. In order to do that, the Tzu Chi Foundation is built on a solid bureaucratic system (Huang, 2009). Members of the organization are divided into ranks and located at different departments. This structure allows Tzu Chi to provide social basic services to both its followers and the general society. Among these services we find healthcare, education and media. Environmentalism is also considered inside this bureaucratic system. Since the early 1990s, both Buddhist clergy and lay people affirm that Buddhism's knowledge is able to give us answers for fighting climate change (Badiner, 1990). In Taiwan, Tzu Chi assumed this role and claims to tackle climate change. They promote recycling and vegetarianism as a way of protecting the planet while fighting human suffering (Zimmerman-Liu, 2019). In this thesis, I draw out the importance of environmentalism in the world-making of Tzu Chi.

Environmentalism is a recent addition to political and economic ideologies. Guha (2000) introduces us to environmentalism's history in the second half of the 20th century. This movement started as a decentralized grassroots movement in protest of fast polluting

development that happened after World War II. It was not until the early 1970s that environmentalism became an interconnected worldwide movement (Guha, 2000, p. 139). From that point on, environmentalism entered the mainstream political and economic scholar debates. The importance of environmentalism became relevant when in 1992 the United Nations held the first Earth Summit (Guha, 2000, p. 141). In Taiwan, environmentalism appeared at the same time as a protest movement as it did globally. However, it did not start interacting with a worldwide environmentalist network until later. This was due to the political situation of the island during most of the 20th century (Grano, 2015). During the late 1980s, a series of social protests and scholar pressure forced the Taiwanese authorities to start adopting environmentalist measures into governing policies. Environmentalism has passed from social activism to mainstream politics in the past few decades (Guha, 2000). Today, due to worsening effects of human activities in the environment, environmentalism has risen to prominence. I discuss that this modern importance of environmentalism provided the momentum needed for Tzu Chi to adopt and use environmentalism within its world-model.

A world-model is discourses through which a community interprets the world around them, called a ‘model of’, and the physical manifestations of those discourses through buildings and practices, called a ‘model for’ (Geertz, 1973). In this thesis, I argue that Tzu Chi is merging together discourses and practices of Humanistic Buddhism and environmentalism in order to create its own ‘model of and for’. The final aim of this model is to create a ‘Pure Land’ here and now. ‘Pure Land’ is a Buddhist notion that describes a utopian realm where all suffering is gone. In this ‘Tzu Chi’ model, environmentalism has become part of the organization’s Buddhist doctrine. The reason behind this is to maintain power in times of power shifts (Asad, 2003). Tzu Chi uses environmentalism as a world-making tool to retain power. This power can take different forms, such as influence or money. According to Tzu Chi’s ‘model of’, having a healthy ecosystem is an essential part for relieving human suffering. Through its network of volunteers and environmental protection centres, Tzu Chi’s ‘model of’ becomes a ‘model for’.

In the ‘Tzu Chi’ model, there is a clear hierarchy in which Tzu Chi Commissioners maintain moral power over the rest of volunteers, who hope to gather as much merit as possible to regain a better rebirth (Oomen, 2016). It is also about the power embedded in the ‘model of and for’, since the organization’s commissioners obtain a labour force that they use to manage the resources they can get (Collins, 1998). For Tzu Chi, recycling is the main implementation of environmentalism as a ‘model for’. Recycling is linked to service provision and resources capture (Oomen, 2016). For the volunteers, recycling acquires a spiritual meaning, a ritual through which they can obtain transformation (Lee and Han, 2015). The Tzu Chi Foundation

is known as well for its prominent female, which has influenced its world-making (Lee and Han, 2016). The ‘Tzu Chi’ model uses the motherly figure to represent both Ven. Cheng Yen and ‘Mother Nature’, this is the result of merging traditional Buddhist concepts with environmentalist notions.

In this thesis, I discuss that the ‘Tzu Chi’ model has proved to be successful in Taiwan and beyond. Tzu Chi began to grow in a time of profound changes to Taiwan political and economic systems, which also brought societal and environmental changes. The organization knew how to address the people who did not feel comfortable with the new system, enlarging its follower base. Housewives were among those who experienced the most drastic changes in their traditional social roles. As a result, many entered Tzu Chi and in the present, this organization has a strong female membership. Eventually, these housewives' husbands joined Tzu Chi as well. Many of these people were attracted to the discourse of order and stability presented by Ven. Cheng Yen (Huang, 1998; Lee and Han, 2016). Since many of these members were wealthy middle-class citizens, Tzu Chi obtained access to both human and capital resources. Those resources have been essential to keep spreading the ‘Tzu Chi’ model. Tzu Chi has become one of the biggest religious NGO in the world, participating actively in the international scenario. In events such as the COPs, Tzu Chi shows the success of its religious environmentalism world-model to other actors.

For this thesis, I carried out a qualitative study of primary sources from the Tzu Chi Foundation. These materials include videos from their YouTube channel, a public document delivered at the COP24 and their accountability reports. In the first chapter of this thesis, I will review recent historic developments in both global and Taiwanese environmentalism. Later, as an introduction of Tzu Chi’s environmental message, I have analysed a series of videos in which Ven. Cheng Yen gave different speeches related to environmental issues. This chapter opens the door to my analysis of a Tzu Chi’s document presented at the COP24. In this document, the Taiwanese NGO introduces to the world its green Buddhist world-model. To finish with, I further researched Tzu Chi’s environmental ‘model for’ through several accountability reports and fieldwork. I visited a Tzu Chi Environmental Protection Centre, which allowed me to experience first-hand Tzu Chi’s world-model.

This research is important because it explores the work-making potentials of both Humanistic Buddhism and environmentalism in one of the most successful religious organizations of modern Taiwan. The fact that the ‘Tzu Chi’ model has worked shows that we are living in times of change and uncertainty. People are looking for alternative answers in both ancient and modern knowledge. In the case of the Tzu Chi Foundation, this is relevant since

they have adopted and used environmentalism as an intrinsic part of their world-model. It does not only legitimize its own mission of building a ‘Pure Land’ on this earth, but also serves as political-economic means to obtain and assure its influence and funding. Tzu Chi’s reshape of grammar in order to stay relevant applies to a broad modern religious organization’s adaptation to structural changes as well as the rise of environmentalism as an ideology and social movement used by other actors to retain power.



Literature Review

Religion as world-making

The conception of religion as a world-modelling tool is central to my thesis' argument. In his highly influential essay, *Religion as a Cultural System*, Clifford Geertz (1973) explains the world-making potentials of religion. Religion embeds itself in the myths, stories, and morals of a community, what Geertz refers to as 'models of' the world. In addition, and most powerfully, these 'models of' the world are also represented in the built environments of villages and urban centers, becoming 'models for' the world. These symbols become emotional, moral and intellectual concepts that shape our physical representations in the world. We see examples of this in the construction of different religious buildings. For instance, Buddhist temples are built to resemble the Mount Meru. In doing so, the builders are bringing the Buddhist cosmology into material structures. Hence, religion becomes a 'model of and for' the world (Geertz, 1973, p.123). The importance of religion is its capacity to change reality. Religious symbols represent the reality of things, 'model of', but these ideas and symbols are given physical form in buildings and practices, this is 'models for'. Religion is not only a cultural system, but also a system based on creating and holding power. Creating and implementing a world-model requires power. Asad (2003) adds to Geertz's contribution and navigates the relationships between secularism, nation-state and religion in a rapidly changing society. He argues that the idea of religion does not disappear in a secular society. Religion holds its power through history adopting different grammars (Asad, 2003, p. 245). These power dynamics also affect the creation of both 'model of' and 'model for the world'. We see this phenomenon in Tzu Chi's adoption of environmentalism into its own discourses and practices or 'model of and for' the world. As described by Asad (2003), religious tradition involves both discourses and practices. In the past, the discourse established a practice to be followed by the believers. But the tradition also involves a future in which societal, economic and political forces may modify the discourse and, eventually, the practice in order to survive changes. Much has changed since the Buddhist tradition was established. Due to the increasing relevance of environmentalism, different Buddhist actors are changing the discourse regarding the environment and adopting new practices. These new 'models of and for' travel around different social and physical places. This process was discussed by Hathaway (2013) in *Environmental Winds*. He claims that the Chinese Revolution ideals of equity influenced environmentalism in

America. The resulting new environmentalist discourse then traveled back to Asia, where it merged again with local views on the environment. Hathaway's work is relevant to understand the process in which Tzu Chi takes from different Buddhist and environmental world-making models to offer its own.

Environmentalism is an attractive world-making tool. It offers a 'model of' in which an oppressed group can find a discourse which legitimizes its struggle against an oppressing class. This is what Liu identifies as leverage of power (ibid, p. 28). As described by Liu (2015), the environmental movement aims to convert its alternative discourse into the dominant ideology of a society. In order to gain power, environmentalism spreads its discourse. According to Liu, modern media plays an essential role in this (ibid, p. 31). When society at large accepts this 'model of', environmental movements gain leverage of power vis-à-vis the mainstream 'model of'. With this leverage, environmentalist actors can bargain with the oppressing class to achieve its goal of implementing the environmental 'model for' (ibid, p. 156). Liu's analysis on the success of environmentalism as an attractive and powerful ideology tool contributes to my discussion on environmentalism as a world-making tool within the 'Tzu Chi model'.

In the environmentalist 'model of' the world, human economic development is seen as the main cause of environmental destruction. Unless we change, this destruction will lead the human species to extinction. In order to avoid this outcome, the environmentalist 'model of' offers a series of actions. Among the most repeated ones we find recycling, decreasing our consumption of natural resources and the protection of the environment. In Buddhism 'model of' is the Buddha's 'Four Noble Truths'. According to tradition, the Buddha identified attachment as the source of suffering and offered an end to this suffering. The end of suffering can be achieved practicing the actions belonging to the 'Noble Eightfold Path'. This is the Buddhist 'model for'. As described by Asad (2003), discourses and practices changed since they were established as tradition. In the case of Buddhism, the aim changed from attaining the end of suffering or 'Nirvana' to attain a better rebirth. This saw the birth of the 'Pure Land' tradition. The 'Tzu Chi model' has successfully managed to merge both environmentalist and Humanistic Buddhist world-models and, thus, pursue leverage power needed to establish its model as the norm. However, Tzu Chi breaks with the tradition of 'Pure Land' Buddhism. Instead of searching for a better rebirth, Tzu Chi urges its followers to build a 'Pure Land' here and now.

Humanistic Buddhism

Buddhism is considered by many to be an important part of the history of Taiwan (Jones, 1999; Katz, 2003; Laliberté, 2004; Madsen, 2007; Kuo, 2008). Buddhism helped create common ground for the different ethnic groups that settled the island. These human groups did not only have different cultures, but they also competed to occupy the same land. Conflict was the norm in Taiwan for many centuries (Jones, 1999). In order to avoid those conflicts, the State resorted to Buddhism as a tool to build a common identity, as described by Katz and Laliberté. Important for the analysis of Buddhism as a world-modelling tool.

With the birth of the modern State and the nationalism attached to it, Buddhism lost its privileged position with the state (Jones, 1999). As a result, Chinese Buddhists sought to revitalize Buddhism to retain its position. For many centuries, Chinese Buddhism had focused on funerary ritual services, but it did not focus on the daily life of the living (ibid, 1999). Taixu was a Buddhist thinker who concluded that Buddhism needed renewal and claimed that Buddhism should focus on the people. Thus, Humanistic Buddhism appeared. One of Taixu's disciples was master Yin Shun, who brought this Buddhist current to Taiwan after the retreat of the KMT from Mainland China. As described by Asad (2003), religion has the capacity to shift to new grammars in order to retain its power. The circumstances regarding the birth of Humanistic Buddhism as described by Jones is relevant to this thesis approach to religion as a powerful world-modelling system.

Humanistic Buddhism rose to prominence in a period of deep social, economic and political changes in Taiwan. Due to globalization and democratization, Taiwanese society changed drastically. Many people were left with the sensation of not belonging. Humanistic Buddhism offered these people a sense of order and belonging, as described by many authors (Katz, 2003; Laliberté, 2004; Madsen, 2007; Kuo, 2008). The different religious movements identifying itself with Humanistic Buddhism offered an alternative 'model of and for the world'. As described by the authors mentioned above, this is why modern Buddhist organizations were, and are, so successful in Taiwanese society. Relevant to this thesis analysis of the importance of the 'Tzu Chi' world-model. This revitalization process of Buddhism is not a unique phenomenon and we see similar processes around the different Buddhist schools and individuals.

We observe the same phenomenon in environmentalism. As described by Hathaway (2013), environmentalism comes and goes around doing similar work in different places. The ‘models of’ change in different societies and physical environments. This is what happened when Ernst Friedrich Schumacher (1911-1977) traveled from the UK to different Asian countries as an advisor for economic development. He developed ‘Buddhist economics’, a new economic theory, as a result of seeing the environmental destruction brought in the name of development and being in contact with Buddhism. Due to the similarities of what Schumacher described and what Tzu Chi is carrying out, Schumacher’s ‘Buddhist economics’ is relevant to my analysis of the ‘Tzu Chi’ world-model.. Tzu Chi emphasizes a moral economy based on the well-being of the planet and its inhabitants. This Buddhist organization also criticizes modern society and its consumption patterns. In addition, Tzu Chi develops and uses technology affordable for people in poor countries, such as water filters made with recycled plastics. Before Tzu Chi was founded, Schumacher already developed these concepts in his most famous work, *Small is beautiful* (2010). ‘Buddhist economics’ is based on morals. Buddhism has at its centre the ‘Four Noble Truths’ and the ‘Noble Eightfold’ Path. In the Buddhist ‘model of’, human suffering has its roots in attachment to objects and desires. But there is a way of ending this suffering. This ‘model of’ is embedded in the Four Noble Truths. The actions we need to take to end this suffering are found in the ‘Noble Eightfold Path’. This is the Buddhist ‘model for’. One of these actions is ‘Right Livelihood’. Tzu Chi’s NGO character and its message of social harmony is embedded within ‘Right Livelihood’. Tzu Chi argues that decreasing consumption in rich countries would lead to a more peaceful world. The logic is that if we cut out our cravings, there would not be a competition for resources and, hence, less conflict. This ‘Buddhist economics’ emphasis on ‘Right Livelihood’ is described by Peter Daniels in two articles (2007, 2010) He expands Schumacher’s ideas and establishes ‘Right Livelihood’ as the departing point for economy in the Buddhist ‘model for’. Since Daniels claims that a Buddhist-driven economy would be focused on ending suffering, being based on a service economy, this is relevant to my analysis of the economic model in the Tzu Chi ‘model for’.

Buddhism has not only been linked to the economy, but also to politics. Looking at Tzu Chi from a political and economic perspective shows its importance as a world-modelling organization. In fact, as any other religion, Buddhism has always been tied to power structures. Collins (1998) explains that the Buddhist Pali Canon is the product of the first Indian agrarian societies, being interconnected with power structures. In this model of and for the world, while religion orders time and death, political power forms the social order. Religion and politics

become mutually dependent in order to maintain the established model. Due to Buddhist conception of karma, elites could tell people, as well as themselves, that their social status was produced by their actions in their past life, hence controlling the community who extracts the resources (Collins, 1998, p. 19). For instance, being a good peasant producing food for his overlord could grant a better rebirth. This was because his peasant present life was provoked by bad karma. In the case of Buddhism, this is due to the importance of the interaction between ideology and economy at its early stages, specifically on land possession and resources management. This also applies to Tzu Chi. In its network of recycling centres, Tzu Chi tells volunteers that they can cleanse their karma and gain merit by sorting recyclable products. In doing so, Tzu Chi assures itself a social class of resource extraction. The leader of this new class is Ven. Cheng Yen, whose ruling is based on morality. Holt (2009) shows how Buddhism justifies kingship and its wars for land and resources. A king, or leader, is empowered by the Buddhist model of righteous rule. Kings carry out moral conquests, generating good merit and not only relating themselves to Buddha, but being able to become Buddha (Holt, 2009, p. 39). Indeed, Ven. Cheng Yen is a living bodhisattva in the eyes of Tzu Chi followers. Davis (2016) states that kings and monks share sovereignty over death. A king might take your life, while a monk knows how to guide your soul into the afterlife (Davis, 2016, p. 19). Their powers are shown to the commoners through different ceremonies regarding lands' property and the resources it contains. Tzu Chi often held 'vows' ceremonies in which Tzu Chi members offer to Ven. Cheng Yen symbolic gifts and promise to follow the Buddhist path. Through these ceremonies, Ven. Cheng Yen obtains the legitimacy needed to guide the organization.



Environmentalism

Considering Geertz's theory as discussed earlier, environmentalism also has world-making potential. The environmentalist 'model of' is the discourses talking about the causes of environmental degradation. Environmental actors state that our current economic system is bringing the planet to its limits. Due to the worsening natural conditions, human's existence is at stake. In order to tackle climate change, the environmental 'model for' sets a series of actions, such as recycling, decreasing consumption, protecting forests and corals, etc.

However, environmentalism is a recent addition to political and economic models compared to religions. This movement started as a decentralized grassroots movement in protest of worsening natural conditions that derived from economic development after World War II. It was not until the early 1970s that environmentalism became an interconnected worldwide movement (Guha, 2000, p. 139). From that point on, environmentalism entered the mainstream political and economic scholar debates. Many issues appeared, such as the North-South divide. The Global North extracts the resources of the Global South and enjoys the economic benefits. However, the Global South suffers the environmental consequences of resources extraction and the North's economic activities. The importance of environmentalism became relevant when in 1992 the first Earth Summit was held by the United Nations (Guha, 2000, p. 141). As discussed by Guha (2000), environmental issues have been gaining attention and recognition due to the effects of the capitalist economic system. Environmentalism is a protest ideology which criticizes our current world-model based on economic growth and that offers an alternative world-model whose centre is the environment. Guha's analysis on the origins of modern environmentalism is relevant to my discussion of environmentalism as 'model of and for'.

Since Tzu Chi is a Taiwanese organization, we need to focus on how environmentalism developed in Taiwan. Environmentalism appeared at the same time as a protest movement as it did globally. However, it did not start interacting with a worldwide environmentalist network until later. This was due to the political situation of the island during most of the 20th century (Grano, 2015). During the late 1980s, a series of social protests and scholar pressure forced the Taiwanese authorities to start adopting environmentalist measures into governing policies. This occurred at the same time when Tzu Chi was expanding as an organization. Both the environmental movement and Tzu Chi were offering alternatives 'models of and for' in a time of change. This provided the momentum needed for Tzu Chi to be interested in environmental issues. Grano's contributions to the conversation on Taiwanese environmentalism are relevant to my discussion on Tzu Chi's adoption of environmentalism in its world-model.

However, Buddhism's relation with environmentalism is not that simple. Sahlins (2017) makes important points in his research about the origins of political societies. In the absence of state formations, people had a different cosmological order, based on spirits embedded in the environment (Sahlins, 2017, p.24). In this order, humans are aware of their subordination to environmental agents and create models that support a healthy environmental management. This means that there is not a separation between "Nature" and us. Animals, humans and spirits are intertwined together. Descola (2013, p. 17) adds to this conversation and describes this

environment world-model as a continuum of all living beings. However, we need to consider that humans are submitted to other beings. In those world models, spirits were superior to humans while animals were somehow equal. This animist cosmology changed in many parts of the world when the first agrarian proto-states appeared, producing a grammar shift. Buddhism played a key role in this power change. As explained by Hayashi (2003, p. 185), Buddhism shared power with the spirits after becoming a power tool. However, Buddhism still tries to impose its own world-model. This is why Buddhism fights against the spirits (Davis, 2016); Buddhism needs legitimization over the land in order to collaborate with the State, as claimed by Holt (2009, p. 39). Working with the states gave Buddhism power to implement its 'model of and for' the world. Therefore, if we analyse traditional Buddhism approach on environmental agency, we see that it does not aspire to live in harmony with Nature, but to master it. Despite having incorporated environmentalism, the Tzu Chi world-model also aims to master nature. According to Ven. Cheng Yen, nature is out of balance because of human karma. In order to bring balance back, we must cleanse our karma. I draw out that in the Tzu Chi model, the environment lacks agency. The Buddhist concept of dharma is above that of natural laws. Morality is at the centre of this model, not animistic spirits.

The academic conversation on Buddhism and environmentalism is an ongoing debate. Different reinterpretations have been made of Buddhist texts and teachings to fit the environmental narrative. Sahni (2008) analyses this phenomenon and creates four categories on how authors look at Buddhism and environmentalism. Sahni concludes that although Buddhism does have a sense of environmentalism, it remains ambiguous about this issue (2008, p. 166). Buddhists' attitude towards the environment is a new phenomenon that originated from the unprecedented environmental degradation of the last few decades and its effects on human populations (Kaza, 2006, p. 195). What contemporary Buddhists have been doing is looking into previous Buddhist knowledge in order to seek an answer to the climate crisis, both material and spiritualistic. Tzu Chi's reinterpretation of the canon Buddhist texts fits this organization into the category of those who claim that Buddhism is indeed an environmentalist religion. Kaza and Sahni contributions to the conversation on 'green' Buddhism are important to analyse Tzu Chi's discourses in which it represents the 'model of' through the reinterpretation of classical Buddhist texts.

We observe the same reinterpretation of Buddhist texts to fit in the environmental 'model of' in *Dharma Gaia: a harvest of essays in Buddhism and ecology* (Badiner, 1990). In this collection of essays by different authors, the worsening environmental conditions we are living through are the product of humankind's spiritual crisis. Humans forgot their connection

to earth, our mother, and greedily started to extract her resources. As Tzu Chi does, these essays state that Buddhism is intrinsically green and it should stand up to offer solutions. Meditation to reflect on our interdependency with all living beings will lead us to ecological livelihood, out of awakening and compassion. We also find mentions of ‘Right Livelihood’, including practices such as recycling, consuming less and following a vegetarian lifestyle (Badiner, 1990, p. 227). The discourse of Dharma Gaia is almost identical to that of Tzu Chi. Considering this essay (Badiner, 1990) is key to analyse how original Buddhist doctrine is re-interpreted for the modern world. Specifically when applied to how Tzu Chi explains the environment and the climate crisis in its ‘model of’.

Henning (2002) also belongs to this revitalized Buddhist ‘model of’. He explores the interaction between Buddhism and Deep ecology in Theravada Buddhism. Deep ecology is a current of environmentalism that aims to reshape humanity’s interaction with the environment, from one where ecosystems are valued only according to their usefulness to humans, to a system in which the environment is intrinsically valuable. Henning (2002) claims that deep ecology is the spiritual manifestation of the environmental movement, because it asks for a non-anthropocentric approach to the environment and to cherish all living beings. This spirituality is embedded in Buddhism. Ven. Cheng Yen also uses the same arguments. We see reference to the interconnection of all living beings, emphasizing compassion to non-human beings as stated by the Buddha, in the discourses created for the Tzu Chi organization. Henning also uses the Buddha to explain how love for all living beings will take us to enter a state of ‘oneness’ in which we may become ecocentric (2002, p. 17). Henning’s detailed explanation on the reinterpretation of classical Buddhism to adopt the environmental ‘model of and for’ is important for this analysis about the relationship between environmentalism and ‘green’ Buddhism in the Tzu Chi context.

As discussed through this literature review, the ‘Tzu Chi model of and for’ includes environmentalism as a key component of its discourses and material structures. In this model, the climate crisis is explained through Buddhist doctrine. Natural disasters occur due to our bad karma. In order to gain merit and cleanse our karma, Tzu Chi offers recycling as a Buddhist ritual. As explained by Lee and Han (2021) in *Taiwanese Buddhism and Environmentalism: A Mixed Method Study*, Tzu Chi followers accept the organization’s environmentalism because of the spiritual benefits it brings with it (Lee and Han, 2021, p. 16). This study also establishes that environmental notions have a strong implementation among Tzu Chi followers in comparison to other Taiwanese Buddhist organizations. Reflecting the importance of studying environmentalism adoption in the ‘Tzu Chi model of and for’.

The Tzu Chi model

I argue that Tzu Chi has merged both world-models to create its own Tzu Chi ‘model of and for’ the world. This Tzu Chi model takes part in their mission of building a ‘Pure Land’ on earth, the For Tzu Chi, this Pure Land is a place where human suffering has ended and humans have achieved a balance with nature. Society is based on morals and, thus, the lost balance has been restored. In this ‘Tzu Chi’ model, environmentalism takes a key role. Tzu Chi’s ‘green’ Buddhism is a model of the world in a time where there is fundamental change. As the climate crisis worsens, Tzu Chi uses Buddhist dharma to explain this new reality. According to this interpretation, people have forgotten the dharma, notably the concept of oneness or the interconnection of all life forms. In order to restore natural balance, Tzu Chi emphasizes environmentalism as part of spiritual practice. This is their model for the world. The final aim of this model is to reach the Pure Land. As discussed by Hulme (2020), human predicament is a tool to reshape both past and future narratives regarding climate change (Hulme, 2020, p. 120-121). His contribution is relevant to analysing how Tzu Chi builds a ‘model of’ through discourses.

This ‘model of’ is key to understanding Tzu Chi’s success. As discussed above, a series of societal, economic and political changes led some sectors of Taiwan’s citizens to feel abandoned. Ven. Cheng Yen capitalized this feeling of being abandoned and offered an alternative to those willing to join her. The sense of belonging to a community made Tzu Chi followers stay in the path of living a pro-environmental lifestyle (Zimmerman-Liu, 2019, p. 85). Due to the religious component, they also rejected, in part, materialism. It is also worth noting how Ven. Cheng Yen draws her moral power from accumulating merit and, hence, inspiring people to change. As exposed by Zimmerman-Liu (2019, p. 205) religion still has influence power when it listens to the needs of local communities. A complex process in which Tzu Chi managed to integrate different pro-environmental teachings, practices, and behavioural norms into their spiritual teachings. This integration of different doctrines and practices is the reason why Tzu Chi has successfully adopted environmentalism into their ideology.

Tzu Chi’s solutions to modern society problems relies on spreading compassion through charity and behaving morally as well as having a simple lifestyle (Yao, 2012, p. 113-115). In doing this, Tzu Chi is combining traditional Buddhist doctrine with Humanistic Buddhism emphasis on the living through charity activities. These activities started to include

environmentalism under the same approach. We need to take care of nature in order to cleanse our karma and spread compassion. This is part of Tzu Chi's merging Buddhism world-model with the environmental one. Thanks to this mix, Tzu Chi has become one of the largest Buddhist organizations. Ven. Cheng Yen's success is part of how this organization made Taiwanese Buddhism adapt to a new grammar, retaining its power in modern times.

This also applies to Venerable Cheng Yen, since her power emanates from her merit and morals. Her power gives her more 'insight' in order to use environmentalism as a world-modelling tool. That is why many authors identify Ven. Cheng Yen as essential to Tzu Chi's success (Huang, 2009; Yao, 2012; Jones, 1999). She created and implemented the Humanistic Buddhist 'model for' through which Tzu Chi provides basic social services to its followers and to Taiwan society in general. Those services include healthcare centers and cultural services (Huang, 2009). Cultural services refer to Tzu Chi's TV station and different publications through which Tzu Chi spreads its 'model of and for'. Huang (2009, p. 49-51) describes Tzu Chi's structure in great detail, with attention to the importance of organizational hierarchy and the roles of each level. Important for this analysis about the 'Tzu Chi model of and for' is the relations between commissioners and volunteers in the Tzu Chi organization.

The importance of women within the organizational hierarchy and among the volunteers is a distinctive feature of the Tzu Chi organization. The majority of the founders were women and, since then, both nuns and laywomen had a key role in leading Tzu Chi. Ven. Cheng Yen activism is based on the ideal mother figure, guiding her children with compassion. I draw out that Tzu Chi is offering an alternative world-model, especially to those that feel abandoned. Since many of these women did not have studies or jobs, their social position in the new societal and economic model was very limited. That shows why many of them chose to follow Ven. Cheng Yen. Tzu Chi gave them a sense of belonging and a purpose in its model of and for the world. As discussed by Huang and Weller (1998) and Lee and Han (2016), considering a gender approach is important to understanding Tzu Chi's success among middle-class Taiwanese women as part of its alternative 'model of and for'.

Among the social services provided by Tzu Chi, recycling occupies a central role as part of their 'model for'. Tzu Chi built its network of recycling stations to implement its 'model for' the world. When you enter these stations, you are entering Tzu Chi territory. People's social positions are based on Buddhist morals, not on income (Oomen, 2016). Economic activities are carried out with the environment at the centre of decision-making, rather than environmentalism being a side-note. Tzu Chi's network of recycling centres stands out in the task of implementing its 'model for'. As discussed by Lee and Han (2015) in *Recycling*

Bodhisattva: The Tzu-Chi Movement's Response to Global Climate Change, Tzu Chi's religious environmentalism is implemented through the organization's numerous recycling centres. Important to understand how Tzu Chi's recycling centres are a key stone in the process of building a 'model for'. In those centres, thousands of volunteers recycle while supervised by the Tzu Chi Commissioners. Many of these volunteers are elderly people and, hence, are offered the possibility of building new social relations, while Tzu Chi Commissioners obtained social status and hierarchy inside their organization. But these centres go beyond ideology. Besides donations, the 'Tzu Chi' model's economy relies heavily on these recycling centres. One part of the recycled materials are converted to new objects, providing Tzu Chi with cheap relief aid materials to be distributed around the globe. But the other part of the waste that Tzu Chi obtains is sold to companies. As discussed by Oomen in his work on Tzu Chi's recycling system (2016, p. 69-70), this provides Tzu Chi with a stable source of revenue. With this money, Tzu Chi can keep founding itself and spreading its 'model of and for'. Relevant contribution to understand the success of the 'Tzu Chi' model in both environmentalism and Buddhism.

Throughout this academic conversation, I have shown the different connections between the greening of Buddhism in modern times with the rise of environmentalism. In this greening process, the Buddhist organization Tzu Chi succeeds in adopting environmentalism into religious doctrine. This is because environmentalism is an ideology force that helps Tzu Chi in analysing the reality of the climate crisis, a 'model of the world', and in return offers a solution to society, 'a model for the world', by building recycling centres to avert the crisis. In addition, environmentalism has become a mainstream movement accepted by society at large, making it easy for Tzu Chi to spread its 'model for' the world. This use of environmentalism inside of their world-model is also driven by the need to retain power, influence and money, in times of change. The 'Tzu Chi' model is characterised by an alternative economic model and a rejection of the present one. In addition, leadership is given to those with moral merits, based on the Buddhist principles of dharma and karma. The aim behind the adoption of a new world model is to build a 'Pure Land' on earth during the present, rather than gaining merit to obtain a better rebirth. During the next chapters of this master's thesis, I will be showing my findings about how Tzu Chi is building and spreading its world model.

Methodology

My main research question for this thesis is: How is Tzu Chi adopting and using environmentalism as an essential part of its own world-modelling mission? I argue that Tzu Chi is adopting environmentalism within its own ‘model of and for’ the world. Tzu Chi uses the environmentalist world-model inside the Buddhist one. In doing so, Tzu Chi manages to stay relevant through processes of power shifts. The literature shows us the importance of this organization in Taiwanese contemporary history. The Tzu Chi ‘model for’ is linked to service provision and resources capture. This organization provides its members and society with basic social services such as healthcare, education, media and recycling. In doing so, Tzu Chi implements its ‘model of’ through material structures and practices while gaining legitimacy for this ‘model for’.

Departing from the academic debate presented at the literature review, we have an overall image of environmentalism as well as the Buddhist current in which Tzu Chi adheres itself, Humanistic Buddhism. In addition to that, I found out that there is an ongoing debate about Buddhism being an environmentalist religion. This is complemented with the literature treating different economic theories related to the environment, such as deep ecology or sustainability perspectives. Besides these secondary sources on Buddhist environmentalism and political economy, I carried out in a qualitative study of primary sources from the Tzu Chi Foundation. These materials include videos from their YouTube channel, a public document delivered at the COP24 and their accountability reports.

This combination of desk review of literature and thorough examination of Tzu Chi materials allowed me to analyse how this organization adopted environmentalism as a tool and how this was possible due to the debate about modern Buddhism and environmentalism. Among the produced materials of the organization, I looked at Tzu Chi’s website, both in Chinese and English, to research their statements on environmental issues. Since my major is translation and interpreting in Chinese, I was capable of obtaining information from the original language. Since Tzu Chi environmental action relies mainly on vegetarianism and recycling, I focused on these two topics. I researched a period that covers from Tzu Chi initial steps on environmental action to modern day.

Tzu Chi is also present in mainstream social media such as YouTube. I analysed 15 videos treating environmental issues to identify the characteristic elements of the organization’s Buddhist doctrine and how these elements work to legitimize Tzu Chi’s mission.

I worked with Tzu Chi's “人間菩提” or ‘Human enlightenment’. These short videos are Ven. Cheng Yen's speeches about a specific topic which are uploaded daily to their YouTube channel. I looked at 2021 videos treating environmental issues. This allowed me to see how Tzu Chi employs environmentalism in their mission. In order to have a clear idea of the use of environmentalism inside this organization, I first counted how many videos were dedicated to environmental issues for 2021, meaning how many out of 365 videos. Out of 365 videos for 2021, 42 were dedicated to vegetarianism and environmental protection. Since the total amount of videos was inferior to 100, I analysed 15 videos. I also checked other categories in the YouTube channel. In the health and vegetarian food playlist, they included 4855 videos. In the charity and environmental protection 7703 videos (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2022). The 15 videos were selected randomly. Ven. Cheng Yen used both Mandarin and Minnan in her speeches. Tzu Chi provided English subtitles in the YouTube videos. Since I speak and read Mandarin, I could compare what she was saying with the subtitles. I used the different academic conversations about Buddhism and environment reviewed at the literature review to analyse Ven. Cheng Yen's speeches. From this process, I learnt how Tzu Chi looks relates to the environmental crisis, its origins and consequences, and the alternative model they offer as a solution.

Another important primary source I used is a public document that Tzu Chi published for Katowice's COP24 back in 2018 (The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, 2018). In this document, they present their view on the climate crisis and propose several solutions to the challenges we are facing. It focuses on Tzu Chi's environmental engagement as well as other “missions” of this organization. Although this was the only exhaustive document they presented for a COP, they have a website dedicated to their activities at COP26 in Glasgow, Scotland. Analysing Tzu Chi proposals in these international events show us how this organization interacts with other environmental actors in a broader context. Moreover, it is evidence of how Tzu Chi proves the utility of their “green” Buddhism on an international scale.

In relation to this development projects, I researched Tzu Chi's resources and how this NGO invest in and for the environment. I accessed to accountability reports made public by the NGO, focusing on the expenses attached to environmental activities. I also researched about the location of their environmental stations using both Tzu Chi sources and overall internet publications.

Besides these desk primary and secondary sources, I took a visit to one of the recycling centres. I spent one morning at the Tzu Chi Xindian Environmental Protection Station, near Tzu Chi Taipei Hospital. I chose that specific station because it is located just in front of Tzu Chi's seat of power in Taipei. During that visit, I was introduced to the station and how it runs by one of Tzu Chi commissioners. Moreover, I was able to research about Tzu Chi's world-modelling in the physical world, beyond ideology and literature. This is important since their management of these sites reflects both the material application of their "green" Buddhism doctrine as well as how they use their many land holdings.



Historic approach

This chapter will introduce a historic background for environmentalism as a movement both across the globe and in Taiwan. A background for Buddhism in Taiwan is also provided, with an emphasis on the Tzu Chi Foundation. In addition, I look into Tzu Chi's environmental history as told by this organization. I compare Tzu Chi's claims with the contemporary trends that took place in the environmental movement.

In order to understand the adaptation of environmentalism by Tzu Chi in the 1990s, we need to look at what was going on around the globe and Taiwan at that moment. According to Guha (2000, p. 63), the environmentalist movements started to experience a second wave after WWII. Until that point, discussions regarding environmental issues were almost exclusively part of the scholar and intellectual spheres (p. 80). These thinkers opposed development models and capitalism, among those Guha includes Schumacher (p. 45). However, due to the extraction of more and more natural resources to satisfy the growing economy of post-war developed countries, local movements were formed in order to protect specific locations. This happened worldwide during the 1970s (p. 139). In the 1980s, these local environmental movements started to think globally and formed alliances with other local actors. These early environmental movements were characterized by grassroots activism, which later developed into officialization (p. 80). Guha argues that the rise of environmentalism was accompanied by a feeling of vulnerability. From the 1970s onwards, technological advancement made it possible for the first time to take pictures of planet Earth from space. For some, that famous first picture exposed the vulnerability of the planet. A fragile treasure of life in the middle of darkness (Guha, 2000). This awareness brought by environmental thinkers and local activists made possible the first Earth summit in 1992, UNCED (p. 141). In this summit, states and NGOs debated over the steps to take in order to protect the planet. It is worth noting that this is when environmental NGOs rose to prominence and started its institutionalization.

While this is a general picture of what was happening at a global scale, Taiwan's environmental history has some specific issues. During the initial decades of the KMT regime, there were no environmentalism concerns (Grano, 2015, p.40). However, due to fast industrialization and development that took place during the 1960s and 1970s, environmentalism arrived in Taiwan during the 1980s (p. 42). Grano finds two main reasons for this. On the one hand, the first generation of Taiwanese educated abroad returned with the knowledge of environmentalism. On the other hand, the fast industrialization and lack of

government control led to a deterioration of Taiwan's environment (p. 42). Many citizens worried about the pollution's effect on human health while many local farmers and fishermen saw their traditional way of life threatened by industrial waste. These middle-class overseas students that returned provided the lower-class affected by environmental deterioration with intellectual back-up (Liu, 2015, p. 96-97). Initially, the government offered economic compensations to those communities affected (p. 144). Moreover, it was also during this time that the KMT started to make democratic reforms out of international and local pressure. During 1977 and 1984, Taiwan saw the first 'green' protests (p. 52). The media also started to report on environmental issues (p. 76). In 1987, the first ever environmental policy was enacted and, in 1988, freedom of association led to more environmental activism (Grano, 2015: 43-44). Social protests and police crackdowns were prominent between 1987 and 1991 in the whole country (Liu, 2015: 58). People demanded more protection against pollution and environmental conservation (Grano, 2015: 44-45; Liu, 2015: 145). Different actors tried to raise awareness about environmental issues, such as Tzu Chi (Grano, p. 47). Environmental NGOs were formed and entered a process of institutionalization (Liu, 2015: 152). It was also during this time that Taiwan's environmental movements shifted from a local to a universalist approach (Liu, p. 144). When the democratic transition led to the first democratic elections on the island, the new government tried to balance the industrial sector key to Taiwan's sovereignty and the support of citizens for environmental causes. However, it was not until the main opposition party, the DPP, reached the government that specific measures were taken (Grano, 2015: 49-51). The new government prepared a recycling system as well as enacted numerous policies regarding conservationism. According to Grano, the DPP also needed to lower its environmental aims in order to protect the island's economy, which depends greatly on heavy industries (Grano, p. 52-56). However, an environmental consciousness was already formed in the Taiwanese society (p. 57).

Now that we have seen global and Taiwan environmental developments, we need to take a look at Tzu Chi's history and, more specifically, its environmental path. Tzu Chi is part of what we call Humanistic Buddhism, a term with modern origins. During the last century, monastic and secular Buddhists saw Buddhism as a whole in decline. In order to push back their religion and guided by Buddhism's message of compassion, they developed "Humanistic Buddhism (人間佛教)". Humanistic Buddhism started in China by Ven. Taixu but it arrived in Taiwan with the KMT forces. Ven. Taixu states that Buddhism must come back to the living, since the religion had been focused on funeral services and the afterlife for centuries (Collins,

1998). Therefore, Humanitarian Buddhism aims to help those that are in this world, through charity work, in order to give them a chance of attaining enlightenment (Jones, 1999; Chandler, 2004). In addition to that, Ven. Taixu also finds Buddhism closer to socialism. Both look for the end of suffering and equality (Chandler, 2004). This doctrine is also known by the name of Dhamma Socialism. These circumstances made the KMT suspicious of those nuns and monks arriving in Taiwan from China, imprisoning many as being communist spies (Jones, 1999). One of those monks was the student of Ven. Taixu, master Yin Shun, who influenced later developments in Taiwanese Buddhism.

The KMT wanted to control religion in order to pursue social order and cultural hegemony. For doing so, authorities started a reorganization of Buddhist institutions and organizations, placing them under the Buddhist Association of the Republic of China or BAROC. However, the BAROC presented more problems than solutions since they created a monopoly on Buddhism. Therefore, Taiwanese Buddhism once again recurred to a submissive position in order to preserve its autonomy (Kuo, 2008). The situation changed when the so-called Taiwanese miracle took root and economic growth arrived.

This is the time when we may talk about a pluralization, or proliferation, of Buddhist organizations. These new BAROC-independent organizations took root in the late 1960's and matured in the late 1980's, having different purposes (Jones, 1999). These are the Four Great Mountains, all of them started by students of master Yin Shun and focusing heavily on Humanitarian Buddhism. One of those students was Ven. Cheng Yen. She is the only female and native Taiwanese, focused on adapting to Taiwan's new needs, starting a new vision of Buddhist life and practices (Jones, 1999). She heavily pointed out the importance of charity work since the beginning and, later, of environmental issues.

Buddhism in Taiwan started a process of modernization in which this religion's structure changed drastically (Jones, 1999). To start with, clerical ordinations numbers decreased greatly, while there was an increasing number of nuns in the orders. Taiwanese Buddhism finally stopped obtaining revenue from funeral services as well. This created the opportunity for laypeople of taking an enhanced role in Buddhist organizations and incorporating new democratic structures (Kuo, 2008). Moreover, the new modern Taiwanese life demanded the change of some old-fashioned precepts. Economic growth also allowed laypeople to invest more resources into these new organizations. However, Buddhism also lost some special recognition from the government (Jones, 1999). Monks needed to go to military service and their clergy names were not to be accepted as official.

As we can see in this section, Taiwanese Buddhism's biggest change was brought by the incorporation of Taiwan into the global economic market and its consequences. The inequalities and a value vacuum brought by the new economic order left people with a feeling of losing traditional society's structure. A void that some Buddhist organizations were willing to occupy.

Although I am talking about Taiwanese Buddhism as a whole, we should consider that the main Buddhist organizations differ greatly in their approaches to society. Besides all being part of Humanitarian Buddhism, Laliberté (2004) identifies three common characteristics: being part of the Mahayana tradition, being influenced by Confucianism and sharing the same political situation. Therefore, despite all of these common issues, why do they differ? According to Laliberté (2004), these Buddhist organizations are built around their master's leadership. This makes each one unique in the sense that each master decides to implement a different approach in implementing Humanistic Buddhism.

Now we will bring our focus back to the Tzu Chi Foundation. The biggest Buddhist organization in Taiwan was founded by Ven. Cheng Yen in the late 1960's from scratch in Hualien, at the time an impoverished region (Jones, 1999). Ven. Cheng Yen addressed middle class women that were unhappy about their lives because of the changes that brought modernity (Huang and Weller, 1998). Due to the Taiwanese economic growth and the establishment in the country of a market economy, traditional ties collapsed. On the one hand, men needed to work more and stay away from home for business trips. On the other hand, women kept being inside their homes and, those who could, participated actively in the new consumption society. Besides, the market economy brought more social inequalities. Ven. Cheng Yen provided them with a solution, engaging in charity work. Through compassion, these unhappy women could see the reality of other unlucky beings and, hence, realized how fortunate they were. In doing so, the master aspired to create a kinder world. Also, giving women the chance of running an organization subverted the traditional women's role of Chinese societies, reserved exclusively to the house (Huang and Weller, 1998). That explains why Tzu Chi's leadership is composed of women and the foundation's members are 80% females. To sum up, the organization claims that charity work will spread tolerance and kindness, hence restoring social values and building a better world. Tzu Chi is also against modern consumption society and strongly supports environmental issues (Huang and Weller, 1998). In doing so, Ven. Cheng Yen made Buddhism take a stabilizing and conservative role in a society which was going under deep changes. She offered a solution for those citizens that feel lost in the new order (Madsen, 2007).

As it is exposed above, Tzu Chi started as a charity organization, not as an environmentalist one. Therefore, we might wonder about its environmental path. Let us see first what the organization says itself:

Tzu Chi's advocacy of environmental protection began on a summer morning in August 1990. Master Cheng Yen accepted an invitation from the Wu Tsun-Hsien Foundation to give a speech at Shin Min High School in Taichung. While she walked through the streets after a night market, she noticed a large pile of rubbish by the roadside, with plastic bags strewn and paper blown around by the wind. "This is such a beautiful island, but its environment is so dirty!" she thought. This scene made her sad; the Master sighed for the people of Taiwan, who enjoyed a booming economy and a comfortable lifestyle – but had neglected their environment. The end of her speech was followed by continuous applause. With deep sincerity, she called out to the audience: "Taiwan is a clean, beautiful island. With our effort, we can definitely bring out more of its beauty! This requires the strength of many of us. I appeal to all of you who are clapping now to use the same hands to help sort recyclables. (The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, 2018, p. 24)

As we can see, the date of 1990 coincides with the analysis by Grano (2015) and Liu (2015). By that year, environmentalism was already a mainstream concept in Taiwanese society. However, rather than to accommodate Tzu Chi into historic events, the organization emphasizes the role of Ven. Cheng Yen in adopting environmentalism as part of the Tzu Chi ideology. Not only that, but it is implied that the idea of environmentalism is an idea by Cheng Yen herself. Thus, legitimizing its adoption as part of her follower's Buddhist practices. In this same section, the document includes later developments:

In March 1991, the Tzu Chi Foundation in Taiwan collaborated with the King Car Cultural and Education Foundation to carry out a campaign to purify human minds and correct negative influences in society. The following year, they started working with Taiwan's Environmental Protection Administration and civil groups to promote environmental protection among the public. Their efforts included tree-planting, recycling, and other green practices and activities that could be implemented in daily life. The nationwide campaign not only raised environmental awareness among the public. It also helped to spread and deepen environmental

concepts and practices throughout Taiwan. Since it began this mission in the beginning of 1990s, Tzu Chi has gradually become a key organization in promoting and implementing environmental sustainability in Taiwan. It regularly organizes the clean-up of beaches and mountains. In addition, it has set up numerous recycling stations in communities across the island, to encourage ordinary people to help protect and care for the environment. (The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, 2018, p. 32)

Environmentalism becomes entangled with religion. Environmental actions are taken inside a broad package of actions aiming to ‘purify’ society. The text also enshrines Tzu Chi as a ‘key’ environmental organization. However, as we have seen throughout this chapter, there were numerous environmental actors before that helped spread environmentalism earlier than Tzu Chi (Grano, 2015; Liu, 2015). I argue that Tzu Chi, rather than taking the lead in the environmental cause, has been following the winds of change. Let us observe the following image taken from a Tzu Chi document delivered at the COP24 in 2018:



Figure 1. *Tzu Chi environmentalist path*

The Tzu Chi environmental path is given the 1990 as a starting point as in the previous text. Every few years we can observe how this NGO gives more detailed information on how to tackle climate change. However, it is interesting to note that all of these marked events do not differ much in time. They all talk about recycling in different dimensions. It was only in 2007 when they aimed to “encourage people to adopt a frugal and low-carbon lifestyle”. Certainly, Ven. Cheng Yen has been criticizing modern consumerism since Tzu Chi’s beginning but it was from a religious perspective. In Buddhism, desire is the cause of suffering and, in order to attain enlightenment or liberation, one needs to reject desire. Desiring modern commodities is the cause of society’s suffering nowadays. However, later Tzu Chi adapted this rejection of consumerism to environmentalism. Not only our cravings represented suffering, but this suffering had its material representation in environmental degradation. Now Ven. Cheng Yen encourages people to have a simple lifestyle in the name of Buddhism, cut down suffering, and environmentalism, a lower carbon footprint.

Although Tzu Chi has become an environmental organization, it has not the leading role in Taiwanese environmentalism. This ‘Tzu Chi environmental stages’ image just shows the adoption of environmental actions inside Tzu Chi. However, Tzu Chi did not come up with those ideas. Rather, Tzu Chi just added a religious message to them. In doing so, Tzu Chi made environmentalism more attractive to its followers so now it was linked to Buddhism thinking and practice. Moreover, Tzu Chi also maintained its public image regarding Taiwanese society.

The reason behind Tzu Chi’s decision to adopt environmentalism as a power tool is the reason why environmentalism is easy to accept by people (Liu, 2015, p. 29). According to Liu, power refers to ideology power. He argues that environmentalism is socially acceptable and politically respectable. This fact also makes it easier for this thinking to be spread through communication media (Liu, 2015, p. 31). According to Liu, the oppressing forces of a society held the power to do so over the oppressed people. In order to negotiate with this main power, oppressed classes must find leverage to induce changes and obtain better life conditions (Liu, 2015, p. 28). In the case of environmentalism, Liu states that environmental movements first pursue ideological power. In doing so, environmental actors aim to erode the primary source of power and, hence, obtain legitimization and leverage to claim the power (Liu, 2015, p. 156).

I find that this is the case for Tzu Chi to incorporate environmentalism as part of their Buddhist doctrine. As states need citizens to maintain their existence, religions need followers. Environmentalism serves Tzu Chi to gain legitimization over both its followers and the rest of society. Combining Buddhist claims with environmental ones creates an even more appealing ideological power. It is also simple to do since Buddhism and environmentalism share many

similarities, for instance their emphasis on restraint (Guha, 2000, p. 145). With this ideological power and the consequent erosion of the main non-Buddhist, non-environmental power, Tzu Chi obtains leverage power vis-à-vis this main power. In the case of Tzu Chi, this power takes the shape of influence over the Taiwanese society. As society accepts the Tzu Chi ‘model of’, the Tzu Chi Foundation can keep spreading its ‘model for’. We observe this when Ven. Cheng Yen asks for adopting a single lifestyle and rejecting modern ‘values’, intertwining environmentalism with Buddhist doctrine.

Throughout this historic background, we have seen how environmentalism changed from local grassroots movements to become a global movement that was accepted by mainstream politics and society. In Taiwan, this process started later due to the political situation but it had the same results. Environmentalism is a respectable ideology that institutions and organizations use to gain legitimacy. This is why Tzu Chi adopted environmentalism. The environmental ideology offers Tzu Chi bargain ideology power vis-à-vis the current source of political-economic power. With this ideology power, Tzu Chi aims to reshape the current world-model. Since both Buddhism and environmentalism are world-modelling tools, Tzu Chi is intertwining both models to create its own and offer an alternative world-model. In order to understand the ‘Tzu Chi’ world-model, we need to determine what their model of the world is. In the next chapter, I am analysing Ven. Cheng Yen’s speeches to identify Tzu Chi’s ‘model of’ the world, meaning what are the discourses this organization uses to look at the current world-model.

Tzu Chi ‘model of’: discourse analysis

In this chapter, I am analysing a series of videos updated in the Tzu Chi’s official YouTube channel. I focus on daily speeches given by Ven. Cheng Yen to her followers. I extracted fragments of the videos where the ‘Tzu Chi’ discourse is presented clearly. This discourse is the base of the organization’s ‘model of’ the world. Ven. Cheng Yen also gives examples of how Tzu Chi’s environmental actions take place, giving us the material structures needed to build a ‘model for’ the world.

As part of my research of Tzu Chi’s primary sources, I researched about what Tzu Chi calls cultural mission. Inside its cultural department, Tzu Chi runs a TV station that also has a Youtube channel, 大愛電視 or DaAi TV. Since its Youtube channel has been running since 2009 there is a vast amount of material to work with. First, two playlists drew my attention, “健康 / 蔬食” and “慈善 / 環保”, meaning health and vegetarian food and charity and environmental protection respectively. In the health and vegetarian food playlist they included 4855 videos. In the charity and environmental protection 7703 videos (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2022). It is interesting how Tzu Chi groups together these two different concepts. Moreover, due to the high amount of data, I decided to go directly to Ven. Cheng Yen daily speeches or “人間菩提”, Human enlightenment. Out of 365 videos for 2021, 42 were dedicated to vegetarianism and environmental protection. Listening to Tzu Chi’s leader, we can have a deeper understanding of Tzu Chi’s narrative regarding the current climate crisis. First, the crisis we are experiencing is caused by human’s collective bad karma:

We humans let ourselves be entangled in our desires as if we had put ourselves in jail and couldn't break free. This is why we create more and more bad karma. Bad karma inevitably leads to bad consequences. So, natural disasters occur frequently. (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2021, April 20, 8:07)¹

Using Buddhist doctrine, Ven. Cheng Yen asserts that this bad karma is produced from human desires and cravings:

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZL9FUahEFy0>

As people seek to enjoy material abundance, industry is highly developed and products are promoted vigorously. So, many things discarded were only used once. All this results from people's desires. People also crave meat. Due to people's desires, resources are depleting. Trees are felled, animals are slaughtered, etc. (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video (2021, December 2, 1:38)²

Moreover, as we can see above, these desires are enshrined in our current economic system that, in a vicious circle, pushes people to keep consuming:

When the economy took off, more and more chimneys were set up along with factories that manufactured what people wanted. Lands and sea floors have been excavated for crude oil, which is then refined and made into various resources to satisfy peoples' needs. And, to boost the economy, consumption is encouraged. More resources are used as a result and many things get discarded after only being used once. This is one of the many vicious cycles that harm the environment. (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2021, September 30, 2:41)³

As we can see, Ven. Cheng Yen engages in the debate of the consumption society. These critics of modern economics often appear in Buddhist academic works such as Schumacher (2010) or Daniels (2007, 2010). It is also an increasing trend in the economics field itself. Degrowth is not only seen as utopia nowadays but as another option to change the current system (Hickel, 2021). Humans do not only harm themselves and create collective bad karma because of bad emotions, but also have brought imbalance to Nature due to their uncontrolled desires:

There are many people suffering in the world, so we must find ways to end suffering. We've often seen erratic climate conditions and disasters brought about by the imbalance of people's minds. Nature's elements have become imbalanced, and not only is there a large world population but people give rise to complicated thoughts due to their desires and ignorance. (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2021, September 30, 1:22)⁴

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8eSvuQ6BMoA>

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WCvYw93jXuo>

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WCvYw93jXuo>

Nature and the world go hand-in-hand, so people in the world ought to be vigilant about this. This has to do with karma as well. Climate change is caused by human activities. (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2021, March 22, 3:18)⁵

This imbalance produces more natural disasters that leads to more suffering for humans. Ven. Cheng Yen links climate change to human's actions but she adds religious reason to scientific ones:

We've seen floods, wildfires, storms, and other natural disasters. Nature's elements are indeed out of balance. What's more worrying is that due to global warming, erratic weather patterns have truly become very common. Nature's elements have become imbalanced because driven by our habitual tendencies, we humans have been damaging the environment ceaselessly. Many people have gone astray in life and have not only been damaging and polluting the environment but also creating bad karma. (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2021, October 6, 0:53)⁶

It is also worth noting that Ven. Cheng Yen states that people losing morals create bad karma as well. In the images presented during her speeches to us, we see all of those disasters she mentions, giving it an apocalyptic feeling. In this natural disasters' category, she also includes viruses like COVID-19:

When people's collective bad karma comes to bear, viruses become rampant, which is described in the Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva Sutra. In all, the COVID-19 virus runs rampant now. (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2021, October 6, 5:20)⁷

As we can see, she looks for answers to modern problems in traditional Buddhist doctrine (Kaza, 2006; Sahni, 2008). Ven. Cheng Yen keeps building a Buddhist narrative, asserting that the Three Poisons, greed, anger and ignorance, explain why we are living a climate crisis and how the pattern keeps repeating itself:

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jp9adC9IIiY>

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vE1AKhYGrWM>

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vE1AKhYGrWM>

When we are misled by an unwholesome thought, we will give rise to greed, anger and ignorance and in turn create bad karma. As people have created bad karma collectively, disasters have occurred, destroying many wonderful things. Many places have become harsh and ugly. The Earth used to be very beautiful. Yet, it has now been damaged by people. It is not as beautiful as it once was due to people's greed, anger and ignorance. As people have been creating bad karma, there is much suffering in the world. (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2021, May 6, 0:54)⁸

There is also a sense of nostalgia, the past used to be beautiful but the present is worse. It is interesting to note that she also combines the Buddhist concept of karma with the academic notion of anthropocene:

Otherwise, we would have a man-made climate. Why is it called man-made? It's collective karma created by living beings, which causes air pollution and increases global temperature. (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2021, March 22, 6:51)

Our Mother Earth is already greatly damaged. Our Earth is harmed and humans have been the culprit of this. For a very long time, humans have been so greedy that they over-excavated and exploited our Earth, causing much harm and leaving no time for our Earth to recuperate and recover. (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2021, August 16, 2:04)⁹

This is not the only mention of academic works. Throughout the videos, we can see scientists talking about climate issues and Ven. Cheng Yen backs up her claims quoting reports published by different institutions. Moreover, Tzu Chi's Master not only provides a Buddhist interpretation of the climate crisis, but she also proposes solutions to tackle this problem. She emphasizes vegetarianism in most of her speeches:

What we eat matters greatly, if we stop eating meat and adopt vegetarianism, we can help purify the air and protect the environment. (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2021, December 11, 11:03)¹⁰

⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ThrKcnWgAcg>

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hSUxfdb9E0>

¹⁰ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ca_zsqVnhX4

Vegetarianism is a fundamental way to lessen the impact of climate change. (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2021, December 11, 3:03)¹¹

We must urge everyone to go vegetarian. Only then can the land be purified. (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2021, December 2, 5:05)¹²

Hence, Tzu Chi sees industrial meat production as harming the environment. This is a current debate on environmental issues with organizations such as the United Nations publishing reports of the bad consequences of meat consumption for the environment (IPCC, 2019). Ven. Cheng Yen links adopting a vegetarian diet with ‘purifying’ the air and soils, using scientific data about how raising animals as livestock produces pollution. She also aims to detach vegetarianism from religious issues, saying that everyone can be vegetarian regardless religion or culture (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2021, December 2). The other solution that is present in Tzu Chi doctrine is recycling:

If we didn’t promote the idea of recycling, people in modern times use single-use things and throw them away. As a result, we have to keep on pumping crude oil and excavate mountains; such activities destroy our land. This is only to provide people material goods which are used once and then thrown away. (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2021, November 14, 2:16)¹³

It is hard to know if Ven. Cheng Yen speaking of ‘we’ refers to society as a whole or exclusively to Tzu Chi. I tend to think the second since in Taiwan environmental history, Tzu Chi plays a key role in promoting recycling. It is also not clear what she means by the consequences of not promoting recycling. However, Tzu Chi’s recycling acquires a religious meaning (Lee and Han, 2015). It is not only about protecting the environment, but also about managing a person’s karma:

¹¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ca_zsqVnhX4

¹² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8eSvuQ6BMoA>

¹³ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2x6Dp_XxIPo

If we throw plastic away, they'll be buried under the ground. they will not decompose; after 500 years or 1000 years, they remain as plastic. If all the ground is covered with plastic, we'll have no land to grow rice or grain crops. Therefore, according to the law of karma, when we plant bad seeds, we'll receive bad fruits. On the other hand, planting good seeds will give us good fruits. When people keep on being wasteful, they plant bad seeds; when people keep consuming and throwing things out, those acts are also bad seeds. If we keep collecting recyclables, we are picking up blessings[...]. (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2021, November 14, 4:05)¹⁴

Engaging in modern rich societies' consumerism is also embedded in religious connotations, since being 'wasteful' leads to bad karma. That is why in Tzu Chi language, there is no garbage but recyclables, which are compared to blessings. Moreover, recycling represents the ideal relationship of master and student in Buddhism as well. As a Tzu Chi recycling volunteers stated:

I'm grateful to Master, or else I might be so lost, and don't know where I'd be heading. I had such a foul temper, a really bad one. Not anymore, I don't get angry and I don't get mad at people. The more I serve the happier I am. I don't want anything. I'll follow Master's finger and go where it points. If I don't follow her footsteps... I can't catch up. I'm happier and happier by collecting recyclables. The more I collect, the more blessing goes to my family. (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video (2021, February 26, 1:20)¹⁵

Mom, I let Master down by going to the US. If I go, I won't be able to do recycling. I'd truly let Master down. (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2021, March 6, 5:46)¹⁶

This notion of picking up recyclables as getting blessings is present as well among Tzu Chi followers. Recycling also can change someone into being a better person, just like any other religious ritual could do. Also, Ven. Cheng Yen often quotes volunteers herself, without

¹⁴ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2x6Dp_XxIPo

¹⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BtkgxQen-rk>

¹⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=piLA0tMgBk8>

any actual evidence of such interactions. She affirms that the following words were said by a Tzu Chi follower:

Master says that to enjoy good health, we must serve and work. By doing so, we can also benefit humanity. To protect the Earth, we must work hard to collect and sort recyclables so they can be remade into useful resources and less damage will be done to the Earth. This teaching from Master is truly correct, so we follow Master's words and do recycling with gratitude and joy. We are grateful to Master for encouraging us to do recycling. Working with other volunteers, we are not lonely and we can live out our value in life. (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2021, October 14, 4:52)¹⁷

Volunteers 'serve' Ven. Cheng Yen as they also serve the Earth. Moreover, recycling also has a social factor (Oomen, 2016; Zimmerman-Liu, 2019). Since most Tzu Chi followers are elderly people, recycling brings them the opportunity of staying active and building social relationships. Besides recycling and adopting a vegetarian diet, Ven. Cheng Yen also acknowledges the importance of decreasing our use of natural resources:

This is how our volunteers protect the Earth. And, as many recyclables can be reused, there is no need to extract resources from the land or the sea, relieving some burden on the Earth. We can all create a pure land on Earth. It's best if we can use less resources. If we do so, excavation can be reduced, less products will be manufactured, and less pollution will be created. We humans must understand this and turn our knowledge into wisdom. Only then can we protect the Earth. We must also extend our love to mountains and rivers and protect forests instead of felling trees or excavating mountains and lands. This way we can live in harmony with Mother Nature and create a pure land of Bodhisattvas that is most joyful, peaceful and wonderful. (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2021, October 14, 8:43)¹⁸

¹⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZckvDQ8KDM4>

¹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZckvDQ8KDM4>

When our hands are in contact with water, we must have the awareness that we need to conserve water and cherish water resources. When every one of us uses less water, every little bit we save will help water conservation. (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2021, March 22, 8:58)¹⁹

We need to find a way to rescue ourselves now; in order to rescue ourselves, we need to conserve resources, curb our desires, and stop eating meat. Take a look at the many lives in hunger, they are poor and have no food to eat. In rich nations, food is prepared excessively, and food leftovers become food waste, with many buckets of it. This is wasting food, bringing about a lot of pollution. Therefore, humans need to awaken. Look at these children, they are children in hunger. If people can eat 80% full and save up 20% to help others, everyone can be full. (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2021, March 1, 9:19)²⁰

Tzu Chi proposes these solutions to adopt a specific world-model. This new world-model would be a 'pure land' where humans live in harmony with 'Mother Nature' after having 'curbed our desires'. As we have seen in Ven. Cheng Yen's own words, environmental protection goes beyond mundane issues, it also includes religion. Recycling and vegetarianism then become a way of expressing regret as people look for forgiveness:

They know the concept of chopping off big trees to grow cost-effective produce is wrong. While people reap the fleeting profits for now, they have damaged forests and destroyed the land, which lead to disasters. Many people know their wrongdoings, so they have been replanting trees. (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2021, March 6, 3:09)²¹

The Earth is hurt badly and its illness is very severe, the only remedy is for humans to awaken in time. A big disaster is here, so, let us awaken, raise our heads and genuinely repent to the sky; we repent for our ignorance and our greed. (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2021, August 16, 5:32)²²

¹⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jp9adC9IliY>

²⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGcKcOUxhz>

²¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=piLA0tMgBk8>

²² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hSUxfgba9E0>

[...] now is the time for us to raise our heads and repent together by following a vegetarian diet. (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2021, August 16, 6:51)²³

According to this Buddhist interpretation, people are unaware of their bad karma and its consequent environmental destruction. Hence, they need to ‘awaken’ and cleanse their karma. In this world-model, people are always tempted to commit wrongdoings, therefore, they need someone who guides them in the right path. That someone is Tzu Chi’s leader Cheng Yen, that adopts the role of a traditional Buddhist master, but also that of a kind mother who worries about her children (Huang and Weller, 1998):

In our world, nowadays, climates have become extreme. So, people need to live peacefully with one another. This is like bringing warmth to the world, which will naturally bring balance back to Mother Nature. (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2021, March 6, 10:31)²⁴

They love and protect the land. They listen to my teachings and feel they make sense. Those with wisdom know principles and the right path. (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2021, March 6, 6:38)²⁵

Her followers, or children, need to listen to and follow her teachings. Not only because they ‘make sense’, but also because of her moral power. As a fulfilled Buddhist Master, she gained uncountable merits from her good deeds (Zimmerman-Liu, 2019). Ven. Cheng Yen is the archetype of a righteous Buddhist leader (Holt, 2009). And as a leader, she guides her people in this Tzu Chi model:

The land was donated by an elderly volunteer, and he was dedicated to recycling work too. Our volunteers did recycling joyfully on this pure land like a family. (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2021, October 19, 5:47)²⁶

²³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hSUxfdba9E0>

²⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=piLA0tMgBk8>

²⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=piLA0tMgBk8>

²⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pB6mb3DwGn4>

By collecting recyclables, our land becomes clean. By collecting bottles and cans, we can help people. Recycling can do this. Especially for this group of volunteers who are housewives, they are very happy doing recycling. When they are by themselves, they are bored. When they are with people sharing the same goal of protecting and saving the land, they do recycling with a sense of achievement. (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2021, March 6, 8:07)²⁷

In Tzu Chi ‘model of’ the world, we can observe a mix of traditional family values and modern female ‘empowerment’. A ‘good’ housewife is supposed to work for the community she lives in. Their work is not any more restrained inside the house, but it is still embedded with this traditional concept of the perfect sacrificial housewife (Huang and Weller, 1998; Lee and Han, 2016). This time, she must sacrifice protecting the Earth and, in doing so, they become fulfilled.

Moreover, in these two last fragments, Ven. Cheng Yen offers us a glimpse of how society is organized in this specific ‘model of and for’ the world as well. The images in those videos showed people apparently poor working hard as they recycle every kind of materials. Ven. Cheng Yen was visiting those recycling stations. She was accompanied by Tzu Chi commissioners in their clean, perfect blue navy uniforms. As it happened in Buddhist history, I discuss that elites, Tzu Chi commissioners (Oomen, 2016), are using environmentalism to maintain their access to resources, recyclables, and to those extracting them, volunteers (Collins, 1998). Moreover, Nature becomes incarnated by the concept of Mother Nature, that becomes upset when her children cause problems, just like a mother would. Hence, in order to serve their mother, people need to listen to her, follow what Ven. Cheng Yen calls ‘laws of Nature’:

To raise so many animals requires a lot of resources. In fact, if we don’t raise so many animals, less water or plants are needed to be given to animals. We need to abide by the laws of Nature and protect lives. Only in this way can we have blessings for the world. (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2021, March 22, 6:05)²⁸

²⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=piLA0tMgBk8>

²⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jp9adC9IliY>

In fact, we can see that by ‘laws of Nature’, she means dharma. Although this Sanskrit word may have different translations, in Buddhism it refers to ‘cosmic law and order’. In Tzu Chi ideology, Nature has become unbalanced because of human activities. Vegetarianism, recycling and decreasing the use of natural resources are instruments to restore the Dharma, the cosmic order, just like meditation or offerings. For instance, Ven. Cheng Yen often talks about vegetarianism, even saying that “promoting vegetarianism is to promote the Dharma” (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2021, February 28). This is Tzu Chi’s mission, to bring back Dharma or balance:

I hope Da Ai TV can keep reporting on our recycling work. This is how we can spread Tzu Chi’s work all around the world. When the Buddha expounded the Dharma, the Dharma was everywhere in the world. (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2021, December 2, 10:37)²⁹

Now that we have seen how Tzu Chi interprets the climate crisis and how they offer solutions to it, I would like to say some remarks about these videos. Although they do mention recycling, vegetarianism and decreasing resources consumption, Ven. Cheng Yen does not go beyond and offer a specific economic model like Buddhist economics (Schumacher, 2010, Daniels, 2007, 2010) or degrowth (Hickel, 2021). What she offers is an alternative environmentalist way. One embedded by ‘religious predicament’ (Hulme, 2020). If we follow Holpwood et al. (2005) environmental ideas map, according to Ven. Cheng Yen’s speeches, Tzu Chi will stand somewhere between mainstream sustainability and social ecology. The success of Tzu Chi in adopting environmentalism comes from integrating different aspects and practices from several currents (Zimmerman-Liu, 2019). Even though some authors like Henning (2002) tend to link Buddhism and deep ecology, we can see at Tzu Chi’s thought that Buddhism is still an ‘egocentric’ rather than ‘ecocentric’ movement. Certainly, Ven. Cheng Yen talks about the interdependence of all living beings, but humans remain at the top of the model. Animals deserve love because we should feel pity for them. They were reborn as animals because of their bad karma and, hence, ignorant and unable to attain Nirvana (大愛電視 Tzu Chi DaAi Video, 2021, December 11). They are not equal, but inferior to humans.

²⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8eSvuQ6BMoA>

When Ven. Cheng Yen talks about ‘Mother Nature’ is nothing similar to spirits in animistic cultures. Historically, Buddhism has aimed to conquer spirits, not to coexist with them (Hayashi, 2003, Descola, 2013; Sahlins, 2017). Spirits represent another natural order and Buddhist has dharma, cosmic law. This has changed in the last decades. Due to the influence of modern environmentalism, Buddhism has shifted its approach to nature (Kaza, 2006; Sahni, 2008). Different organizations and Buddhist leaders used diverse strategies to adopt animistic concepts, for instance ‘Mother Nature’. In the case of Tzu Chi, ‘Mother Nature’ is a parallel to Ven. Cheng Yen’s mother status to her followers (Huang and Weller, 1998; Lee and Han, 2016). Due to her knowledge of dharma, equivalent to natural law in Buddhism, Ven. Cheng Yen has the legitimacy to speak for nature. As we can observe from her speeches, nature becomes a part of her Buddhist cosmology. As the ideal representation of the mother figure, she recognises the pain of her children and, hence, is able to solve their problems through compassion and guidance. This guidance is behind Tzu Chi’s main objective is to relieve human suffering and, currently, the environment is bringing more suffering to the human species. Ven. Cheng Yen uses traditional Buddhist doctrine to explain the origins and consequences of the climate crisis but Buddhism is not an inherent ‘green’ religion (Kaza, 2006, Sahni, 2008).

In this chapter, I have shown that Tzu Chi’s adoption of environmentalism serves the purpose of building a ‘model of and for’ the world (Geertz, 1973). Both Buddhism and environmentalism are world-modelling tools with their own discourses and material structures. What Tzu Chi does is to merge both world-models, with Buddhism having a more prominent role. The climate crisis is happening due to the abandonment of dharma and the creation of bad karma, its effects reflecting on a worsening nature world. This is the base for Tzu Chi ‘model of’ the world. The answer to this challenge is the restoration of dharma or balance through Tzu Chi’s model for the world. This includes vegetarianism, recycling and decreasing consumption. Moreover, in this ‘Tzu Chi’ model we observe a specific hierarchy and gender approach. Ven. Cheng Yen is the ideal mother figure whose guidance take us to put nature once again under human control. Although through these videos we observe the base of the ‘Tzu Chi’ model, we cannot obtain the full picture. That is why in the following chapter I will analyse a document Tzu Chi presented at the COP24.

The ‘Tzu Chi’ model: *Co-exist with the Earth* analysis

In this chapter, I will analyse *Co-exist with the Earth*. Tzu Chi presented this document at the COP24 that took place in Katowice, Poland, in 2018. In addition to presenting its ‘model of’ the world through discourse, in this document Tzu Chi also shows the material implementation of their ‘model for’. This model includes recycling, ethical eating and resource conservation. According to Tzu Chi, these actions will contribute to fulfil the organization’s mission. Since *Co-exist with the Earth* introduces Tzu Chi’s ‘model of and for’ the world, it contains valuable information that contributes to my argument.

In the 35 pages of *Co-exist with the Earth*, Tzu Chi shows its narrative about the climate crisis and explains its measures to find a balance between human development and nature. Moreover, Tzu Chi did so in an international United Nations-related event, hence, among countries, institutions and organizations that held political and economic power. This gives Tzu Chi the opportunity to show the success of its religious environmentalist world-model to a broader public.

To start with, this document's analysis, I wanted to determine what the main topics were. Hence, I carried out a 'word cloud' from this document:



Figure 2. Word-cloud extracted from the COP document

As we can observe, among the most repeated words we find recycling (161), volunteers (99), environment/environmental (45/77), climate (54), protection (47), disaster (45) and community (40). Moreover, if we compare it with the previous chapters in which I analysed Ven. Cheng Yen's speeches, apparently we do not find so many religious connotations. Purify and pure are only mentioned 6 times in total. Although the document exposes Tzu Chi's environmental actions, vegetarian and ethical eating are only referenced 17 and 4 times respectively, much less than in Ven. Cheng Yen's speeches. The concept 'Mother Nature' only appears 7 times. Lifestyle (19), resources (13) and conservation (2) encompass the 'environmental resource conservation' part of this document. Although Buddhism is not mentioned besides the term Buddhist (6) or karma (5), and only in those parts where Ven. Cheng Yen directly addresses the reader, Tzu Chi religious environmentalism is present throughout the document. The clear protagonists in this document are recycling and communities. Indeed, recycling is an important part of Tzu Chi's 'model for' the world. According to the literature, Tzu Chi's recycling initiatives have proven to be an important part of its revenue (Oomen, 2016) and we cannot forget that this organization is an NGO. They want to prove that their global wide actions have proven beneficial to those communities they have been working with. In the COP document, this NGO nature becomes more evident in its 'mission' statement:

To alleviate the suffering of the most vulnerable in society through humanitarian and charitable assistance, medical care, education, and spiritually inspiring activities, empowering individuals and communities to become self-sustainable. (The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, 2018, p. 3)

As we can see, Tzu Chi exposes its NGO nature through this statement. However, it is not an average NGO. Although all NGOs have an ethical base, Tzu Chi has been since its conception based on an interpretation of Buddhist morals (Huang and Weller, 1998). The COP document shows them providing not only materialistic relief aid, but also "spiritually inspiring activities" in its disaster relief efforts (The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, 2018). In addition to that, Tzu Chi hopes for communities "to become self-sustainable". Indeed, environmentalism has been an important part of Tzu Chi for a long time (Madsen, 2007; Kuo, 2008). At first sight, we could include Tzu Chi as an environmental NGO despite its religious base. If this is the case, what are the exact solutions they offer to tackle the climate crisis? In the previous chapter, I analyzed Ven. Cheng Yen's environmental narrative and she offered

three solutions: recycling, vegetarianism and some sort of ‘degrowth’ (Hickel, 2021). These solutions form part of what this document present us as *Co-exist with the Earth*. I discuss that this is Tzu Chi’s ‘model for’ the world. Let us have a deeper look into this world-model:

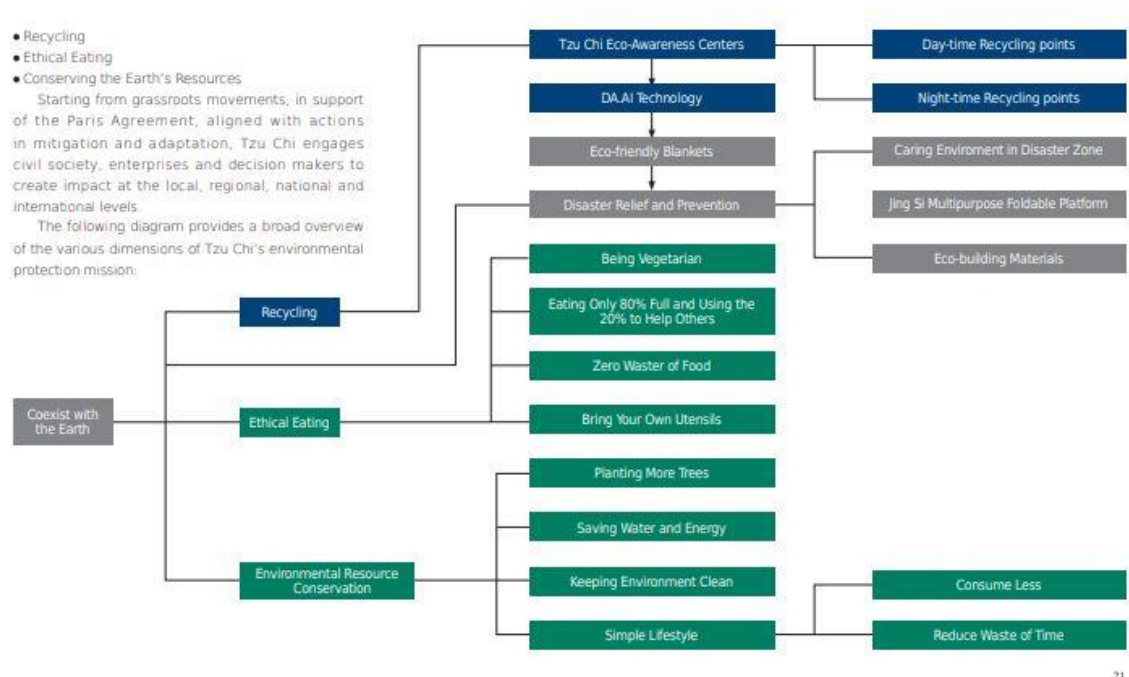


Figure 3. Tzu Chi 'model for the world'

This diagram presents the three solutions mentioned above. The first one, recycling, is given special importance inside Tzu Chi (Oomen, 2016, Lee and Han, 2021). Indeed, it is highlighted in a different colour from the other two actions. Their recycling centres, both day and night time, are inside the ‘Eco-Awareness’ category. There is no deviation from Tzu Chi’s official narrative about its recycling centres. In fact, we find the following statement:

Many Tzu Chi recycling volunteers are elderly. These stewards of the Earth give of themselves cheerfully and make good use of their retirement by collecting and reclaiming reusable resources. Their work reduces garbage and pollution and fills their lives with a strong sense of value and purpose. A better, cleaner world for the future generations will be their enduring legacy. (The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, 2018, p. 58)

This is Tzu Chi's social model. It provides people left behind with an alternative community in which to find a 'purpose'. Tzu Chi clearly indicates that they see recycling as something more than just environmentalism:

On the other hand, recycling has a religious meaning. Recycling helps to obscure the social boundaries of gender, occupation, wealth and age, and therefore encourage group integration. (The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, 2018, p. 36)

This quote indicates how Tzu Chi enters the category of religious environmentalism. Moreover, the purpose of collecting recyclables is to give them a new use. This chain leads to Da'ai Technology. As for other Tzu Chi-owned companies, like Da'ai TV, it is called 'Great Love' or 'Great Compassion'. Below Da'ai Technology the diagram color changes again to grey. In those grey boxes, Tzu Chi shows its relief-assistance NGO nature, but they embedded it with environmentalism. Furthermore, they have developed new technologies in order to use them in relief aid efforts. For instance, in their recycling centers across the globe, they transform plastic bottles into blankets, which they can later redistribute when a disaster hits. Other innovations include dehydrated rice and portable water purification systems as well as 'eco-blankets' made of PET bottles (The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, 2018). As the document states:

Tzu Chi does not do recycling for economic profit. We do it for the benefit of Mother Nature, for the natural environment, mankind and all living beings on this planet. (The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, 2018, p. 40)

Although we can think of charity as an 'uneconomic' activity from a capitalist perspective (Schumacher, 2010), recycling is an activity that can generate wealth. Besides charity, Tzu Chi's recycling provides this organization with an important source of revenue (Oomen, 2016). However, Tzu Chi explicitly declares that despite this fact, the importance behind recycling is the environment:

When doing recycling, it is important not only to focus on the profit gained from selling the recycled products but to also take the whole present and future environmental impact of the deed into account. (The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, 2018, p. 40)

The second solution that Tzu Chi provides, vegetarianism, is included in ‘ethical eating’. This refers to the adoption of a vegetarian diet and the reduction of food waste. Tzu Chi takes part in those who denounce industrial animal farming as part of the most polluting economic activities in the present. In order to prove their point, the document provides us with different scientific data supporting their claims, mostly from the UN (The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, 2018). They mention the advantages of cutting down meat consumption for human’s health, environmental protection and animal well-being. The document also indicates that Tzu Chi only serves vegetarian meals in their hospitals, schools, events and disaster relief actions. In addition to that, it also engages in the religious explanation for the adoption of vegetarianism, compassion for animals and karmic consequences (The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, 2018).

The ideas behind Ven. Cheng Yen’s mentions of decreasing our use of resources is found at ‘environmental resource conservation’. This means to reduce water and energy consumption. In order to do so, Tzu Chi encourages people to adopt a simple, low-carbon lifestyle. This means to reduce consumption and to give more value to the objects we use. This model is what they call ‘Five R’s’, which stands for reduce, refuse, reuse, recycle and rethink (The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, 2018, p. 28). Quoting Ven. Cheng Yen, Tzu Chi proposes here to stop engaging in consumerism, only buying what “we need” and “not what we want”. Besides, Tzu Chi also organizes clean-up of beaches and mountains and activities to educate people about environmental degradation.

Through adopting these solutions, Tzu Chi is aiming to build a new model in which we interact with the environment in a different way. Let us analyse the following diagram:

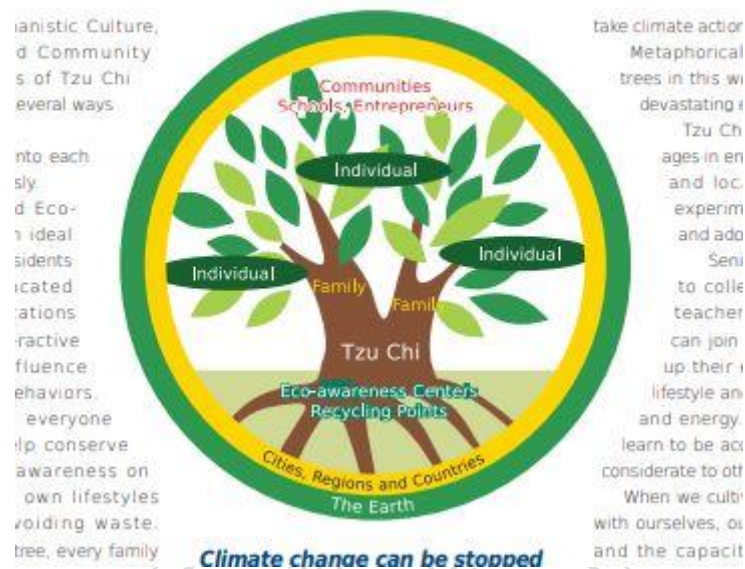


Figure 4. *Tzu Chi society according to its 'model for'*

The environmental model they present us with puts Tzu Chi as the centre, strongest part of a tree, the trunk. From this trunk, the branches depart representing the families that reach individuals and, those, influence different institutions such as schools or businesses. Surrounding that Tzu Chi tree, we find 'cities, regions and countries' and the final circles represent the Earth as a whole. The social model offered by Tzu Chi is further explained by Ven. Cheng Yen's words:

I hope everyone can join our effort and be mindful in bringing forth their pure nature for a clean Earth tomorrow. There is still a long journey ahead, to live in love and harmony with Earth and all living beings. There is so much more for us to do. We are just embarking on this journey. Integrating modern technology into environmental protection is what we are working on now. We have volunteers from all age groups, parents with their children and grandchildren, working together to ensure a healthy Earth. This is for the benefit of our children and future generations to come. (The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, 2018, p. 6)

As she says, Tzu Chi hopes that everyone can join them in their mission of making a better place of Earth and, as in the tree diagram, this NGO is the one deciding what is that better place:

We need more people to join us and give of themselves. Then we can cover every corner of the world with enlightened love and guide everyone in the right direction.
(The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, 2018, p. 6)

Tzu Chi has adopted environmentalism in order to offer an alternative ‘model of and for’ the world (Geertz, 1973). In this specific model, Ven. Cheng Yen has the legitimacy of guiding her followers because of her moral power (Holt, 2009). Indeed, this is a hierarchical model in which Tzu Chi people, both commissioners and volunteers guide the miscarried people who have lost their way. Most of their relief assistance activities take place in underdeveloped countries, which make this relation between Tzu Chi people and local communities one of economic power (Collins, 1998). Tzu Chi has the resources to help them but they do not have the right to reject. These people in need must accept the ‘eco-blankets’ and the vegetarian meals. This is because Tzu Chi knows better what is beneficial for their bodies and their karma. Moreover, although we could state that Tzu Chi takes part in uneconomic activities because of its charity endeavors (Schumacher, 2010), they do admit that recycling brings some kind of revenue.

However, Tzu Chi’s economic model is not only based on profits, but on social and environmental issues. In this aspect, this NGO shares similarities with the economic model proposed by Schumacher (2010) or Daniels (2007, 2010). Also, they invest in technology and innovation not pursuing revenue, but allegedly in order to find new means in which they can help people in need (Schumacher, 2010). Therefore, we can see that Tzu Chi is in fact an environmentalist organization outside the mainstream economic system (Hopwood et al, 2005). At first sight, they do not invest in order to obtain more gains, but for alleviating human suffering and, hence, contributing to Buddhist ideals of harmony and equality. However, we might still wonder why an organization as big and important as Tzu Chi would undertake so many uneconomic activities in order to provide for the environment and modern human society. The answer is within Tzu Chi’s discourse about its mission.

In this COP document, Tzu Chi presents itself as a relief aid organization with a religious focus. According to the introduction part of the text, Tzu Chi has four missions: charity, medicine, education and humanistic culture. About charity, they say: “Inspiring the rich to help the poor and enlightening the poor to discover their own riches.” (The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, 2018). This statement does not only reveal Tzu Chi’s origins with the upper middle class during Taiwan’s economic growth, as explained earlier, but

also it links with the wider Buddhist historic connections with the elites (Collins, 1998; Holt, 2009; and Davis, 2016). Moreover, Tzu Chi obtains legitimization over its followers, empowering them to take action enlightening the masses and, thus, obtaining more followers and their economic and social resources (Jones, 1999; Madsen, 2007; and Kuo, 2008).

This enlightenment process starts with materialistic aid, medicine and education. Since its conception, Tzu Chi focused on providing cheap or free medic services. This was due to Taiwan's rapid economic growth resulting in social inequalities (Jones, 1999; Madsen, 2007; and Kuo, 2008). The same case applies to education services. In a time of social changes, especially in family norms, Tzu Chi claimed to be restoring first society's harmony and values in order to restore the environment later. As we can see in this document, "teaching children to be moral and upright" (The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, 2018) refers to bringing values back into an amoral society. As I mentioned earlier, Tzu Chi aspires to reshape society and the world applying its unique version of Humanistic Buddhism. This organization enter the political religion scenario as a path to adapt to new modern society. In a time where power shifts occurs, Tzu Chi included environmentalist world-model as part of its own. Thus, Tzu Chi can retain its power, as influence and funding, in the modern world (Asad, 2003). In order to do so, they put into work a huge cultural department through television stations, websites, and magazine publications.

Tzu Chi's mission of Humanistic Culture includes the Da Ai (Great Love) television station, website, and magazine publications, all of which aim to establish virtuous cycles of love and goodness, promoting the social welfare of all regardless of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic status. The calling of this mission is to purify the human mind, to pacify our society, to help those who suffer, and to rectify frenzied and chaotic acts. (The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, 2018, p. 4)

Tzu Chi sees religion and culture as essential world-modeling tools (Geertz, 1973) through which they can spread their message and, in return, expand their followers base and obtain access to more resources:

Throughout the past 52 years, as the number of Tzu Chi members and volunteers increased, Tzu Chi gradually spread from its birthplace in Hualien, Taiwan, to all corners of the world. To date, Tzu Chi now has over 50 branch offices around the

world, and provides services to 97 countries, creating a community of global citizens, taking action to make the world a better place. (The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, 2018, p. 8)

As we see in this extract, Tzu Chi expanded from Taiwan to the world, currently being present in most of the world, providing it with new resources. The presentation of this document at an international high-level event is part of Tzu Chi's strategy to keep expanding its influence through the globe while gaining legitimacy for its model.

This is an alternative 'model of and for' the world, which merges Buddhism and environmentalism (Geertz, 1973). In the Buddhist 'model of' the world, life is suffering and this suffering derives from cravings. The Buddhist 'model for' the world is achieving nirvana, or the end of suffering through meditation and compassion. In environmentalism, the 'model of' is the destruction of the planet and the danger we are in. The 'model for' is the adopting of different measures to stop the destruction of the planet. In Tzu Chi, both models come together. The 'Tzu Chi' model of is the unbalance brought by human suffering and bad karmic effects, which reflect on worsened natural conditions. The Tzu Chi 'model' for is the environmental actions such as recycling and decreasing consumption embedded with religious meaning.

Moreover, in the 'Tzu Chi model, moral power gives Ven. Cheng Yen the legitimacy needed to guide the organization and the model. She becomes the ideal Buddhist moral ruler (Holt, 2009). This model is a hierarchical one, where Tzu Chi commissioners and other high-ranking members, also have the moral power needed to guide volunteers and the miscarried. Tzu Chi has followed the path started by Schumacher in defining and building a Buddhist economic model (Schumacher, 2010). In Tzu Chi's strategy, there is not economic and uneconomic activities, but activities that bring suffering alleviation to those in pain. This charity-based approach follows the Buddhist path as explained in the scriptures (Daniels, 2007, 2010). In helping others, we follow the principles of 'Right Action', 'Right Effort' and 'Right Livelihood'. While in the traditional economic model, giving resources for 'free' would be irrational, since profits come first (Schumacher, 2010).

Moreover, Tzu Chi also uses technology as Schumacher had imagined (Schumacher, 2010). Tzu Chi does not invest and produce expensive technologies that are hard to implement in the poor countries where it operates. Instead, through its affiliated company Da'Ai Technology, Tzu Chi has created cheap and accessible technology that works for the locals. For instance, we have talked above about the water-filtering device made by recyclable products. (The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, 2018). Tzu Chi drinks from

alternative world-building models that arise when the effects of capitalism started to be visible. The most important of those exponents is Schumacher (2010). This long line of alternative economic systems' is today embedded in scholars such as Hickel (2021) and Daniels (2007, 2010). Their message of living with less but better is comparable to Ven. Cheng Yen message of rejecting the consumption society due to its environmental and societal effects. This is part of Tzu Chi's adoption of the environmentalist model of and for the world.

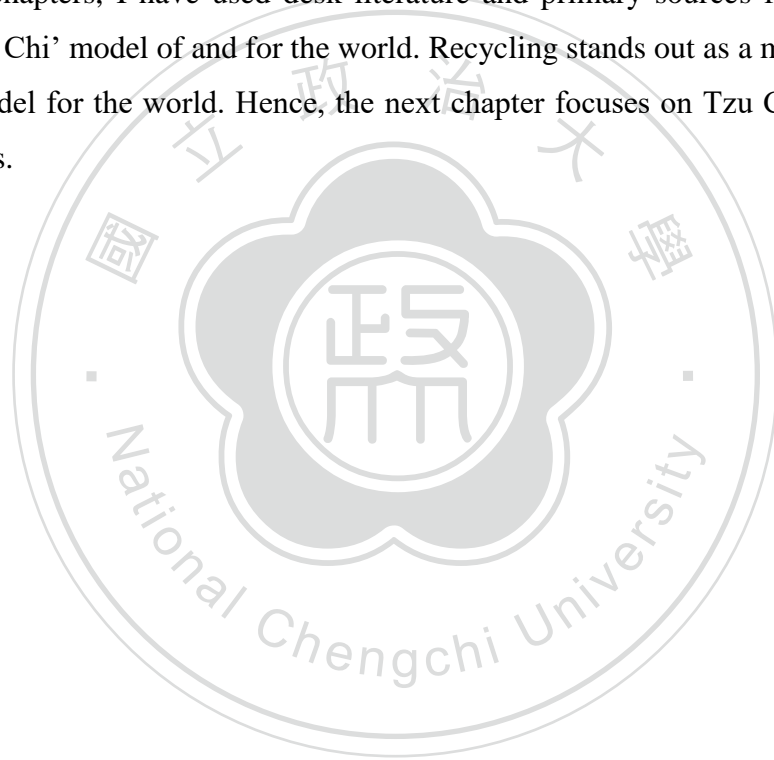
Although we can categorize Tzu Chi as outside of the normative economic system due to its NGO nature, this does not mean that they do not engage in economic activities (Jones, 1999; Madsen 2007). Such activities include obtaining access to land, which we will research about in the next chapter. Tzu Chi also has innovation and broadcasting companies. The main purpose of those activities are building deep and lasting connections with people. Through providing material and spiritual needs, Tzu Chi wishes to build a 'Pure Land' on this Earth (Huang and Weller, 1998; Madsen, 2007). Its success comes from its recent establishment as a religious organization in 1966 and their adaptation to society changes in modern times, allowing Tzu Chi to survive and strive in where other ancient religious groups have failed. As the document indicates:

Sometimes, it is necessary to make reforms, in this case in line with eco-consciousness, for the good of all. (The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, 2018, p. 60)

Among these reforms, environmentalism plays a key role. Tzu Chi started recycling sooner than any other organization or institution, including the State, in Taiwan (Madsen, 2007). When the effects of environmental degradation were more obvious, this gave Tzu Chi legitimacy in the Taiwanese public scene (Liu, 2015). Indeed, Buddhism has a long history connected to states and legitimacy through its karmic 'model of and for' the world (Collins, 1998; Holt, 2009; and Davis, 2016). Using this legitimization tool, Tzu Chi can keep growing and expanding its influence, pursuing its implementation of its religious environmental model:

As Master Cheng Yen once remarked: "Saving the world means protecting the environment." But there are more dimensions to this than we usually think: "protecting the spiritual environment, the social environment and the environment of the whole globe." (The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, 2018, p. 64)

Throughout this chapter, I have researched in detailed about the ‘Tzu Chi’ model of and for the world. This model combines Humanistic Buddhism and environmentalism in the organization’s discourses and material implementations. In the Tzu Chi ‘model of’ the world, nature is out of balance due to people’s cravings. These cravings create a collective bad karma and the climate crisis is the moral punishment to people forgetting the dharma. The answer to this challenge is the Tzu Chi ‘model for’ the world. Recycling, ethical eating and resource conservation leads to people to regain a moral lifestyle. Through the cleansing of this collective bad karma, both nature and human societies can achieve harmony. This ‘model for’ the world is also a hierarchical one, in which Ven. Cheng Yen has the right to rule due to her many merits. In the last two chapters, I have used desk literature and primary sources from Tzu Chi to identify the ‘Tzu Chi’ model of and for the world. Recycling stands out as a material structure in Tzu Chi’s model for the world. Hence, the next chapter focuses on Tzu Chi’s network of recycling stations.



Environmentalism in the Tzu Chi ‘model for’: recycling facilities

In this chapter, I analyse Tzu Chi primary sources about their recycling endeavours. Some authors argue that Tzu Chi recycling activities are an important part of their revenue (Oomen, 2016) and the organization has been involved in financial scandals. That is why I also look to Tzu Chi accountability reports to see how environmentalism is embedded in Tzu Chi economic activities. Tzu Chi has a vast network of recycling stations both in Taiwan and globally. I look at where these stations are located and how the land for these projects is obtained. Finally, I include my analysis of the visit I made to one of these stations.

In early 2015 a huge scandal affected Tzu Chi at a large scale for the first time. Tzu Chi aimed to carry out a development project in Taipei’s Neihu district. The objective was to install a recycling logistic center (Yang, 2015). However, the land they intended to use was environmentally protected, hence receiving harsh criticism from environmentalists. Moreover, there were accusations that Tzu Chi acquired those lands illegally and that the organization used donations to engage in financial businesses such as real estate, bonds and stocks (Gerber, 2015). Due to the consequent citizen’s backlash, Tzu Chi announced the cancellation of the project and the first ever inner accounts made public as well as an inner restructuration (Gerber, 2015; Yang, 2015). Until that moment, Tzu Chi had kept growing in a quiet way, obtaining access to new land and income but avoiding broad scandals. In 2015, Tzu Chi was the biggest owner of private land in Taiwan and 80-85% of religious donations in the island were given to this NGO (Yang, 2015). As we can see, Tzu Chi is a big organization that manages large amounts of resources, so we might wonder how Tzu Chi does it. Since we started talking about this scandal, let us look into the most recent accountability report made public by Tzu Chi and approved by an independent auditor.

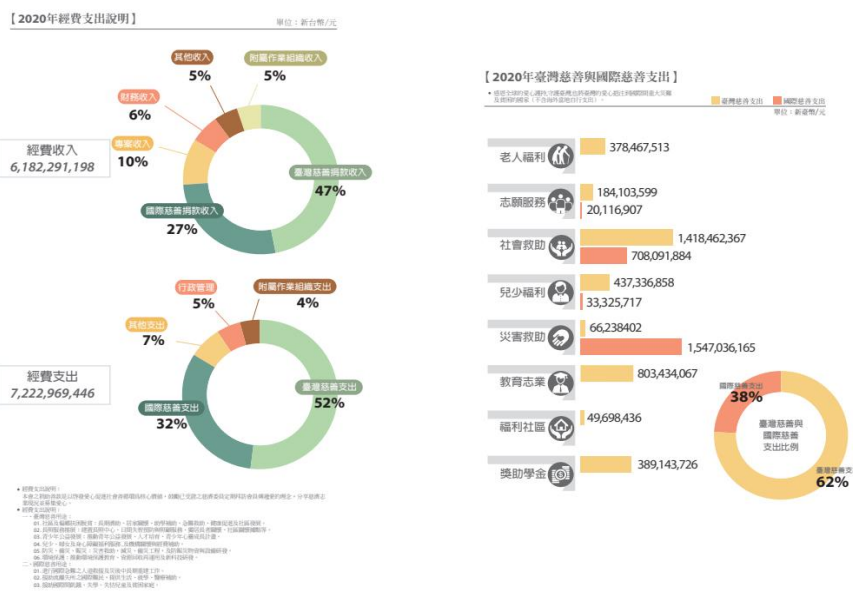


Figure 5. Tzu Chi income and expenses for 2020

According to this image, the organization declared more expenses than income for the year 2020. It is interesting noting that, despite the claim that protecting Earth is one of their missions, Tzu Chi does not reflect this in this report. Among the different activities they spend in, we find elders' care, housing, studies, disaster relief activities, etc. Tzu Chi is above all an NGO which aims to tackle human suffering. That is why the organization adopted environmentalism, because the changing climate is bringing more suffering to those that Tzu Chi works for. The report does mention environmental activities briefly. It consists of three pages detailing and recycling-related educational bus that goes around Taiwan (The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, 2020). However, where those expenses are included is not clear. As mentioned by Yang (2015) in the article about the Neihu scandal, even though Tzu Chi made some accounts public, it is possible that the organization does not count donations made in temples or the earnings of their six hospitals in Taiwan.

If we look at the accountability report made by Tzu Chi's Mission of Culture (Tzu Chi Mission of Culture, 2019), we do realize that the accountability report offered to us in the main Tzu Chi website is incomplete to some degree. Moreover, in order to back up my claim that Tzu Chi is using environmentalism as a power tool, it is worth noting the amount of money put into the media: NT\$ 1,327 millions. That money is used as in the following graphic:

Expenses

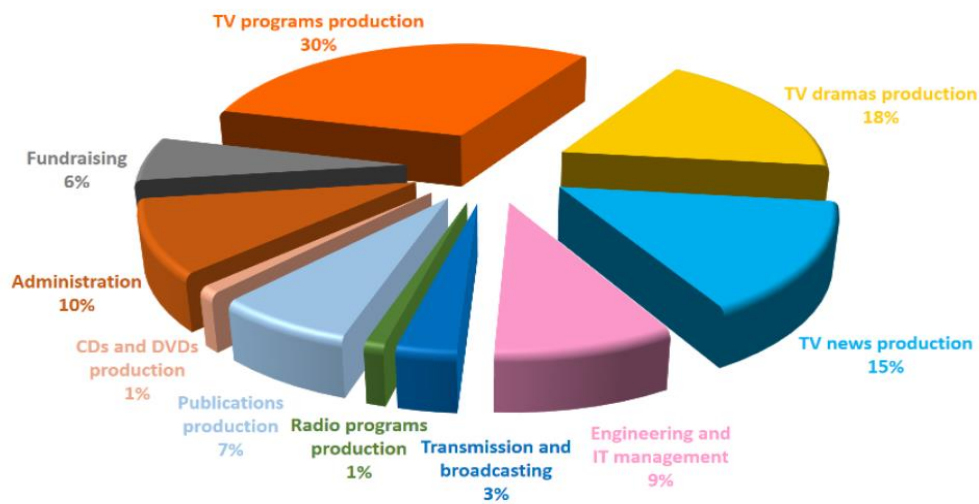


Figure 6. *Tzu Chi's Mission of Culture expenses in 2019*

The majority of the expenses, 63%, is used for television programs and dramas as well as news production in Tzu Chi's TV channel, Da'ai TV. As I mentioned in the second chapter, the videos I analysed for this thesis are part of Da'ai TV programs. Moreover, throughout the writing of this thesis, I often watched Da'ai TV dramas. As in the other programmes, those TV dramas are characterized by a strong moral content. Most dramas tell the story of a middle-class woman that realizes her life is missing something and later finds fulfilment in helping others. Environment-related content is also common in this TV station. Through this media creation and diffusion, Tzu Chi spreads its environmental message included in ideology power.

In order to be able to keep producing those contents and keeping their followers close, Tzu Chi needs a large amount of funding. As we saw in the accountability report, Tzu Chi receives donations as a way of income, but that report is incomplete. Oomen (2016) states that Tzu Chi uses the income derived from its recycling activities to pay for its several charity endeavours, but also to pay for Da'ai TV (ibid, p. 58-60). In the first chapter, I introduced Tzu Chi's version of how Ven. Cheng Yen came with the idea of recycling to save Taiwan's environment. However, Oomen (2016) presents us with a different background. He states that it was a young volunteer who approached Ven. Cheng Yen first. That volunteer started to gather used products and managed to obtain 5000 Taiwanese dollars that she later donated to Tzu Chi. When Cheng Yen heard of this, she started to encourage people to do recycling. Tzu Chi started to develop its recycling networks of stations and volunteers. Although there are not many

accountability reports from that time, by 1995 Tzu Chi was able to raise 11.9 million only in the Tainan region (ibid, p. 44-46). Until 1998, Tzu Chi was doing 50% recycling of what the Taiwanese government was doing (ibid, p. 47).

This success in the recycling industry also led to the establishment of R&D company Da'ai Technology. Some businesspeople who were volunteering at Tzu Chi decided to do some investment to create this company. Although this technological company is independent from Tzu Chi, they declared it a 'moral business' since all of its revenue is donated to Tzu Chi (ibid, p. 47-48). As we can see, money flows from environmental-related activities towards Tzu Chi but, later, this organization spends that revenue mainly in charity activities and spreading Tzu Chi Buddhism. Its doctrine is also present in those recycling stations. Let us first introduce those centres.



Figure 7. Tzu Chi distribution of recycling facilities in Taiwan

Tzu Chi environmental protection activities take place in their centres. Those centres are divided around Taiwan with the numbers almost corresponding to the cities and counties' population. There is no gentrification in the location of an environmental protection centre in a city. For instance, in Taipei we find recycling in most of the districts without rent differences. This is explained by the fact that any Tzu Chi volunteer can decide to start a recycling 'project' (Oomen, 2016, p. 46-47). Most of the terrains or buildings used for those recycling activities are donated by volunteers, which explains why Tzu Chi recycling stations are local and autonomous. Tzu Chi divides its environmental protection locations into two types: points and stations. In the environmental protection points, anyone is able to drop discarded products or materials for Tzu Chi to manage. The second type, the stations, are the bigger ones. In these stations, volunteers gather to sort materials in order to send them to recycling processing plants, mainly those of Da'ai Technology. There, new products will be created to assist Tzu Chi in their charity activities. For instance, from PET bottles Da'ai Tech. produces tents to assist those who lost their homes when a natural disaster hits (Oomen, 2016; The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, 2018).

Although Oomen (2016) claims that recycling volunteers are there in order to save the Earth and to socialize with other members of the community, we have seen in the analysis of the videos that many volunteers also hope to gather merit for themselves and their loved ones. Volunteering is also needed in Tzu Chi to ascend in the inner hierarchy of the organization. These commissioners are at the top of the Tzu Chi hierarchy. While all volunteers usually wear a white and blue uniform, commissioners wear a full blue navy style uniform. They are also the most religious followers in the inner structure of the organization and must preserve an excellent moral reputation (Huang, 2009; Oomen, 2016). Hence, they are in charge of enforcing the Tzu Chi doctrine. In order to attain this position, a person must have served a certain amount of time volunteering but also have given a specific amount of money to Tzu Chi. In the 'Tzu Chi' world-model, commissioners hold a high social status (Huang, 2009). This Tzu Chi hierarchy is part of the organization's world-modelling. Commissioners represent the doctrine of Tzu Chi Buddhism being enforced upon the recycling volunteers, who are the extraction class in this case. Those volunteers are also reproducing the Tzu Chi 'model of'. In order to save themselves, they also need to save the planet through recycling activities and adopting a vegetarian diet. In the recycling points and stations, Tzu Chi commissioners also organize educational events in which non-Tzu Chi members can go and learn about the organization's environmental activities (Oomen, 2016, p. 52). These activities serve two main purposes, on the one hand, it can lead to some people to join the organization and, on the other hand, it

spreads Tzu Chi doctrine among non-followers. Therefore, Tzu Chi environmental protection network of locations and volunteers becomes Tzu Chi doctrine's manifestation in the physical world.

In order to back up these claims and to assess what other authors have written about Tzu Chi environmental activities, I decided to take a visit myself to one of these places. I went to the Tzu Chi Environmental Protection Station near the Tzu Chi Taipei Hospital because this is the centre of Tzu Chi activity in Taipei. This station is located at a crossroad in the Xindian District. Once I arrived, I introduced myself to one of the Tzu Chi people wearing a uniform. Interestingly, they did not talk to me until they found the station's commissioner. This reflects the hierarchy structure of Tzu Chi as seen in the literature (Huang, 2009; Oomen, 2016). This commissioner kindly agreed to show me around and explain to me how the station worked. Unfortunately, I could not speak directly to any of the volunteers there without the commissioner being present. The station was a small portion of land where they used pre-made buildings. Besides the working areas, there were also resting rooms, bathrooms and a multi-purpose room. The last one served as an educational room but also a dining room.



Figure 8. *The Tzu Chi Environmental Protection Station in Xindian District, New Taipei*

Portraits of Ven. Cheng Yen were found all around through the station, usually up in the wall looking at the volunteers working. There were also a series of altars with Buddhas resembling Cheng Yeng. The station also had an installation of speakers through which volunteers can constantly hear speeches of Ven. Cheng Yen. The commissioner explained that, even though some volunteers are not Tzu Chi-related, those speeches talk about daily life problems, so that they could apply this knowledge in their lives. The commissioner could also quote Ven. Cheng Yen's ideas, from environmentalism to Buddhist doctrine. Hence, in this model of the world, Tzu Chi's leader becomes the leader of the group. The rest of the members follow her and work for her. Tzu Chi members do so because of Ven. Cheng Yen's moral power. For them, she is a living Buddha and, thus, a source of knowledge and compassion (Huang, 2001). Although Tzu Chi is a Buddhist movement characterised by the important of lay members, the commissioners fulfil a certain Buddhist role. They are located at a higher status inside Tzu Chi because of their knowledge of Ven. Cheng Yen's speeches and publications (Yao, 2012; Oomen, 2016). The status resulting from their devotion to Tzu Chi's living Buddha made them able to rule among the volunteers. Indeed, they are the first among equals. As I saw during my visit, the commissioner that acted as my guide was also focusing in recycling activities before my arrival. The commissioner status comes with some benefits, but also many responsibilities. Since they respond directly to the organization high-rankings, they must prove perfect moral behaviours (Huang, 2001; Oomen, 2016).

However, a hierarchy is always far from equality. Most volunteers were elderly women. This is because most Tzu Chi members are women. Tzu Chi became successful due to its popularity among middle-class housewives (Huang and Robert, 1998; Lee and Ling, 2016). Those housewives helped the organization grow through their families and friendships. The husbands of those housewives entered Tzu Chi because of them and, later, their children were already born 'inside' Tzu Chi. Although Tzu Chi claims to obscure the gender and social divisions through recycling (The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, 2018), a gender division of labour was observed. While women did the sorting of materials to be recycled, men were repairing bikes or disassembling technological products. This might be explained by the lack of studies of those women (Huang and Robert, 1998). Most of them never had the chance to access a professional education. Since they lack the knowledge to work with those technological products. This task is reserved to retired men with the proper knowledge to do so. Hence, this is a gender biased derived from society gender issues.

When I asked about the reasons for some to volunteer, the commissioner introduced me to a woman. She claimed to have been both physically and mentally ill but, thanks to recycling

work, she had become “normal” again. The commissioner also highlighted the age of the volunteers, saying that in doing that work, they could be healthy productive citizens of society. Through the visit, I could observe how these elderly volunteers sorted different materials to be recycled. The commissioner explained to me that unused and repaired products were sold at the station itself. The sorted materials were prepared to be sent to Da'ai Technology or sold to material suppliers. As stated before, recycling is not only about saving Earth. For Tzu Chi, recycling proves to be a stable source of income. They acquire most products without cost and they make money out of them through different means.

Moreover, the commissioner invited me to do volunteer work. She explained to me that on weekends, many young people including students went there to help do recycling. The station also fulfils an educational role (Oomen, 2016). Public and private schools send their students there so they can learn more about the environment and its protection. I also observed this during my tour of the station. The commissioner asked me questions about how different materials were recycled in order to teach me about recycling issues. She also criticized modern lifestyle, stating that people rely too much on “convenience” and generate a lot of waste, while showing me a big bag of disposable lunch boxes. In Taiwan, it is common for people to eat outside so restaurants provide disposable lunch boxes, utensils and plastic bags. At the end of the visit, the commissioner mentioned that environmental damage was provoked by human's desires, not needs, and that those desires brought harm to us. Here we observe that this recycling station is part of a broad Tzu Chi Buddhism network. Indeed, as a commissioner, her job is not only to keep the station working, providing Tzu Chi with resources, but also to enforce the ideology enshrined by Tzu Chi and Cheng Yen (Huang, 2009; Oomen, 2016).

As I have analysed throughout this chapter, Tzu Chi religious environmentalism is implemented in the physical realm by these environmental protection points and stations. They do not only serve economical means, but also ideological ones. This physical implementation of Tzu Chi Buddhism helps the organization to spread its world-model through a tangible experience. Volunteers are not only exposed to Ven. Cheng Yen's ideas, but the station makes them feel that they are doing the right thing. They are both preserving the planet for their grandchildren and earning the merit needed to attain a better rebirth. This model is also a hierarchical one, in which commissioners hold more moral power due to their knowledge of Tzu Chi Buddhism. Hence, fulfilling the role of the ‘enlightened’ ones. A benevolent ruling based on morals.

So far, this ‘Tzu Chi’ world-model has proved successful. However, Tzu Chi no longer possesses the monopoly on recycling. After 2006, recycling saw a boom in Taiwan (Oomen, 2016). From the previous 50% during the nineties, Tzu Chi started to make 10% of what the government did since that time (Oomen, 2016, p. 50). This does not mean that Tzu Chi’s recycling model has declined. Instead of aiming for a constant expansion, Tzu Chi has focused on the amelioration of the existing points and stations. The focus is to attract as many people as possible as well as developing an education model (Oomen, 2016, p. 52, 69). This call for people to join Tzu Chi follows the inside logic of the organization. In order to attain its objectives, people must feel attracted to the organization, accepting and spreading its world-model.

In this final chapter, we have navigated the building of the ‘Tzu Chi’ model for the world as material structures. My experience during the visit I made to one of the organization’s recycling stations is identical to that of the literature. This shows how Tzu Chi has been successful in merging its Buddhist doctrine with the environmentalist ideology. Alongside the discourses, Tzu Chi’s recycling centres have been building a model for the world. We observe this in each of Tzu Chi centres having a centralized hierarchical structure. Once you enter these centres, you enter the ‘Tzu Chi’ world-model. In this model, Ven. Cheng Yen is admired because of her merits and morality. People following her enter a hierarchical structure, which repeats this system based on morals. Tzu Chi commissioners attain this position due to their understanding of Buddhism doctrine and their morality. The volunteers who recycle do so hoping to cleanse their bad karma. This world-model allows Tzu Chi to retain power in the modern world, in the shape of influence and money. Recycling is an important part of Tzu Chi funding which they use to keep spreading their ‘model of and for’ the world. In order to do so, Tzu Chi cultural department reproduces the ‘model of’ through publications, social media and a TV station. Through offering free visits in the centres, Tzu Chi is able to reach to more people and show its ‘model for’ the world. The final aim is to spread this ‘model for’ the world and, in doing so, to build a ‘Pure Land’ on this earth.

Conclusions

This thesis contributes to the ongoing academic conversations regarding religious organization and environmentalism movements. I have researched about the merging of Humanistic Buddhism and environmentalism in the Tzu Chi ‘model of and for’ the world. I discuss that we need to consider modern religious organizations and environmentalist movements due to their ability of modelling the world. In the Tzu Chi Foundation, both the Humanistic Buddhist and the environmentalist ‘models of and for’ meet and form a powerful tool in world-making. This ‘Tzu Chi’ model has proved successful in offering an alternative model to Taiwanese society. Moreover, Tzu Chi’s world-model has allowed the organization to stay relevant and survive times of power shifts.

When the Tzu Chi Foundation became successful was indeed a time of changes. Taiwan was experiencing both economic growth and political disruptions. Many Taiwanese citizens saw their traditional lifestyles changed, notably housewives. In Chinese culture, like in many others, women remained in the house. This changed when many husbands became successful businessmen, hence producing a shift in household relations. Despite the increase in material possessions, many women became lonely and disappointed with modern life. Venerable Cheng Yen gave them not only a new purpose to engage in, but also a influential organization in which they could empower themselves. Inside Tzu Chi, they could carry out activities, such as funding raising or administrative tasks, outside of a traditional Chinese society in which women position were at home. However, this empowerment is not revolutionary. Ven. Cheng Yen encourages her followers to rebuild traditional family models in order to go back to a moral society. The support of this middle-class citizens also offered her with the funding needed to engage in charity work. Charity activities are a central part of the ‘Tzu Chi’ model. This derives from Humanistic Buddhism thinking. Humanistic Buddhism put emphasize on reconnecting with mundane issues and leaving aside the traditional afterlife links of Chinese Buddhism. The goal is to achieve the Buddhist idea of ending suffering, which in Humanistic Buddhism takes the form of helping people in their daily life. In Tzu Chi, the implementation of this ‘model of’ in material structure and practices became charity, an essential part of Tzu Chi’s ‘model for’.

With the rise of the environmentalist movement to prominence, Tzu Chi was influenced by the ongoing debate around Buddhism and environmentalism. At the end, Tzu Chi aligned itself with those Buddhist actors that saw traditional Buddhist doctrine and practices as compatible with the environmentalist ‘model of and for’. As it did before with Humanistic

Buddhism, Tzu Chi adopted environmentalism as a way to stay relevant in times of power shifts. Due to worsening climate conditions, environmentalism achieved societal and political acceptance. This is why Tzu Chi integrated discourses and practices of the environmentalist world-model into its own. In the 'Tzu Chi' model, both followers and society are encouraged to recycle, adopt a vegetarian diet and decrease consumption. These environmentalist actions are embedded with ritual meaning. Through caring about a healthy functioning ecosystem, Tzu Chi affirms that it is building a 'Pure Land' here and now. Moreover, recycling and vegetarianism are offered to Tzu Chi followers as means to clean their karma and follow Buddhist principles. Tzu Chi's network of recycling centres are key to this 'model of and for' the world. In this centres, Tzu Chi brings together the Humanistic Buddhism and environmentalism 'models of and for'. Volunteers sort recyclables while listening to Buddhist speeches by Ven. Cheng Yen, cleaning both their karma and the planet. But these centres also provide Tzu Chi with a stable source of income which it uses to finance its 'model of and for' the world. The 'Tzu Chi' model has proved that it is capable to bring more followers and resources to Tzu Chi. Through this growth, Tzu Chi can keep spreading its world-mode.

In this thesis I discussed how Tzu Chi followers created access to and management of different resources, human and capital, and how they use it for the implementation of their model. The 'Tzu Chi' model for the world is a hierarchical one. We observe this in the recycling centres. Portraits of Ven. Cheng Yen and paintings of her speeches decorate the spaces in where followers recycle. She is able to lead Tzu Chi because of her merit power, establishing herself as a moral ruler, a notion present in traditional Buddhism. In the Tzu Chi 'model for', morals are key to ascend in the hierarchy. Tzu Chi commissioners are the ones in charge of expanding the organization structure and spreading the 'model of'. In order to this attain position, a person must prove a moral lifestyle and knowledge of Tzu Chi's Buddhist doctrine. As I drew out through this thesis, environmentalism is adopted within the Tzu Chi 'model of and for' world. Tzu Chi commissioners are also in charge of ruling the recycling centres. In doing so, these commissioners also make sure that the volunteers listen to and reproduce the 'Tzu Chi' model. Indeed, the data shows that many of the elderly that volunteered because of social interactions and physical exercise eventually joined Tzu Chi. The 'Tzu Chi' model has proved successful in maintaining the influence and economic power of the organization through offering an alternative world-model which is attractive to many people.

Although the 'Tzu Chi' model is embedded with environmentalism, Buddhism is still more dominant. When facing consumption society, it does so with the concern that materialistic wealth diminishes spiritual practice. Vegetarianism is linked to karma and merit; recycling

becomes a ritual. When Ven. Cheng Yen talks about restoring balance with the environment, her aim is to reshape society in a 'green' Buddhist way according to the 'Tzu Chi' model. This model will create a 'Pure Land' on earth, fulfilling the promise of Buddhism of ending suffering.

Tzu Chi is not a conventional religious movement, but it is not a revolutionary one either. Its power comes from the legitimacy obtained by its world-model. The 'Tzu Chi' model success is due to the momentum provided by the societal, economic and political circumstances. First, departing from Humanistic Buddhism during the democratic and economic transition in Taiwan and, then, adopting environmentalism when this movement gained social and political acceptance. Through the years, Ven. Cheng Yen has gained widespread recognition because of Tzu Chi's charity activities, adding more legitimacy to the 'Tzu Chi' model. With her influence in Taiwanese society, she is able to keep spreading the Tzu Chi 'model of and for' the world. Relevant to this legitimacy is Tzu Chi's cultural department, which uses modern technology to expand the 'Tzu Chi' model across Taiwan and beyond. This research has focused on Taiwan, but Tzu Chi is now an international NGO that keeps spreading its world-model. Further research is needed to study how this the 'Tzu Chi' model is changing through time and places.

Although there is much research about this organization, there is a lack of an environmental approach to Tzu Chi. This thesis has shown that there is consistency with what other studies have shown about its environmental actions. However, I put environmentalism at the centre to understand the reasons why Tzu Chi grabbed environmentalism and made it work for itself. Nowadays, we can speak of a 'Tzu Chi' environmentalism. Following other studies about Tzu and environmentalism, this thesis catches the environmental angle of the organization. There is still research to do about this 'Tzu Chi' environmentalism and its implementation across different places and times.

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