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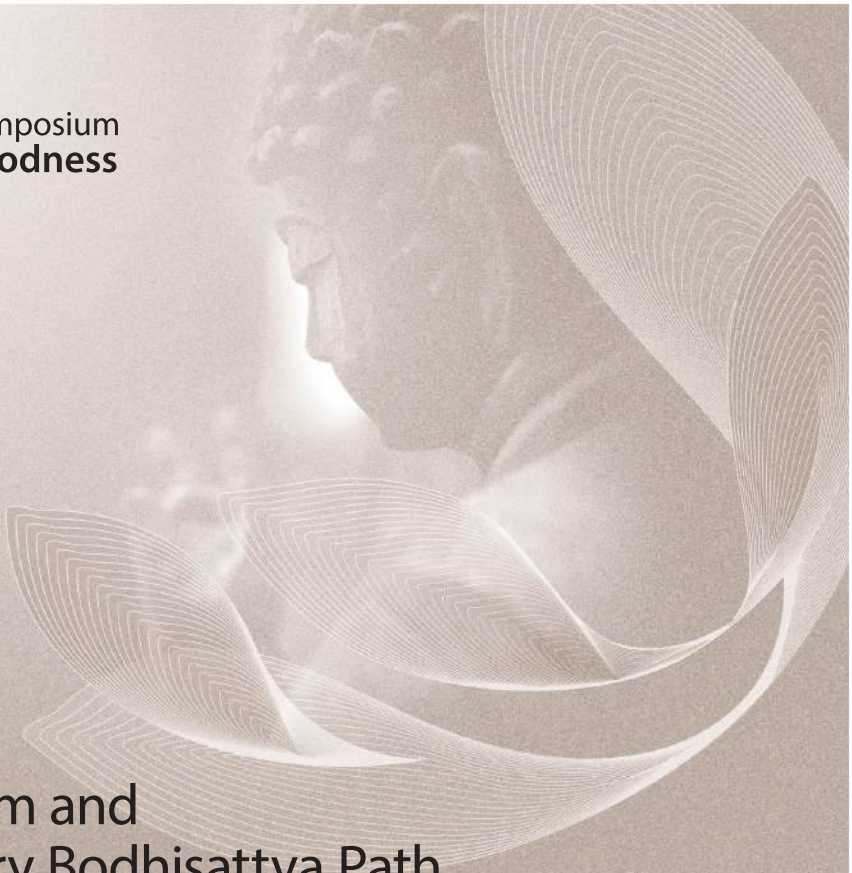

Applied Buddhism and
the Contemporary Bodhisattva Path

Exploring the Future of Buddhism

應用佛法與當代菩薩道：前瞻佛教的未來

May 2026 07 Thu. — 09 Sat.

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

Organizers

TZU CHI CHARITY FOUNDATION

CAMLab FAS | HARVARD

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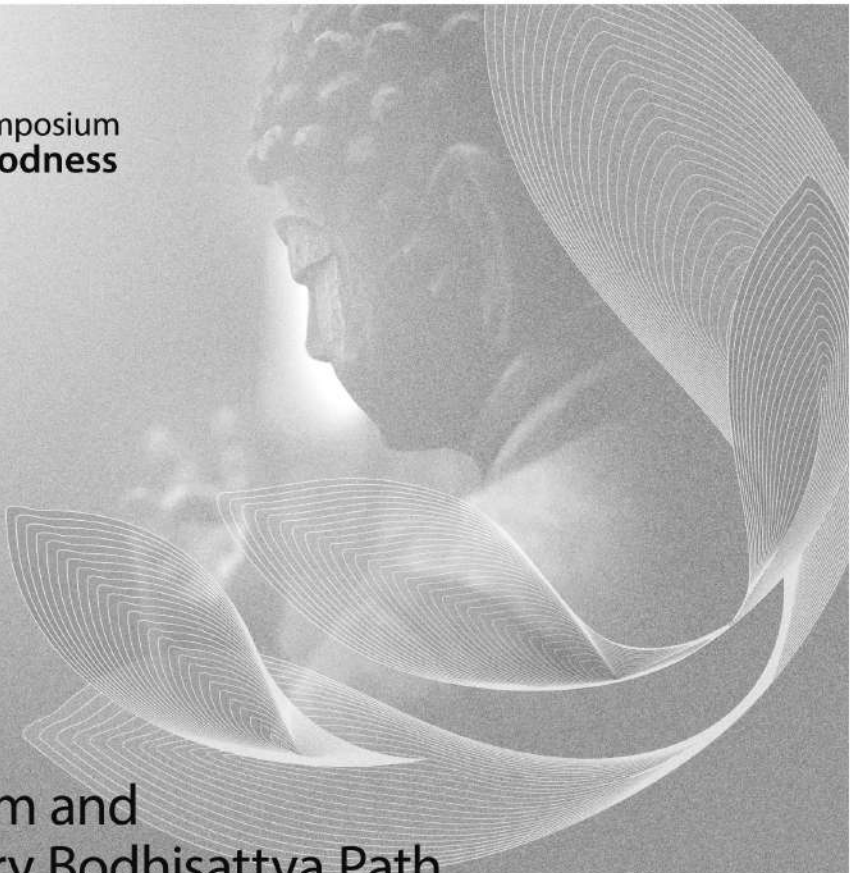

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Table of Contents

Symposium Program

DATE: Thursday, May 7 to Saturday, May 9, 2026

LOCATIONS:

Symposium: Harvard Student Organization Center at Hilles (SOCH)

Exhibition: Harvard CAMLab Cave

Exhibition Opening Ceremony: Adolphus Busch Hall

Concert: Harvard Art Museums Calderwood Courtyard

ORGANIZERS: Tzu Chi Charity Foundation; Harvard FAS CAMLab

PROGRAM:

Wednesday, May 6 **"Journey to Enlightenment" Exhibition Tour**	
13:30-17:30	**Exhibition Preview & Tour: "Journey to Enlightenment"** (Guided early-access viewing for scholars and guests.)
18:00-20:30	**Dinner**

Thursday, May 7 **Applied Buddhism and the Bodhisattva Path**	
08:30-09:20	**Opening Remarks** 1. Jing Si Monastic Representative 2. Representative of Harvard CAMLab 3. Representative of Tzu Chi Foundation 4. Stephen Teiser, Princeton University 5. Parimal Patil, Harvard University

	Group Photo
09:20-09:45	**Keynote Speech I** Rey-Sheng Her (Tzu Chi Foundation) *Contemporary Interpretations of Buddhism: The Significance of Applied Buddhism*
9:45-10:05	**Break**
10:05-10:30	**Keynote Speech II** Stephen Teiser (Princeton University) *Buddhist responses to epidemics—past, present, and future*
10:30-12:25	**Session I** **PHILOSOPHICAL AND ETHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE BODHISATTVA PATH** **Moderator: Parimal Patil** **Speakers:** Jonathan Gold (Princeton University) *Upāya Without Closure: Coercion, Trauma, and the Contemporary Bodhisattva Path* Jiade Shao (Nanjing University) *All Dharmas Are Equal, with No Distinction of High or Low: The Historical Connotations and Contemporary Significance of the Buddhist View on Equality* Wen-liang Zhang (Renmin University of China) *Tathāgatagarbha Thought and the Contemporary Bodhisattva Path* Yinggang Sun (Zhejiang University) *The Maitreya Bodhisattva Cult in Gandhara and Its Influence on East Asian Civilization* **Commentators** Lina Verchery **(**Victoria University of Wellington)

	Justin Ritzinger (University of Miami)
12:25-13:40	**Lunch Break**
13:40-15:35	**<u>Session II</u>** **BUDDHISM, HEALTH, AND ETHICS OF CARE** **Moderator:** Yu-chen Li (Taiwan Chengchi University) **Speakers:** William McGrath (New York University) *From Lay Physician to Medicine Buddha: Ethics in the Lives of Jīvaka and Yutok* Pierce Salguero (Pennsylvania State University) *Beyond Mindfulness: Buddhism & Health in the US* Mayfair Yang (UC Santa Barbara) *Chasing the Sarus Cranes: Buddhist and Hindu Multispecies Assemblages in Lumbini* Elise Anne DeVido (Tzu Chi University) *A Study of the Concept of "Animals Repaying Debts of Gratitude"〈動物報恩〉in Tzu Chi Teachings* **Commentators** Janet Gyatso (Harvard University) Brooke Lavelle (UTS)
15:35-15:55	**Break**
15:55-18:00	**<u>Roundtable I</u>** **STUDIES AND PRACTICES OF APPLIED BUDDHISM** **Moderator:** James Robson (Harvard University) **Speakers:** Debbie Lee (Tzu Chi USA), Wen-liang Zhang, Rey-Sheng Her, Pierce Salguero, Monica

	Sanford, Brooke Lavelle, Andrew Her
19:00	**Dinner** (Harvard Faculty Club)

Friday, May 8 **Venerable Cheng Yen's Philosophy and Leadership**	
08:30-09:00	**<u>Keynote Speech III</u>** James Robson (Harvard University) *Buddhism and Bedlam: Buddhist Monasteries and the Care (and Confinement) of the Insane*
09:00-10:55	**<u>Session III</u>** **THE LOTUS SŪTRA AND THE THOUGHT OF MASTER CHENG YEN** **Moderator:** Justin Ritzinger (University of Miami) **Speakers:** Rey-Sheng Her (Tzu Chi Foundation) *The Vijñapti-Mātratā Thought of Dharma Master Cheng Yen* Chien-te Lin (Tzu Chi University) *From Humanistic Buddhism to the Perspective of Religion of Dharma Master Cheng Yen* Anwu Lin (Shandong University) *Integrating Non-Arising and Vitality: Tzu Chi's Practical Interpretation of Infinite Meanings Sutra — Via "Trialectics of Being" and Confucian-Buddhist Convergence* Jianming He (Renmin University of China) *The Buddhist Nature and Universality of the Tzu Chi School of Buddhism Established by Dharma Master Cheng Yen Based on the Lotus Sutra* **Commentators:**

	Eugene Y. Wang (Harvard CAMLab) Weijen Teng (Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts)
10:55-11:15	**Break**
11:15-13:10	**Session IV** **GLOBAL HUMANITARIANISM AND ENGAGED BUDDHISM** **Moderator:** Weijen Teng (Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts) **Speakers:** William Yau Nang Ng (Taiwan Normal University) *Reconsidering Human Security: Tzu Chi–Style Service Buddhism* Weishan Huang (Hong Kong Shue Yan University) *Infrastructuring Compassion - The Moral Economy of Tzu Chi's Humanitarian Relief* Yining Liu (Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts) *Eco-Bodhisattvas in the Anthropocene: Generational, Gendered, and Transnational Dimensions of Tzu Chi's Climate Activism* Jiangang Zhu (Zhejiang University) (Pre-recorded Video) *Tzu Chi Volunteers in Mainland China: Humanistic Buddhism, Moral Discipline, and the Making of Volunteer Spirit* **Commentators:** Monica Sanford (Harvard Divinity School) Mayfair Yang (UC Santa Barbara)
13:10-14:30	**Lunch Break**
14:30-16:05	**Session V** **CHARISMA, PRACTICE, AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY IN TZU CHI** **Moderator:** Rey-Sheng Her (Tzu Chi Foundation)

	Speakers: Yu-chen Li (Taiwan Chengchi University) *Writing Religious Charisma: The Buddhist Publishing Industry and Bhikshuni* Pei-ying Lin (Taiwan Chengchi University) *Compassion Network: The Tzu Chi Pure Practitioners in the Age of Globalisation* Julia Huang (Taiwan Tsing Hua University) *Modern Body-Giving Bodhisattvas: Affect, Emotional Practice, and Ethics in the Whole-Body Donations to Tzu Chi* **Commentators** Jonathan Gold (Princeton University) Pierce Salguero (Pennsylvania State University)
16:05-16:25	**Break**
16:25-18:00	**Roundtable II** **THE FUTURE OF BUDDHISM** **Moderator:** Mayfair Yang **Speakers:** Jonathan Gold, William McGrath, Yinggang Sun, Weijen Teng, Julia Huang
18:30-19:30	**Opening Ceremony of "Journey to Enlightenment"** **Remarks** 1. Mark Wu, Faculty Director for the Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies at Harvard University 2. Jing Si Monastic Representative 3. Eugene Y. Wang, Director of Harvard CAMLab 4. Rey-Sheng Her, Deputy CEO of Tzu Chi Foundation 5. Special Guests **Introduction to Project Journey to Enlightenment**

19:30	**Dinner**

Saturday, May 9 **Design Futures after Buddhism: Worldmaking by Other Means**	
09:00-09:30	**<u>Keynote Speech IV</u>** Eugene Y. Wang (Harvard CAMLab) *Design After Buddhism: Back to Future*
09:30-10:50	**<u>Session VI</u>** **SPECULATIVE DESIGN AND ALTERNATIVE FUTURES** **Moderator:** Allen Sayegh (Harvard GSD) **Speakers:** Anthony Dunne & Fiona Raby (The New School) *An Archive of Impossible Objects* James Auger (RMIT) *Reconstrained Design* Chenchen Lu (Harvard) *Designing Enlightenment: Computational Simulation of Cultural Systems and the Reconfiguration of Cognitive Worlds* **Q & A**
10:50-11:10	**Break**
11:10-12:30	**<u>Session VII</u>** **ARCHITECTURE, ECOLOGY, AND SYSTEMS THINKING** **Moderator:** Eugene Y. Wang (Harvard CAMLab) **Speakers:**

	Sheila Kennedy (MIT) *Trees as Teachers* Jungyoon Kim (Harvard GSD) *Reworlding Sansu through Nature-Drawn Boundaries* Goh Yu Han & Chang Huai Yan (SALAD Dressing) *On the Being of Plants* **Q & A**
12:30-13:50	**Lunch Break**
13:50-15:30	**<u>Session VIII</u>** **MIND, MEDITATION, AND MULTI-SENSORIAL EXPERIENCE** **Moderator:** Jungyoon Kim (Harvard GSD) **Speakers:** Monique Mead (Carnegie Mellon University) *Journey to Enlightenment: A Musical Pathway into Meditative States* Cuilan Liu (University of Pittsburgh) *Hor nag maṇi: Buddhist Chanting and Community-Building in Northeastern Tibet* Sonya Lee (USC) *In the Spirit of Recycle and Reuse: Preserving Buddhist Wall Painting through Replication* Xiaoze Xie (Stanford University) *Cosmic Models: Poetic Reveries on the Dunhuang Library Cave* **Q & A**
15:30-15:50	**Break**

15:50-16:30	**Closing Remarks and Thanks**
16:40-17:40	**<u>Immersive Sound Bath Session with Prof. Monique Mead</u>** (Carnegie Mellon University)
17:45-19:00	**Dinner**
19:30-21:30	**<u>Concert</u>** ***UNDER ONE SKY*** (Harvard Art Museums Calderwood Courtyard)

General Information & Procedures

Languages & Interpretation

The primary language for this symposium is English, with select presentations delivered in Mandarin. Simultaneous interpretation is available throughout the event. Headsets can be borrowed from the Translation Service Desk.

Device Etiquette & Recording

Out of respect for our speakers, please ensure all mobile phones and electronic devices are set to silent during sessions. Please note that unauthorized photography or audio/video recording of presentations is prohibited without prior consent from the event organizers and the speakers.

Session Format & Timekeeping

To ensure the symposium runs smoothly and on schedule, time limits will be strictly observed.

> **Time Reminders**: For presentations, a single bell will ring as a 3-minute reminder. Two bells will indicate that time is up, and the speaker must yield the floor immediately.

Time Allocations

Session Type	Role/Segment	Allocated Time
Keynote Speech	Speaker	25 minutes per session
Panel Sessions	Moderator	2 minutes per paper
	Presenter	15 minutes per paper (May 7 & 8)
		20 minutes per paper (May 9)
	Commentator (May 7 & 8)	12 mins each (for 3 papers) 16 mins each (for 4 papers)
	Open Discussion	Remaining time of the session
Roundtable Discussions	Moderator	5 minutes (Opening) 5 minutes (Conclusion)
	Panelist	10 minutes each
	Open Discussion	Remaining time of the session

Day 1:
Applied Buddhism and the Bodhisattva Path

Upāya Without Closure: Coercion, Trauma, and the Contemporary Bodhisattva Path

Jonathan Gold
Department of Religion, Princeton University

Abstract

This talk argues that the contemporary bodhisattva path should not be defined by the avoidance of coercion, but by the refusal to allow coercion—or any particular construction of care—to harden into certainty. In modern social and political life, practitioners operate within institutional systems—law, policing, borders, incarceration, and emergency governance—in which the use of force is not an exceptional deviation but a persistent structural condition. Buddhist ethics, if it is to remain responsive to these conditions, cannot rely on idealized formulations of nonviolence that presuppose the full eliminability of harm. At the same time, it cannot endorse coercion as morally justified *tout court*. The central ethical problem, therefore, is not whether coercion may be unavoidable, but how to prevent it becoming reified as necessity, moral truth, or final justice—and how even altruistic intentions themselves can undergo this same hardening.

The talk develops a diagnostic account of coercion by bringing Buddhist moral psychology—particularly the concepts of ignorance (*avidyā*) and attachment to views (*dṛṣṭi-upādāna*)—into dialogue with contemporary trauma research. Across clinical and psychological literature, chronic exposure to threat produces hypervigilance, attentional narrowing, and a

diminished tolerance for ambiguity. Under such conditions, decisiveness and certainty become effectively regulating: they stabilize experience in the face of perceived danger. This dynamic closely parallels classical Buddhist analyses of ignorance, not as a lack of information but as a loss of reflexive awareness, and of view-attachment as the affective fixation on simplified interpretive frames that render experience manageable under stress.

From this perspective, coercion can be understood not merely as a tool deployed in response to external conditions, but as the institutional stabilization of threat-conditioned perception. When fear-induced cognitive narrowing becomes socially distributed and materially encoded, it produces durable structures that enact and reproduce those perceptual constraints. Law, surveillance, borders, and punitive systems can thus be interpreted as sedimented responses to past insecurity—forms of causal inheritance operating at the institutional level. This reframing shifts the analysis of coercion away from questions of justification toward questions of formation: coercive systems are not simply chosen, but emerge as predictable outcomes of cumulative moral-psychological processes.

The paper articulates this process through a "karmic" feedback loop: chronic threat produces narrowed perception; narrowed perception generates a demand for certainty; certainty is stabilized through authority and force; and these structures reproduce the very conditions of insecurity that sustain the cycle. Within such a loop, coercion comes to feel not only necessary but righteous. Its moral valence is affectively conditioned rather than intrinsically grounded. The extent to which a society relies on coercive mechanisms can therefore be read as an index of collective moral-psychological contraction rather than as a direct measure of objective danger.

To clarify the nature of this dynamic, the paper proposes a reinterpretation of institutional "externalization." Rather than treating institutions as symbolic projections of inner states, it argues that they function as operationalizations of regulatory patterns. What is externalized is not belief but form: urgency becomes emergency governance, intolerance of ambiguity becomes bright-line law, and suspicion becomes surveillance. Institutions do not merely express trauma; they perform it. Coercion is thus private threat regulation rendered public and compulsory.

At this point, the paper introduces a further normative clarification: the status of altruism

itself under conditions of sociocultural and affective conditioning. What counts as "helping" is never given in a neutral or unmediated form. Perceptions of harm, urgency, and appropriate response are shaped by position, institutional role, and historical experience. Under conditions of threat, altruism predictably narrows: it becomes protective, exclusionary, and oriented toward certainty. Coercion, in this light, often appears as care—defense of the vulnerable, preservation of order, or the enforcement of moral boundaries.

To address this, the paper articulates a framework that may be described as the "two truths of altruism." At the conventional level, altruistic action is conditioned, perspectival, and historically situated. At the non-reifying level, no particular construction of altruism can be treated as final or exhaustive. There is no fixed standpoint from which compassion can be perfectly specified in advance. Altruism is therefore both real and unstable: necessary for ethical action, yet always subject to distortion and revision. The ethical problem is not the absence of care, but its narrowing, rigidification, and conversion into certainty. Coercion can thus be understood as misrecognized altruism under conditions of contraction.

This insight provides the basis for a reconstruction of the bodhisattva ideal. The bodhisattva, on this account, is not the agent who never causes harm, but the one who never mistakes harm—or any particular interpretation of care—for final truth. This stance is grounded in core Mahāyāna commitments: the distinction between conventional and ultimate truth, the rejection of fixed views, and the vow to remain engaged within samsara without being captured by its distortions. At the institutional level, this entails a set of ethical prohibitions: that emergency must not be allowed to become the norm, that fear must not become authority, and that necessity or altruism must not be reified into destiny.

On this basis, the paper reconceives upāya (skillful means) for non-ideal political conditions. Classical accounts of upāya emphasize flexibility and context sensitivity, but often assume that skillful action can be cleanly distinguished from unskillful action. In contexts shaped by systemic trauma and institutionalized harm, this assumption no longer holds. There are no karmically pure options. Some actions reduce suffering only by producing other forms of harm. Upāya must therefore be understood not as the selection of a purely skillful course of action, but as action undertaken without reification: decisions may be decisive and even coercive, but they are not

granted the status of ultimate justification. When force is used, it is treated as provisional, regrettable, and oriented toward the dismantling of its own necessity.

The paper then develops a model of bodhisattva praxis structured around three interrelated commitments. First, *non-closure*: coercive actions, where unavoidable, must be accompanied by mechanisms of reversibility, revision, and temporal limitation. Practices such as sunset clauses and institutional review embody a refusal to treat coercive measures as final. Second, *role-sensitive compassion*: different social roles—judicial, administrative, activist, scholarly—enact partial constructions of altruism, none of which exhaust the demands of compassion. Each role requires humility, self-limitation, and openness to correction. Third, *the interpretation of rigidity as karmic signal*: expressions of anger, fear, or moral certainty are understood as indicators of underlying suffering and perceived threat. The bodhisattva response is to translate these signals into causal analysis—identifying the conditions that give rise to them—while refusing to enact their most rigid implications. Public reasoning thus becomes a practice of transforming affectively charged assertions into revisable, condition-sensitive understanding.

A final section addresses the concern that such an approach risks paternalism by subordinating the voices of those most affected by harm. The paper argues that it preserves the moral and epistemic significance of these perspectives while resisting their elevation into unchallengeable authority. Trauma-conditioned viewpoints are recognized as both valid and partial: they reveal real suffering and real conditions, but do not, in themselves, determine appropriate responses. Compassion, whether individual or institutional, requires both reception and translation—openness to testimony while situating it within a broader causal and ethical framework.

The paper concludes by situating this account as a middle path within contemporary applied Buddhism. It rejects both quietist withdrawal, which renders Buddhist ethics politically inert, and moral purism, which treats nonviolence as an absolute irrespective of context. It also resists activist frameworks that, in their urgency, risk reproducing the very dynamics of coercive closure they oppose. Instead, it proposes a model of engaged practice that attempts to be historically informed, psychologically realistic, and institutionally attentive.

The contemporary bodhisattva path, on this view, is not a path of purity but of disciplined non-reification. It is a commitment to act within compromised conditions without granting those conditions—or any single form of altruistic interpretation—ultimate authority. Coercion, where it appears, is treated as provisional, regrettable, and subject to targeted dismantling. In this sense, the defining mark of the bodhisattva is not the absence of force, but the refusal to allow force—or care itself—to become final: an ethics of engagement that remains answerable to time, evidence, and the enduring expectation of being shown to be wrong.

All Dharmas Are Equal, with No Distinction of High or Low: The Historical Connotations and Contemporary Significance of the Buddhist View on Equality

Jiade Shao
School of Philosophy, Nanjing University

Abstract

This article examines the conceptual connotations, historical evolution, and dialogue with modern egalitarian ideas of the Buddhist view on equality. Equality is not only a fundamental value of modern society but also a core concept in Buddhism. However, the Buddhist view of equality is not a single, static concept; rather, it exhibits rich layers and complex tensions across different historical periods and cultural contexts. Starting from the original meanings found in Buddhist scriptures, this article traces the development of equality thought in Chinese Buddhism, focusing on the collision and integration between Buddhist equality and Western concepts of equality during the modern transformation. On this basis, it summarizes the distinctive characteristics of Buddhist equality and its implications for contemporary egalitarian practice.

I. The Multiple Meanings and Theoretical Structure of Buddhist Equality

In Chinese Buddhism, the term "equality" (pingdeng 平等) corresponds to several Sanskrit words such as sama, upekṣā, and samaya, with the basic meaning of "no distinction between high and low, shallow and deep." However, the Buddhist view of equality is far from a simple "elimination of differences"; rather, it is a systematic thought grounded in core Buddhist doctrines. The theory of dependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda) reveals the commonality of interdependent existence, where all sentient beings are equal under the law of karma. Emptiness teachings (śūnyatā), from an ontological perspective, eliminate attachment to substantial existence and advocate the "equality of nature and characteristics." The Buddha-nature (Buddha-dhātu) theory provides a metaphysical basis for the possibility that all beings can become Buddhas. The theory of karmic retribution demonstrates the fairness of "one reaps what one sows". These doctrines together form the profound foundation of the Buddhist view of equality.

From a theoretical structural perspective, the Buddhist view of equality comprises at least three levels: First, equality at the doctrinal level, i.e., the equality of dharmatā (the nature of phenomena)—all phenomena are fundamentally undifferentiated—which is the metaphysical basis of Buddhist equality. Second, equality at the level of practice, including the wisdom of equality, the contemplation of equality, the mind of equality, and the ultimate state of equality attained through cultivation. Third, equality at the social level, such as the Buddha's advocacy of "equality of the four castes," affirmation of the possibility for both men and women to attain Buddhahood, and egalitarian concerns in the relationship between religion and politics, ethnic integration, and charitable practices. These three levels are not isolated but mutually penetrated and progressively interrelated. The equality of dharmatā provides the theoretical basis for practical equality; practical equality transforms metaphysical principles into individual practice; and social equality is the external manifestation of the spirit of equality in real life. It is worth noting that the Buddhist assertion of equality does not imply the negation of all differences. The Buddha recognized differences in beings' capacities, in the stages of spiritual attainment, and in karmic results, but maintained that these differences lack true permanence. Equality and difference in Buddhism form a relationship of "mutual identity" (xiangji 相即), like water and waves—the forms differ, but the watery nature is one.

II. Historical Development of Equality Thought in Chinese Buddhism

The view of equality in Chinese Buddhism underwent a long process of evolution. From the initial transmission of Buddhism to the Western and Eastern Jin periods was the period of introduction, during which a concept of equality (pingdeng) different from traditional notions of "evenness" or "ordinariness" was introduced to China through scriptural translation. The Northern and Southern Dynasties was the period of establishment, as the concept of equality was accepted by both official intellectuals and ordinary people, appearing in official histories, folk statuary, and epitaphs, and influencing actual political relations, gender status, ethnic integration, and social charity. The Sui and Tang dynasties was the period of innovation, during which the development of Chinese Buddhist schools greatly expanded the connotations of equality thought. The Huayan (華嚴) school regarded "principle" (li 理) as equality and "phenomena" (shi 事) as difference, advocating their mutual identity and unimpeded interpenetration. The Tiantai (天臺) school integrated the three truths of emptiness, conventional existence, and the mean through "one mind contemplating the three truths," emphasizing equal contemplation. The Chan (禪) school highlighted the "equality of Buddha-nature" and the "non-difference of mind, Buddha, and sentient beings." The Three Levels (三階教) school proposed the ideas of "universal respect" and "universal Buddhahood," shifting the object of reverence from Buddha images to sentient beings. Even the notion that "insentient beings possess Buddha-nature" established an equal relationship between plants, stones, and sentient beings. During this period, the concept of equality played an important role in metaphysical theory, debates over Buddha-nature, and methods of practice. From the Five Dynasties to the mid-Qing was the period of permeation and popularization, as equality increasingly became an everyday term, internalized in the thinking of Buddhists and the general populace. From the late Qing to the modern era was the period of transformation, during which, with the entry of Western theories of equality, the Buddhist view of equality was continuously reinterpreted, reformed, and innovated.

III. Modern Transformation and Theoretical Challenges to Buddhist Equality

The Buddhist view of equality underwent a significant transformation after encountering modern Western thought. This transformation exhibited several characteristics. In terms of the means of

realizing equality, it shifted from lofty metaphysical theory to practical, this-worldly practice, from religious equality to secular equality, focusing on the realization of equal rights in politics, gender, ethnicity, etc. In terms of the selection of egalitarian theories, it emphasized the equality of all sentient beings, showing greater interest in Buddha-nature equality than in the existential or practical dimensions of equality. In terms of the effectiveness of egalitarian practice, the strategy of using Buddhist discourse or narrative was often more prominent than actual efficacy, and modern intellectuals held divergent views on the role of Buddhist equality. Modern scholars such as Kang Youwei (康有為), Liang Qichao (梁啟超), Zhang Taiyan (章太炎), and Tan Sitong (譚嗣同) no longer focused on the undifferentiated nature of human nature or morality from the perspective that "everyone can become a Buddha." Instead, they accepted modern Western notions of equality and emphasized claims to actual rights in real life.

However, there are differing opinions on whether these appropriations were successful. Yan Fu (嚴複) considered Buddhist equality to be "negative equality," far removed from the "positive equality" advocated by Rousseau. Xiong Shili (熊十力) attempted a reconciliation, on the one hand acknowledging the true meaning of equality as the undifferentiated nature found in traditional Confucianism and Buddhism, and on the other hand accepting the modern legal concept of equality before the law. Taixu (太虛) offered a more reasonable compromise: starting from the principle of "no-self," he argued that social inequality arises from delineating a sphere of self, elevating the self, and suppressing the non-self. If one can understand the no-self of human life, the drama of elevation and suppression will not occur. He maintained that a free and equal outlook on life must be based on a no-self, mind-only cosmic view, and that egalitarian movements should take each person's mind as the central point, only then can they be reliable and not in vain.

Yet, since being "re-standardized" in modern times, this concept has faced practical doubts: Has the Buddhist advocacy of undifferentiated equality actually promoted equality within Buddhist monastic communities or Chinese society at the level of social practice? These doubts essentially point to an apparent rupture between the historical development of Buddhist equality theory and its social practice. An extreme view holds that Buddhism has not and will not cause any real harm to actual social inequality, but rather has maintained unequal institutions. A milder view suggests that Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism all belong to "high-sounding egalitarianism,"

which presupposes acceptance of real social inequality. However, such critiques need to be treated with caution. From a historical perspective, Buddhism may not have been deeply concerned with equality issues outside its own religious interests, but it can provide a metaphysical basis for secular equality and has indeed played a role in promoting certain forms of social equality. From a theoretical perspective, although the Buddhist view of equality has a holistic and universal character, it can also accommodate real and present differences and even factual inequalities. The complexity of this issue lies in its involvement of Buddhist doctrines and concepts of equality across different periods and regions, so a simplistic answer may not be very important. The important question is: what practically applicable insights can the Chinese Buddhist view of equality offer to resolve real-world dilemmas?

IV. The Unique Characteristics and Contemporary Value of Buddhist Equality

The Buddhist view of equality indeed possesses unique characteristics. For example, in terms of structural level, Buddhist equality primarily concerns the equality of dharmas rather than focusing specifically on the equality of sentient beings or humans. In terms of the subject of equality, Buddhism recognizes that all sentient beings equally possess the capacity for nirvāṇa or awakening, but because this is based on sentient beings' sentience (capacity to feel) rather than on human rationality alone, it transcends anthropocentrism. In terms of the content of equality, Buddhism tends to discuss equality from the perspective of free will and the acceptance of karmic consequences, rather than acquiring social rights or capital. In terms of the mechanism of equality, Buddhism holds that all sentient beings equally possess the capacity to feel suffering, emphasizing the same capacity to perceive harm, unlike Hobbes' emphasis on the same capacity to harm others. In terms of the temporal dimension of realizing equality, Buddhist equality emphasizes the future and potential, not being confined to the present and current state.

Faced with the difficulties in contemporary egalitarian theory, the Buddhist view of equality can provide resources in at least several aspects. First, according to Fang Dongmei (方東美), Buddhism offers an equality that looks upward for alignment, rather than an equality that levels downward. Social welfare equality often adopts a downward-leveling approach in resource distribution, which reduces higher forms of life to lower material phenomena. Buddhism, in

contrast, provides an impulse to look upward and then transforms this into a plan of action. Moreover, the Buddhist view of equality emphasizes equality in the "fruit" (result) aspect—that all beings equally undergo karmic consequences—rather than simply seeking equality in the acquisition of resources at the "cause" stage. Second, Buddhist this-worldly concern breaks through anthropocentric egalitarian claims. The possibility of equal liberation in Buddhism is based on sentient beings' capacity for emotional awareness, or even on the emptiness of all things, rather than on the uniquely human capacity for rational thought. Therefore, the perspective of this equality encompasses the relationship between humans and other living beings and nature, offering insights for current ecological and environmental issues—an equality of a broader scope. Third, from the perspective of human psychology, Buddhist equality provides, at the level of contemplative practice, a means to overcome envy and jealousy—a problem that many Western egalitarian theories and social practices cannot resolve. Furthermore, Buddhism's pursuit of spiritual realms establishes value orientations beyond material interests. The pluralization of value evaluations can help us realize ourselves and achieve a psychological sense of equality on multiple levels, thereby partially eliminating the psychological gap and social unrest caused by resource scarcity or unequal distribution in a certain aspect.

是法平等，無有高下：
佛教平等觀念的歷史內涵與現代意義

邵佳德
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摘要

本文考察了佛教平等觀的思想內涵、歷史演變及其與現代平等理念的對話。平等既是現代社會的基本價值理念，也是佛教傳統思想中的核心觀念。然而，佛教平等觀並非單一、靜態的概念，而是在不同歷史時期、不同文化語境中呈現出豐富的層次與複雜的張力。文章從佛教經論的原初意涵出發，梳理了漢傳佛教平等思想的發展脈絡，重點分析了近代轉型過程中佛教平等觀與西方平等理念的碰撞與融合，並在此基礎上總結了佛教平等思想的獨特特質及其對當代平等實踐的啟示意義。

一、佛教平等的多重意涵與理論結構

在漢傳佛教中，“平等”一詞對應梵文 sama、upekṣā、samaya 等多個語彙，其基本義涵為“無高下淺深之別”。但佛教平等觀遠非簡單的“消除差別”，而是建立在其核心教義基礎上的系統性思想。緣起理論揭示了事物相互依存的共性，眾生在業力法則面前一律平等；般若空觀從實體論角度破除對實在的執著，主張“性相平等”；佛性論為眾生皆可成佛提供了形上依據；業力果報論則從世俗

生活層面論證了自作自受的公正性。這些教理共同構成了佛教平等觀的深厚根基。

從理論結構看，佛教平等觀至少包含三個層面：一是義理層面的平等，即法性平等——一切現象在本質上無差別，這是佛教平等觀的形上基礎；二是修行層面的平等，包括平等智、平等觀、平等心等修行法門，以及通過修習達到的究竟平等境界；三是社會層面的平等，如佛陀對“四姓平等”的宣導、對男女成佛可能性的肯定、以及在政教關係、民族融合、慈善實踐中的平等關懷。這三個層面並非相互隔絕，而是相互滲透、層層遞進。法性平等為修行平等提供理論依據，修行平等又將形上原理轉化為個體實踐，社會平等則是平等精神在現實生活中的外顯。值得注意的是，佛教主張平等並不意味著否定一切差別。佛陀承認眾生根器有利鈍、修行果位有高下、業報結果各各不同，但主張這些差別不具真實性與恒久性。平等與差別在佛教中構成“相即”的關係——如水與波，形態各異而水性為一。

二、漢傳佛教平等觀的歷史脈絡

漢傳佛教平等觀經歷了漫長的演變過程。從佛教初傳至兩晉為輸入期，隨著經典翻譯，一種不同于傳統“均平”、“平常”之意的平等理念被引入中土。南北朝時期為確立期，平等觀念已為官方知識份子和普通民眾所接受，體現在官修史書、民間造像、墓誌銘文中，並對現實的政治關係、男女地位、民族融合、社會慈善產生影響。隋唐時期為創生期，中國佛教宗派的發展極大拓展了平等思想的內涵。華嚴宗以“理”為平等、“事”為差別，主張理事相即、圓融無礙；天臺宗以“一心三觀”融攝空、假、中三諦，強調平等關照；禪宗突出“佛性平等”與“心、佛、眾生三無差別”；三階教提出“普敬”、“普佛”思想，將歸敬物件從佛菩薩轉向眾生；甚至“無情有性”的觀念也在草木瓦石與有情眾生之間建立了平等關係。這一時期，平等觀在形上理論、佛性論爭、修行方法等層面均發揮重要作用。五代至清中葉為下滲流行期，平等日益成為日常生活用語，內化入佛教徒乃至民眾的思想。清晚期至近代為轉型期，隨著西方平等理論的進入，佛教平等觀被不斷詮釋、改造與創新。

三、佛教平等觀的近代轉型與理論質疑

佛教的平等觀在與近代西方思潮包括其平等思想相遇後，產生了重要的轉型，這種轉型呈現出幾個特點：在平等方式的實現上，從高調的形上理論下沉到現實的形下實踐，從宗教平等轉移到世俗平等，注重政治、男女、族群等平等權利的實現；在平等理論的選擇上，注重眾生平等思想，對佛性平等的興趣明顯大於佛教在存在、修行層面的平等觀；在平等實踐的效果上，利用佛教"言說"或敘事的策略大於實際功效，近代以來知識份子對佛教平等觀的作用褒貶不一。近代學人康有為、梁啟超、章太炎、譚嗣同等人關注的平等權利不再是從人皆可為堯舜或人人皆可成佛的角度去談人性及道德的無差別，而是接受西方近代以來的平等觀，側重討論對現實權利的訴求。

然而，這些嫁接是否成功存在不同看法。嚴複認為佛教的平等是"消極平等"，與盧梭所標"積極平等"相去甚遠。熊十力則試圖調和，一方面承認傳統儒佛中本性無差別的平等真義，另一方面接受現代法治觀念下法律面前人人平等的權利。太虛提供了一種更為合理的折中方式：他從"無我"原理出發，認為社會不平等源於劃定自我範圍、抬高自我、壓伏非我；若能了達人生無我，抬高與壓伏的惡劇便不會上演。他主張自由平等的人生觀必須建立在無我、唯心的宇宙觀基礎上，以各人心理為中心點去作平等運動，才有把握不落空。

但自從近代被重新"標準化"後，這一觀念開始面臨一種實踐層面的質疑：即宣導無差別的佛教平等，有沒有在社會實踐層面推動佛教僧團或中國社會的平等？這些疑惑實際想指出的是佛教平等理論的歷史脈絡和社會實踐出現了明顯斷裂。極端觀點認為佛教沒有也不會給現實不平等造成真正危害，反而維護了不平等制度；溫和看法則指出儒道佛都屬於"高調平等論"，以默認現實社會不平等為前提。但這種質疑需要審慎對待。從歷史角度看，佛教或許沒有那麼關注宗教利益之外的平等問題，但可為世俗平等提供形上依據，並確實為推動某些社會平等起到過作用；從理論角度看，佛教平等觀雖有整體性、普遍性的特徵，但又可包容現實與當下的差別乃至事相的不平等。這一問題的複雜性在於涉及不同時期、區域的佛教教理和平等概念，因此籠統的答案或許不是很重要。重要的問題在於，在當下平等思想的發展脈絡中，漢傳佛教的平等觀能夠提供什麼具有現實操作意義的借鑒，又有哪些超越現實、解決困局的洞見。

四、佛教平等觀的特質與現實價值

佛教平等觀確具獨特性。例如，佛教平等從結構層次來說，首先是法的平等，而不特重、專重眾生或人的平等；從平等的主體來說，佛教認可眾生同具獲得涅槃或覺醒的能力，但因為建基在生物的感性之上，而非人的理性能力上，因此是超越人類中心主義的；從平等的內容來說，佛教傾向從自由意志和行為的果報承受角度談平等，而不是從獲取社會生活權利、資本的因的角度談平等；從平等的機制來說，佛教認為眾生同具感受痛苦的能力，這是強調感知傷害的能力相同，而非像霍布斯說的傷害他人的能力相同；從平等的時效來說，佛教的平等還是一種重視未來和潛能的平等，並不拘泥於當下與現狀。

面對當代平等理論中存在的難題，佛教的平等觀至少可以在幾方面提供資源。首先，根據方東美的說法，佛教是提供向上看齊的平等，而不是向下拉平的平等。社會福利的平等往往在資源配置角度採取向下拉平的思路，這使得高級的生命存在形式被逐層矮化為低級的物質存在現象。方東美認為這會導致生命中所有的心理活動及精神現象，乃至由此衍生出的文學、藝術、道德、宗教等引人向上、莊嚴生命的精神活動都被弱化，人的生命走向是下行的。而佛教給我們提供的是向上看齊的衝動，繼而轉化為行動的計畫。並且佛教平等觀側重從“果”的角度談眾生對業報的承受是平等的，而不是在“因”的過程中一味尋求資源獲取的平等。其次，佛教的現實關懷突破了人類中心主義的平等訴求，其平等解脫的可能性是建立在眾生情感的覺察能力、甚至是所有事物的空性基礎上的，而不是作為人獨有的理性思考能力上，因此這種平等觀的視野包容了人與其他生物和自然的關係，對於當前的生態、環保等問題均有借鑒意義，是一種更大格局的平等觀。第三，從人的心理角度言，佛教平等觀在修行觀法層面提供了一種破除嫉妒心理的可能，這是很多西方平等理論和社會實踐無法解決的問題。並且佛教在境界層面的追求設定了一種在物質利益之外的價值取向，價值評價的多元化可以說明我們在更多層次上實現自我、獲得平等的心理感受，從而部分消除在某一方面因資源匱乏或分配不均導致的心理落差和社會動盪。

Tathāgatagarbha Thought and the Contemporary Bodhisattva Path

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Abstract

Among the three major lineages of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism—Madhyamaka, Yogācāra, and Tathāgatagarbha (Buddha-nature)—the Tathāgatagarbha lineage has had the most profound impact on Chinese Buddhism. This is particularly true following the emergence of the Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna (Dacheng Qixin Lun 大乘起信論) in the mid-sixth century. Its doctrines of the "One Mind" (yixin 一心), the "Two Aspects" (ermen 二門; the aspect of thusness and the aspect of arising and ceasing), and the "Three Greatnesses" (sanda 三大; substance, characteristics, and function)—as expressions of a Sinicized Tathāgatagarbha thought—deeply influenced the cognitive characteristics and faith structures of various sects within Chinese Buddhism.

Tathāgatagarbha thought can be summarized through three core tenets: first, all sentient beings perfectly possess the wisdom of the Tathāgata; second, ordinary sentient beings, due to inverted cognition, remain unaware of this innate wisdom; and third, if sentient beings receive the blessings and support of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to overcome this inverted cognition, this innate wisdom will manifest.

The influence of Tathāgatagarbha thought on the Mahāyāna Bodhisattva path includes the following shifts: whereas Early Buddhism and the sectarian Buddhist schools emphasized the importance of the physical body (rūpakāya) of the Buddha, Tathāgatagarbha thought emphasizes the importance of the Dharma-body (dharmakāya). While Early Buddhism and the sectarian schools emphasized the liberation of the Buddha, the Tathāgatagarbha tradition emphasizes the liberation of sentient beings. Furthermore, whereas Early Buddhism and the sectarian schools highlighted the difference between Buddhas/Bodhisattvas and ordinary sentient beings, Tathāgatagarbha thought emphasizes the identity—based on the Tathāgatagarbha—between the Buddha and sentient beings.

After Tathāgatagarbha thought was transmitted to China, following doctrinal debates regarding whether icchantikas (yichanti 一闡提) possess Buddha-nature and whether there is a single vehicle of Buddha-nature or if there are five distinct types of nature, the concept that all sentient beings equally possess Buddha-nature became the mainstream in the Buddhist community. Within the Three Stages School (Sanjie jiao 三階教), the Chan School, and the Pure Land School, Tathāgatagarbha transitioned from a concept expressing the possibility of sentient beings attaining Buddhahood to one expressing the actuality of sentient beings attaining Buddhahood. Examples such as the "Tathāgatagarbha-Buddha" of the Three Stages School, the "mind itself is the Buddha" (jixin jifo 即心即佛) of the Chan School, and the "mind-only Pure Land" (weixin jingtu 唯心淨土) of the Pure Land School all convey that Buddhahood for sentient beings is not something achieved only after eons of practice, but is instead something present and realized in the immediate moment.

This signifies that Indian Buddhist Tathāgatagarbha thought had completed its Sinicization, evolving into a Chinese-style Tathāgatagarbha thought that emphasizes equality and simplicity. In the contemporary era, as we seek to reconstruct the Mahāyāna Bodhisattva path, there is a need to provide a modern interpretation and modernization of Tathāgatagarbha thought. The direction of this transformation lies in imbuing the concept that "the mind, the Buddha, and sentient beings are no different" (xin, fo, zhongsheng, san wu chabie 心佛眾生，三無差別) with new connotations.

"The mind, the Buddha, and sentient beings are no different" emphasizes that, based on their

shared Dharma-body, there is fundamentally no difference between the Buddha and sentient beings. Yet, due to the presence or absence of practice, differences still exist between the Buddha and sentient beings in their empirical state. If one were to simply equate the Buddha with sentient beings, one might fall into the misguided path of nihilism regarding practice. One possible interpretation is that this proposition expresses a new type of Bodhisattva path in which sentient beings serve as mutual subjects of salvation. The relationship between the Buddha and sentient beings is not a unidirectional one—from Buddha (the savior) to sentient beings (the saved)—but rather a reciprocal one where Buddha is sentient beings ⇆ sentient beings are Buddha, with sentient beings simultaneously being those who are saved and those who provide salvation.

As long as every individual gives rise to the Bodhi heart (fa putixin 發菩提心), is willing to offer their love, and puts this into action by saving others, they are a Bodhisattva; they are a Buddha. This concept, which emphasizes great love, equality, and the value of action, is precisely the core philosophy of the Tzu Chi Merit Association. The philosophy and practice of the Tzu Chi can be said to be the best interpretation of a modern Bodhisattva path based on Tathāgatagarbha thought.

如來藏思想與當代菩薩道

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摘要

在印度大乘佛教三系即中觀思想、唯識思想、如來藏思想中，對中國佛教影響最為深遠的是如來藏思想。特別是在六世紀中葉，《大乘起信論》問世之後，「一心」、「二門」（真如門與生滅門）、「三大」（體、相、用）說，作為中國化的如來藏思想，深刻影響到中國佛教諸宗派的思維特質和信仰形態。

如來藏思想可以概括為三大核心理念：一切眾生都圓滿具足如來的智慧；凡夫眾生由於顛倒的認知而意識不到自己的本有智慧；眾生如果獲得佛菩薩的加持，克服了顛倒認知，就能讓本具的智慧顯現。

如來藏思想給大乘菩薩道帶來了影響包括：原始佛教和部派佛教強調色身佛陀的重要性，而如來藏思想則強調法身的重要性；原始佛教和部派佛教強調佛陀解脫的重要性，而如來藏則強調眾生解脫的重要性；原始佛教和部派佛教強調佛菩薩與凡夫眾生之間的差異，而如來藏思想則強調基於如來藏的佛與眾生之間的同一性。

在如來藏思想傳入中國之後，經過「一闡提是否有佛性」、「一乘佛性還是五性各別」等思想論爭，一切眾生皆平等具有佛性的觀念成為佛教界的主流。而在三階教、禪宗和淨土宗中，如來藏由一個表達眾生成佛可能性的概念，轉

換為表達眾生成佛現實性的概念。如三階教的「如來藏佛」、禪宗的「即心即佛」、淨土宗的「唯心淨土」等，皆表達了眾生成佛不是累劫修行之後，而就是當下現成。

這標誌著印度佛教如來藏思想已經完成中國化的改造，成為強調平等性和簡易性的中國式如來藏思想。在當代，我們要重構大乘佛教的菩薩道，需要對如來藏思想進行現代闡釋和現代化轉型。轉型的方向是賦予「心佛眾生，三無差別」理念以新的內涵。

「心佛眾生，三無差別」，強調的是佛與眾生基於共同的法身（心、如來藏）而在本質上沒有差異。但由於修行的有無，在現實態中，佛與眾生還是存在差異。如果簡單地把佛與眾生相等同，可能走上修行無用論的歧路。一種可能的解釋是，這一命題表達了眾生互為救度主體的新型菩薩道。佛與眾生之間不是佛（救度者）→眾生（被救度者）的單向關係，而是佛即眾生⇆眾生即佛，眾生同時是被救度者和救度者。

每個人只要發菩提心，願意獻出愛心，而且付諸救度他人的行動，你就是菩薩、就是佛。這種強調大愛、強調平等、強調行動價值的理念，恰恰是慈濟功德會的核心理念。慈濟功德會的理念和實踐，可以說是基於如來藏思想的現代菩薩道的最好詮釋。

The Maitreya Bodhisattva Faith in Gandhara and Its Influence on East Asian Civilization

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Abstract

Although Buddhism originated in northeastern India, its development from a local belief system into a world religion is inseparable from its reinvention and growth in the Gandhara region. It can be said that Buddhism underwent a comprehensive and revolutionary transformation in Gandhara. This transformation is commonly referred to by scholars as the rise of Mahayana Buddhism, which replaced Hinayana Buddhism as the mainstream. This mainstream traveled eastward along the Silk Road into China, and from there to the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese Archipelago, forming an essential component of East Asian civilization. To be more precise, the new developments of Buddhism in the Gandhara region had a profound impact on various aspects, including artistic creation. This is the historical backdrop against which Gandharan art, unique in the history of human civilization, emerged. Within this context, the Bodhisattva appeared as a core concept.

In the Mahayana Buddhism that arose in Gandhara, the core belief and ideal shifted from pursuing individual self-salvation to advocating the salvation of all sentient beings. Based on this, the path of self-liberation was termed "Hinayana" (the Lesser Vehicle), while the path of universal

salvation was called "Mahayana" (the Great Vehicle). The concept that best embodies this core ideal of Mahayana Buddhism is the Bodhisattva. It is generally believed that the concept of the Bodhisattva emerged around the beginning of the Common Era, distinguishing itself from earlier traditions. However, there is no historical evidence to prove whether intense competition or conflict existed between them, and such details remain unknown. The Bodhisattva faith is a key characteristic of Mahayana Buddhism. As Buddhism was transmitted to China, and then to Japan and the Korean Peninsula, the East Asian Bodhisattva faith also reached its peak, becoming a major component of the East Asian religious world.

In 1980, a gold scroll inscribed with Gandhari language and dated to 14 CE was unearthed from a stupa site in the modern-day Swat region (Udyāna). This inscription mentions Maitreya. This is the earliest archaeological evidence concerning Maitreya. Although the historical background and many details of the rise of the Maitreya faith remain shrouded in mystery, it is generally inferred that the Maitreya faith originated in Gandhara, then traveled along the Silk Road from Central Asia into China, reaching its zenith during its dissemination. During China's Northern and Southern Dynasties period, and even the Silla period in Korea, the Maitreya faith not only became extremely important and widely accepted in the religious world but also served as a tool for political mobilization, playing a significant role in political fluctuations and social changes. The Maitreya faith, especially the belief in Maitreya's descent to the human world (Maitreya's advent), played an undeniable role in the historical development of East Asia.

In Buddhism, the savior is not Śākyamuni but Maitreya, the Future Buddha—a characteristic that distinguishes Buddhism from many other religions. The rise of the Maitreya faith is likely closely related to the political propaganda and cultural traditions of the Kushan Empire. Primitive Indian Buddhism did not possess such a strong savior faith. Maitreya, as the Buddhist savior and Future Buddha, appears on the coins of the Kushan emperor Kaniṣka. On Kaniṣka's coins, Maitreya is depicted in a crossed-ankle seated posture (padmāsana), wearing earrings and armlets. His right hand is raised in the abhayamudrā (gesture of fearlessness), and his left hand holds a flask. Around him, the inscription in Greek letters reads "Metrago Boudo" (Maitreya Buddha). It is noteworthy that although Maitreya's appearance on Kaniṣka's coins is that of a Bodhisattva, he is referred to as "Buddha." This reflects Maitreya's dual nature: on one hand,

he is a Bodhisattva, but on the other, he is the Future Buddha who will inherit Śākyamuni's mission in times to come. On Kaniṣka's coins, images of both Maitreya and the Buddha (Śākyamuni) appear, indicating their coexistence. The fact that Maitreya's image could be minted on coins also demonstrates that, at least by the reign of Kaniṣka (2nd century CE), the Maitreya faith had already gained widespread acceptance and royal support. At least during Kaniṣka's era, the concept of Maitreya as the Future Buddha was already very popular. Maitreya carries strong political connotations. For this reason, his relationship with the Buddhist ideal of the Chakravartin (Wheel-Turning King) became extremely significant. Figures such as Kaniṣka, Emperor Wu of Liang, Emperor Wen of Sui, and Wu Zetian all exploited the relationship between the Maitreya faith and the Chakravartin as a theoretical weapon in their political maneuvers.

Maitreya's threefold identity (as Bodhisattva, Future Buddha, and Savior) places him in a very special position within the Buddhist cosmic and temporal worldview. After the rise of the Maitreya faith, it merged with the faith of the Seven Buddhas in the Gandhara region, leading to the development of the "Seven Buddhas and One Bodhisattva" iconographic composition.

The large number of Maitreya images discovered in Gandhara attests to the popularity of the Maitreya faith. Artistic creation closely associated with the belief in Maitreya's descent was the construction of colossal Buddha statues. Ancient India had no tradition of making colossal Buddha statues, and statues reaching 10 meters in height are rarely seen. The known colossal Maitreya statues were constructed in what is now northern Pakistan, dating to the 4th century. According to the belief in Maitreya's descent, Maitreya will descend from the Tushita Heaven to the human world. Simultaneously, the ideal Buddhist monarch, the Chakravartin (Wheel-Turning King), will also appear. Under his rule, the world will be abundant, and the people will be at peace. From the basic tenets of the descent faith, it is clear that it is closely connected to secular kingship and embodies a religious-political ideology imbued with strong political prophecy and utopian elements. In this context, the construction of colossal Maitreya statues became linked to both secular royal authority and the Buddhist faith. From Central Asia to China, building colossal Maitreya statues was both a religious activity and often a form of political propaganda.

The construction of colossal Maitreya statues even influenced Japan. During the Nara period, Japan also undertook the construction of colossal Maitreya statues closely associated with imperial

authority. After the 7th century, the carving of colossal Maitreya statues in China declined. Maitreya worship gradually receded from the center of faith, its position replaced by Amitabha Buddha and Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva. This outcome is likely related to the intensely political nature of the Maitreya faith. Reflected in Buddhist art, even the image of Maitreya underwent a fundamental change. The image of Maitreya Bodhisattva transformed from a handsome, heroic, and princely figure into a pot-bellied, obese figure.

From Lay Physician to Medicine Buddha: Ethics in the Lives of Jīvaka and Yutok

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Abstract

Medical ethics, in the Buddhist world as elsewhere, do not exist as a set of abstract principles imposed upon an otherwise neutral practice of healing. They emerge organically from the narratives, rituals, and practical contexts by which communities define health, diagnose disease, and evaluate the efficacy of their therapies. To explore how these ethics have been constituted and transformed across Buddhist history, this paper focuses on the prescriptive life stories of two paradigmatic Buddhist physicians: Jīvaka Kaumārabhṛtya, the celebrated lay physician of early Indian Buddhism, and Yutok Yönten Gönpo the Elder, the legendary founder of Tibetan medicine whose hagiography is preserved in the seventeenth-century Sealed Biography. Taken together, these two narratives illuminate a Buddhist ethical transformation from the subordination of medical knowledge and practice to the radical identification of the physician as the Buddha himself.

In the canonical sources of early Buddhism, represented here by the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya preserved in the Tibetan Canon of Translated Scriptures, Jīvaka Kaumārabhṛtya serves as the paradigmatic lay Buddhist physician. Born of ambiguous parentage in Rājagṛha and raised by Prince Abhaya, Jīvaka travels to Takṣaśilā to study medicine under the legendary sage Ātreya before

returning to serve at the courts of King Bimbisāra and, later, the patricidal King Ajātaśatru. In these narratives, Jīvaka's medical practice is fundamentally professional; he earns his livelihood through his skills, deploys therapeutically deceptive methods when necessary, and repays his debts to teacher, guardian, and patron with appropriate gifts and donations. When Jīvaka treats the king of Videha and receives a priceless cloak in return, he presents it to the Buddha himself, resulting in a new rule that permits monks to wear the dyed garments of householders. This pattern is repeated throughout his life story, and it establishes the ethical template of the early Buddhist physician. Jīvaka is a lay professional who supports the Three Jewels through generous patronage, maintaining clear boundaries between his worldly expertise and the transcendent teachings of the Buddha.

That boundary is made explicit in the climactic scene of Jīvaka's biography. Having achieved renown as the foremost physician of his age, Jīvaka develops a moment of pride and declares that no other physician is his equal. The Buddha immediately corrects him, however; while Jīvaka may indeed be the greatest physician of worldly bodies, the Buddha alone possesses the medicine that heals sufferings of birth, old age, disease, and death at their roots. As shown in this moment of subordination, Jīvaka's medical knowledge, however extraordinary, remains secondary to the Buddha's transcendent wisdom. The physician may heal the manifestations of suffering, but only the Buddha can heal its causes. According to this early Buddhist model, still predominant in some communities, a lay physician earns money, practices generosity, and supports the monastic community, but does not and cannot embody the Three Jewels himself. The canonical Vinaya, moreover, explicitly forbids ordained monks and nuns from practicing medicine professionally, reinforcing the structural boundary between the worldly profession of healing and the path to liberation.

The scriptures and treatises of the Greater Vehicle and especially Tantric Buddhism challenge the boundary that separates the worldly from the transcendent. Prominent Mahāyāna thinkers like Vasubandhu, for example, canonized medical knowledge as one of the five fields of knowledge necessary on the bodhisattva path to omniscience. The Sūtra of Golden Light presents the study and practice of medicine as a direct expression of compassion on the bodhisattva path. By the time these texts were translated into Tibetan over the eighth and ninth centuries, the canonical ethics of

Buddhism had reached a dialogical stage; the Vinaya continued to depict the physician as a lay patron of the monastic order, while Greater Vehicle treatises and scriptures directed all bodhisattvas, lay and monastic alike, to learn and practice medicine for the benefit of others. The stage was set for a more radical reimagining of what it means to be a Buddhist physician.

That reimagining is fully realized in the Sealed Biography of Yutok Yönten Gönpo the Elder, first published in the seventeenth century at the court of the Fifth Dalai Lama. As the late scholar Yang Ga has convincingly argued, the life story synthesizes creative hagiographies composed over the preceding two centuries to produce a foundational narrative for the practice of Tibetan medicine. In this narrative, Yutok Yönten Gönpo is simultaneously a reincarnation of Jīvaka Kaumārabhṛtya, an emanation of the Medicine Buddha (Bhaiṣajyaguru), and a living embodiment of the scriptural teachings themselves. Emperor Tri Songdetsen addresses him as the "speech emanation of the Buddha, Master of Medicine," for example, and his mother dreams that both Jīvaka and the Medicine Buddha reside within her womb alongside the enlightened Bodhisattva of Wisdom, Mañjuśrī. This narrative systematically dissolves the boundaries that once separated the worldly healer from the transcendent teacher and that structured early Buddhist medical ethics, allowing for a new identification of the physician as a compassionate manifestation of enlightened activity.

The Sealed Biography effects this dissolution through the transformative technologies of narrative, meditation, and ritual. In Yutok's deathbed instructions to his disciples, for example, practitioners are directed to visualize this world as a pure land of beryl, their own bodies as divine palaces, and their physician-teacher as the Medicine Buddha in human form. "When you observe with the eye of insight," the narrative declares, "the teacher, the King of Physicians, the Buddha, and the human-formed Yutok Gönpo are indivisible, like butter poured into butter or water poured into water." Through such meditative identification, physicians do not merely emulate or signify an ethical ideal, they ritually become it. In the Tantric Buddhist framework of Tibetan medicine, and as expressed in the foundational scripture of the Four Tantras, "by healing patients and abandoning thoughts of deception, one will progress to the stage of unsurpassed buddhahood." For the followers of Yutok and other practitioners of Tibetan medicine, therefore, the professional practice of medicine can be a complete path to unsurpassed enlightenment.

The significance of this transformation extends beyond the historical or legendary figures of Jīvaka and Yutok. In early Buddhist contexts, medical practice remains categorically external to the Buddha, his teachings, and the monastic community. The physician might support the Three Jewels as a lay patron, but they do not and cannot embody them. In the Tantric Buddhist vision of the Sealed Biography, however, all three converge in the figure of the accomplished physician. The healer is the Buddha, transmitted medical knowledge is the Dharma, and the lineage of compassionate practitioners constitutes the Sangha. Despite this historical convergence, twenty-first-century practitioners of Tibetan medicine throughout the world are overwhelmingly lay practitioners who operate in pluralistic medical environments alongside biomedicine and other healing traditions. Even so, the ethical framework bequeathed by the Tantric tradition, crystallized in texts like the Sealed Biography and the Four Tantras, remains available to them as a potentially transcendent and transformative resource. What it offers is a vision of what medical practice can be, a transformative "as-if world" that is accessible through narrative identification and meditative practice, in which compassionate healing activity can itself be a vehicle for awakening. In studying the lives of Jīvaka and Yutok, contemporary physicians, scholars, and patients alike are invited to recognize that the Buddha, his teachings, and his followers need not remain external objects of devotion; they can be realized as the very nature of healing activity in this world of birth, aging, disease, and death.

Beyond Mindfulness: Buddhism & Health in the US

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Abstract

While an increasing amount of scholarly and popular attention has been paid to mindfulness meditation in recent decades, the broader impact of Buddhism on healthcare in the United States remains much in need of investigation. This presentation summarizes findings from three complementary studies exploring the role of Buddhist institutions, practices, and communities in shaping the American healthcare landscape. The first, a national online survey of American Buddhists, found near-universal conviction that Buddhism positively influences both mental and physical health, and revealed a far wider range of health-related practices than the meditation-centered literature would suggest. The second, a series of in-depth interviews with Buddhist healers drawn from diverse sectarian, ethnic, and professional backgrounds, identified four distinct practitioner orientations and confirmed that American Buddhist healers consistently refuse the sharp division between physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing that Western medicine assumes. The third, a multi-sited ethnographic study of roughly forty-five Buddhist institutions in the greater Philadelphia area, demonstrated that Buddhist communities function as significant but largely invisible nodes in the American healthcare system, providing ritual healing, traditional

medicine, social support, navigational assistance, and collective trauma processing for populations that mainstream medicine underserves. Taken together, these studies argue that macro-level categories such as sect, and ethnicity are insufficient analytical tools, and that a more granular attention to local factors is required to understand how Buddhist healing actually operates in specific communities. I conclude that Buddhism functions as a substantial yet unrecognized complement to formal medical care in the contemporary US.

Buddhism and health have been inseparably intertwined since the very origins of the tradition 2500 years ago. As Buddhism spread across Asia in the first centuries CE, medical ideas and practices were at the center of its multidirectional processes of cross-cultural exchange (Salguero 2022a). Buddhists around the world today continue to draw upon the religion for ideas and practices that promote wellbeing. In the US, the most prominent connection between Buddhism and health in the last few decades has been the effort to scientifically prove the medical benefits of meditation. However, American Buddhist attitudes toward health are influenced by a much wider range of ideas and practices than this focus on meditation would suggest.

Over roughly a decade of research across the United States, I have attempted to understand how Buddhist healing actually unfolds in the lives of communities and individuals through three complementary methodological approaches: a national online survey, in-depth interviews with Buddhist healers, and a multimedia ethnographic research project at Buddhist institutions across the greater Philadelphia area. Together, these three studies have revealed a Buddhist healing landscape far more diverse and complex than anticipated — one that has consistently refused the compartmentalization that Buddhist studies scholars often take for granted.

Buddhism & Health Survey

The online survey (Salguero 2022b) involved 141 self-identified Buddhists: 23% Asian and 62% white, drawn from a wide cross-section of income levels, split nearly 50-50 by gender, and representing zip codes from across the United States. Respondents spanned a wide range of sectarian traditions, from Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana, modern, and non-sectarian groups, and were highly committed practitioners, with 80% reporting daily practice.

The most significant finding was that across races, income levels, ages, and sectarian affiliations, American Buddhists expressed strong conviction that their tradition positively influenced their wellbeing. Nearly 90% perceived benefits for mental health, while over 75% perceived benefits for physical health. When asked which practices they associated with health, respondents did not limit themselves to meditation. While meditation appeared in over 80% of responses, it was followed by participation in Buddhist groups, cultural activities, social gatherings, and chanting (approximately half), and healing rituals, classes, and visualization practices (approximately a third). When it was mentioned, the term "meditation" itself encompassed an extraordinary diversity of practices — mindfulness, Zen sitting, insight meditation, loving kindness cultivation, walking meditation, Tibetan yoga, and others — functioning as a catch-all that obscured significant differences in technique, intention, and cultural context.

The most commonly reported health benefit of Buddhist practice was emotional regulation, cited by over 60% of respondents, followed by enhanced mind-body connection (over half) and, notably, social connection (51%) — a finding that challenged the dominant Western image of Buddhist practice as a solitary, individualized pursuit.

A follow-up with study participants asking questions about the COVID-19 pandemic gathered 65 responses on how Buddhist practice influenced practitioners' experience of the crisis. Respondents consistently mentioned Buddhist teachings such as forbearance (the capacity to find equanimity in the face of catastrophe), interdependence, impermanence, and the inevitability of suffering to make sense of events, crediting these Buddhist frameworks as enabling them to transform personal anxieties into experiences of connection and compassionate care.

Types of Buddhist Healers

While the survey was ongoing, I also was conducting in-depth interviews with 36 Buddhist healers across the country (Salguero 2024), including monks and nuns, acupuncturists, massage therapists, hospital chaplains, hospice workers, community leaders, and self-styled Buddhist shamans — again diverse in race, age, gender, location, and sect. Conversations accumulated a transcript of nearly 300,000 words.

Every interviewee mentioned meditation, but it was never the end of the story. They also discussed qi, prana, and chakras; the power of mantra, chanting, and visualization; compassion as a healing force; and the importance of lineage and proper transmission. Almost all refused the sharp division between mental and physical wellbeing that Western medicine assumes, while nearly all emphasized that Buddhist practice worked alongside, rather than in place of, conventional medical care.

Analysis of the transcripts yielded four distinct "positionalities," vantage points from which practitioners engaged with the intersections of Buddhism and health:

1. The first comprised practitioners inside mainstream healthcare institutions, whose approach was distinguished by an emphasis on mindfulness and simple presence: the healing power of being with someone who is suffering, attentive to them without agenda.

2. The second group were practitioners of traditional Asian medicine — acupuncturists, herbalists, and practitioners of Tibetan Sowa Rigpa and Thai traditional medicine — who integrated Buddhism into these healing systems on the conviction that spiritual and physical dimensions of health cannot be separated. These groups emphasized lineage, ancient texts, and proper transmission.

3. The third and largest group were Dharma teachers who saw health benefits as a natural outgrowth of spiritual development. They emphasized the transformative power of sustained practice and healing in the broadest sense, including social and collective transformation.

4. The fourth and smallest group were practitioners who had created highly personalized blends of Buddhist practice with New Age spirituality, Chinese healing practices, Reiki, and other healing arts. These individuals worked outside formal institutional affiliations, emphasizing individual abilities and special powers.

Interestingly, these four positionalities cut across sect, cultural background, gender, and other demographic categories.

Multimedia Ethnography in Philadelphia

The third project (Salguero 2019), which ran from 2015–2020 under the name "the Jivaka Project," involved approximately one hundred students conducting participant-observation ethnography at roughly forty-five Buddhist institutions across the greater Philadelphia area. The goal of the project was to make visible what had been hiding in plain sight: how temples act as healthcare resources for Asian American Buddhist communities across Philadelphia.

Student teams conducted interviews with monastics, teachers, and community representatives, collecting information on ritual practices, material culture, and member demographics, with particular focus on how Buddhist institutions contributed to the healthcare landscape of the region. In the project's final years, I collaborated with documentary filmmaker Lan A. Li to produce six short films (Salguero & Li 2019).

Philadelphia's Buddhist landscape reflects decades of immigration shaped by war, politics, and the search for opportunity. The city now hosts dozens of institutions serving Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Cambodian, Taiwanese, Lao, Burmese, Japanese, Mongol, Kalmyk, Sri Lankan, and Thai communities across all major Buddhist schools and several modern movements. The healing landscape across these sites proved extraordinarily diverse.

The project's findings push well beyond the mindfulness-centered narrative that has dominated scholarship on Buddhism and health in the United States. While meditation appeared across many institutions, the vast majority of temples serving Asian immigrant communities neither taught it publicly nor included it in regular weekly services. Far more prevalent were ritual healing practices — chanting of texts such as the Medicine Buddha Sūtra, the Heart Sūtra, and the Great Compassion Dhāraṇī — along with food-based health knowledge circulating through temple kitchens, traditional Asian medicine practices exchanged informally before and after ceremonies, and the social and navigational support that temples provided to members interfacing with the mainstream healthcare system. For refugee communities, the temple's most significant healing function was helping to process collective trauma, providing space within which scattered and traumatized populations could reconstitute themselves and integrate their experiences within Buddhist frameworks of impermanence and suffering. Philadelphia, in short, emerges from this

research not as a peripheral outpost of Asian religious practice but as a genuine node in the global Buddhist world, where healing traditions originating across Asia are actively practiced, adapted, and transmitted.

At the same time, the project demonstrated that neither sect, ethnicity, nor the familiar "two Buddhisms" taxonomy — which divides American Buddhism into "ethnic" and "convert" streams — can adequately account for what is actually happening on the ground. Two Chinese temples can differ from each other as much as either differs from a Lao Theravāda community. A Vietnamese Mahāyāna temple may host Theravāda jhāna meditation transmitted through a white American teacher. What actually shapes Buddhist healing at any given institution is a more granular configuration of local factors: the socioeconomic profile of the community served, the demographics of the surrounding neighborhood, the institution's connectivity to transnational networks and access to imported resources, the presence or absence of robust social media connections, and whether any individual member happens to possess healthcare expertise. A single nurse or insurance company representative in the congregation could transform what a temple was able to access. These meso- and micro-level factors present affordances that communities draw upon and obstacles they must navigate, resulting in healing repertoires that are unique to each institution and that cannot be predicted from macro-level categories alone.

Conclusion

Taken together, the survey, interviews, and ethnographic work confirm that Buddhist medicine in America, as elsewhere, is never a single pure thing but a complex and amorphous ecosystem of diverse ideas and practices, one in which practitioners are not passive recipients of tradition but active architects of something new. At the same time, these three studies collectively make a methodological argument: that the outsized scholarly attention paid to mindfulness has obscured far more than it has revealed about the actual role of Buddhism in American healthcare. The communities most underrepresented in that literature turn out, on closer inspection, to be doing some of the most consequential health-related work in Buddhist communities.

Across all three studies, moreover, a consistent finding was that Buddhist institutions, practices, and communities were filling significant gaps in the mainstream healthcare system:

providing services, frameworks, and forms of support that secular medicine neither offers nor, in many cases, recognizes as important. What emerges is a picture of Buddhism functioning as a largely invisible, but fundamentally critical, complement to formal medical care.

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Chasing the Sarus Cranes: Buddhist and Hindu Multispecies Assemblages in Lumbini, Nepal

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Abstract

Once common across Nepal and northern India, Sarus Cranes (Grus Antigone) are now an endangered species. Today, 94% of Nepal's Sarus cranes choose to reside in the Lumbini area, the birthplace of Buddha Gautama. Why is Lumbini so attractive to the cranes? To answer this question, I examine the major actors (human and nonhuman), and environmental conditions and habitats, in the lives of these largest flying birds of the world, through what Bruno Latour calls Actor-Network-Theory (ANT). I try to give agency to the cranes by imagining what might be attractive about this place to the cranes. Is it the abundance of rivers and lakes?

The local subtropical climate, the land fronting onto the hot Gangetic plains? Or perhaps it is the wet rice paddies and local agricultural produce, which provide the cranes with food and protection from predators for their nests? Or is it the Buddho-Hindu religious culture of the local human inhabitants?

Today in Lumbini, there is a community of foreign Buddhist monastics and lay people resident in this religious pilgrimage site, as well as local Nepalese environmental NGOs. Too often,

both secular environmentalists and the new field of Multispecies Studies neglect to consider ancient and living religious cultures, whose teachings may be more effective in environmental protection than scientific arguments.

This paper shows that the rich multispecies narratives of Buddhism and Hinduism, in which humans interact and communicate with animals, plants, and divinities, deploying them in ethical teachings that extend to more-than-human sentient beings, matter a great deal to environmental efforts today. The paper showcases the value and contributions of both the ethnographic method, as well as the textual study of ancient religious scriptures.

A Study of the Concept of "Animals Repaying Debts of Gratitude"〈動物報恩〉in Tzu Chi Teachings

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Abstract

As is well-known, the Chinese Buddhist view of filial piety is an important aspect of Chinese Buddhist ethics. Over time, the Buddhist view of filial piety became closer to Confucian ethics, forming a unity of Buddhist teachings on filial piety, exhortation to practice filial piety, and assistance to the world in practicing filial piety. One popular text in Chinese Buddhism has been *The Buddha Speaks the Sutra on the Deep Kindness of Parents and the Difficulty of Repaying It*《佛說父母恩重難報經》. This sutra is of fundamental importance in the Tzu Chi teachings. The present paper will look at an aspect of "repaying kindness" (*bao'en*) less studied, that of animals and *bao'en* in both premodern and modern Chinese Buddhist texts, including those of Tzu Chi.

Thus far there is no research on animals and *bao'en* in Tzu Chi teachings, so this paper will fill a gap in scholarship. As seen in Ambros (2025)[1], there is scholarship on animals in early Buddhism

[1] Barbara R. Ambros, "Buddhism and Animals," Oxford Bibliographies Online,

in India; Buddhism in Medieval and Late Imperial China; Buddhism in Japan and Tibet, but very little on contemporary Chinese Buddhism, besides vegetarian and "releasing life" 放生 practices. As for Buddhism and children's literature in Taiwan, with some discussion of animals, see Natasha Heller (2024), *Literature for Little Bodhisattvas: Making Buddhist Families in Modern Taiwan*.

I first undertake comparative textual analysis of several classic Chinese texts with the theme of "Animals Repaying Debts of Gratitude," 動物報恩 including:

a. Pu Songling's *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* 聊齋誌異 (late 17th c)
b. Lianchi Zhuhong (1535–1615), "Illustrations of Releasing Life" 蓮池袾宏（1535 年—1615 年）《放生圖》
c. Xu Qian (Qing dynasty), "Animals Are Like This Too" 徐謙著, (清代)《物猶如此》
d. The stories of animals repaying kindness in *Protecting Life Picture Collection* by Feng Zikai, such as stories from "Illustrations of Animals" (edited by Yuguazhai, 1946) 豐子愷著，《護生畫集》裡面的《動物鑑》（欲寡齋主編，1946）.

Then I examine Master Cheng Yen's writings and speeches on the topic of "Animals Repaying Debts of Gratitude." The question thus becomes, to paraphrase Lina Verchery, "what or whom" do Tzu Chi teachings portray "when they see animals?"[2] Do Tzu Chi teachings see animals (in the narratives) as ontologically serious, or merely pedagogical for children? Here we explore Marian Scholtmeijer's idea that the truth of nonhuman animals is that "they are the 'blank paper' on which human beings write messages to themselves."[3]

I explore why in many cases Tzu Chi presents these "Animals Repaying Debts of Gratitude" stories as teachings for children and if this phenomenon is related to certain tendencies in Buddhist Modernism and the focus on humans in *renjian fojiao*: Could it be that animal–human karmic bonds are seen as mythic, pre-modern, or didactic, rather than ontologically serious? Naomi Appleton (Jātaka Stories in Theravāda Buddhism) shows that Jātakas were ritual, ethical,

DOI: 10.1093/OBO/9780195393521-0290.

[2] Lina Verchery, 2019. "Both Like and Unlike: Rebirth, Olfaction, and the Transspecies Imagination in Modern Chinese Buddhism" *Religions* 10, no. 6: 364. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10060364_

[3] Sue Walsh, "Child/Animal: It's the 'Real' Thing," *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 32, 2002:159.

and cosmological texts, not stories for children. Animals in Buddhist literature are often depicted as metaphors or symbols but also have received significant attention as living, sentient beings and share a profound kinship with humans.

This paper on "Animals Repaying Debts of Gratitude" takes up Lina Verchery's call as follows:

Responding to recent trends in the Humanities calling for an expanded notion of ontological continuity between the human and non-human—notably inspired by critical animal studies, post-humanism, the new materialism, and the "ontological turn" — [Buddhist cosmology including ideas about animals] present resources for moral reflection that can challenge and enrich current mainstream thinking about humanity's relation to the nonhuman world.[4]

Also, to paraphrase Guo Wu: The Buddhist idea of cherishing all sentient beings is not merely based on compassion but also an egalitarian perspective that acknowledges animals' subjectivity as autonomous emotional-moral agents.[5] This "unique dimension" of Buddhism is an excellent entry point to revisit *renjian fojiao* that is already a century old and further update *renjian fojiao* for the 21st century full of global ecological crises that impact humans and animals alike. Furthermore, Buddhism's "unique dimension" can fruitfully engage with current debates in posthumanism. "Posthumanism and transhumanism emerged in the early twenty-first century in response to the humanism of the modern Western Enlightenment. Posthumanism criticizes humanism's Eurocentric, rationalistic, anthropocentric, and patriarchal assumptions as excluding most human beings and as posing a threat to other forms of life and to the biosphere, thereby endangering the human future itself."[6] Posthumanism "... seeks to undermine the traditionally firm boundaries between the human, the animal, and the technological."[7] I agree with Verchery

[4] Lina Verchery, 2019. "Both Like and Unlike: Rebirth, Olfaction, and the Transspecies Imagination in Modern Chinese Buddhism" *Religions* 10, no. 6: 364. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10060364_

[5] Guo Wu, "From the Deer to the Monkey: how the transmission of the Jātaka animal stories to medieval China enriched Chinese culture and complemented Confucianism," *Studies in Chinese Religions*, 9:3, 273–289, 2023, DOI: 10.1080/23729988.2023.2284006.

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that "[a]l resolutely post-modern in flavor, the theoretical approaches in many of these [posthumanist] works can be seen, ironically, to recapitulate many very old Buddhist ideas.

The topic of "Animals Repaying Debts of Gratitude" 動物報恩 invites a reexamination of how the core Confucian concept of 孝 has been integrated with Buddhist concepts such as karma, rebirth, compassion, nonviolence, meat-eating, vegetarianism, and ritual practice. In Buddhist ontology, the animal realm, one of the six realms of rebirth and the only one fully coexisting with the human realm, conveys moral lessons for humans and the entire globe. This paper's findings will make contributions to several fields: Buddhist theory and practice in contemporary Taiwan; religion and animal studies; Buddhism and animal ethics; and posthuman studies.

Philosophy (eds K.B. Jensen, E.W. Rothenbuhler, J.D. Pooley and R.T. Craig).

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Day 2:
Venerable Cheng Yen's Philosophy and Leadership

The Vijñapti-Mātratā Thought of Dharma Master Cheng Yen

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Tzu Chi Charity Foundation

Abstract

Dharma Master Cheng Yen's appropriation of Vijñapti-mātratā (Consciousness-Only) thought emphasizes transforming defilement into purity and consciousness into wisdom. Every state of experience is an opportunity for Buddhahood: wisdom is tempered amid impurity, and Buddhahood is realized through the work of liberating sentient beings in the human world. Sentient beings are defiled, yet the bodhisattva enters the mud without being stained; not only does the bodhisattva remain unstained, but the mud itself becomes nourishment for the realization of Buddhahood, culminating in the Great Perfect Mirror Wisdom.

Dharma Master Cheng Yen explains the relationship among the sixth, seventh, and eighth consciousnesses very clearly. The sixth consciousness becomes stained by the six sense objects and transmits these impressions to the seventh consciousness, which solidifies such sensory impressions into concepts and awareness. The six consciousnesses are the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind consciousnesses. Their six contacts correspond to the six sense objects: form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and dharmas. These defilements then establish a sense of self, which is the manas, or the seventh consciousness. The seventh consciousness gathers together all the thoughts, desires,

emotions, and other impressions arising from the defilement of the six consciousnesses by the six sense objects. It then continuously returns these to the sixth consciousness, where defilement continues and karmic action is further generated. All such defilement and karmic action are stored in the eighth consciousness. In the field of the eighth consciousness, wholesome seeds lead to heaven, and unwholesome seeds lead to hell. Both good and evil are present in the human world.

For this reason, Dharma Master Cheng Yen emphasizes the importance of doing good. Only by doing good can consciousness become pure and undefiled, thereby accomplishing a life of wisdom. When goodness is complete, one can attain heaven. Yet even then, one should not become attached to heaven but should return to the human world; only by liberating beings in a world intertwined with good and evil can one ultimately attain Buddhahood. How, then, can this path of goodness be made firm? Master Cheng Yen believes that doing good is not enough; one must also establish right understanding at the root and comprehend the principles of the world. As she said:

> Doing good is part of being in the human world, so the human world is good for practice. As for evil, we must be proper and disciplined, and not allow ourselves to be defiled by evil. Goodness is what one should naturally do. 'At birth, human nature is inherently good'—one is originally meant to do good. But doing good alone is still not enough; this is goodness mixed with impurity, because we still do not understand principle. Because principle is not yet understood, it is easy to be led astray by temptation.

Therefore, Dharma Master Cheng Yen holds that we can transform the five discriminating consciousnesses—eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body—into wisdom that benefits others. The eyes behold the suffering of beings, the ears hear the voices of beings, the nose perceives the conditions of beings, the mouth speaks wondrous and wholesome words, and the body performs good deeds to benefit sentient beings. In this way, the five consciousnesses can all become pure consciousnesses. As for Wondrous Observing Wisdom, it is the transformation of the sixth consciousness into Wondrous Observing Wisdom. When you see the needs of others, you must understand them,

awaken loving-kindness, and help those in suffering; resolving others' suffering is called Wondrous Observing Wisdom. In other words, the five consciousnesses of eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body are not evil; they are good. They are for evaluating, observing, understanding, and knowing.

In our sixth consciousness, our mind-consciousness, we inspire, help, and put things into practice. Thus, Dharma Master Cheng Yen speaks of the five consciousnesses and the sixth consciousness as highly valuable. Where does this value lie? In fact, it lies in the ability to help others and benefit others. By benefiting others, one dissolves the attachment of the five and sixth consciousnesses to the self and the confinement of the self-centered frame. This is a profound and subtle way of thinking, and also a method we can practice.

From Accomplishing-what-is-to-be-done Wisdom to Wondrous Observing Wisdom, the five and sixth consciousnesses can be transformed into wisdom. The Master explains that the five consciousnesses are transformed into Accomplishing-what-is-to-be-done Wisdom; the sixth consciousness is transformed into Wondrous Observing Wisdom; and the seventh consciousness is transformed into the Wisdom of Equality, so that one can finally reach the Great Perfect Mirror Wisdom of the eighth consciousness.

Dharma Master Cheng Yen uses Vijñapti-mātratāto explain the practice of benefiting others, and her exposition is very complete. Consciousness can discriminate this world, but wisdom can benefit this world. If you can benefit others, then your five, six, seven, and eight consciousnesses are all complete wisdom.

The functions of the first five consciousnesses, namely eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body, are cognition and discrimination, namely sensory functions such as sight, hearing, taste, smell, and bodily touch. The five consciousnesses themselves have no independent activity; when the five consciousnesses arise together, the sixth consciousness arises simultaneously. The sixth consciousness is used to distinguish the objects apprehended by the first five consciousnesses. When thoughts arise in the sixth consciousness, it clearly discriminates the objects of the first five consciousnesses. When the sixth consciousness is transformed into Wondrous Observing Wisdom, the mind will no longer be carried along by changes in conditions and circumstances. Through the transformation of the seventh consciousness into the Wisdom of Equality, the first six

consciousnesses also become purified, and one will no longer cling to selfish, self-centered value judgments. In any circumstance, one can then treat self and others with equality and relate to all conditions in this way, thereby giving positive meaning to life. When the seeds stored in the eighth consciousness, the ālaya-consciousness, are transformed from defilement into purity, this is the complete wisdom of Great Perfect Mirror Wisdom.

From Humanistic Buddhism to the Religious Dharma Master Cheng Yen

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Abstract

This article traces the spiritual and intellectual trajectory from the tradition of Humanistic Buddhism (Renjian Fojiao 人間佛教) to the distinctive religious vision of Dharma Master Cheng Yen (證嚴法師, b. 1937), founder of the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation and architect of the Jing Si Dharma Lineage (Jingsi Famai 靜思法脈) and the Tzu Chi School of Buddhism (Ciji Zongmen 慈濟宗門). The central argument is that while Cheng Yen's religious worldview is inspired by the Humanistic Buddhist tradition inherited from Venerable Taixu (太虛, 1890–1947) and Venerable Yinshun (印順, 1906–2005), her vision constitutes a qualitatively distinctive development — a lived religion of engaged compassion and Great Love (Da Ai 大愛) that both continues and transcends its inherited framework in significant ways.

Genealogy and Transformation

Humanistic Buddhism originated with Master Taixu, who argued that authentic Buddhism must address the living conditions of human beings in the present world, rejecting the funerary preoccupations and superstitious deviations he perceived in contemporary Chinese Buddhism.

Venerable Yinshun subsequently provided this vision with systematic philosophical grounding, rooting it in the canonical teachings of the historical Buddha and articulating the ideal of a "Pure Land on Earth" (人間淨土) as the eschatological horizon of engaged Buddhist practice. At her ordination, Ven. Yinshun gave Ven. Cheng Yen the defining commission — "For Buddhism and for all sentient beings" (為佛教，為眾生) — that became the generative nucleus of her entire religious project.

Ven. Cheng Yen's contribution introduces three critical transitions that distinguish it from her predecessors' work. First, where Taixu and Yinshun engaged primarily in doctrinal reform and intellectual systematization, Cheng Yen achieved comprehensive institutionalization, building a global organization with hospitals, schools, media networks, and disaster-relief operations spanning more than 60 countries. Second, where earlier Humanistic Buddhist thought addressed the Chinese Buddhist community principally, her approach is constitutively universalist, extending beyond a single religious, ethnic, or cultural community. Third, and most theologically significant, Ven. Cheng Yen reframes the very concept of religion — moving from a tradition-specific soteriology to a universal ethic of Great Love understood as the common ground of all authentic religious life.

Ethics as Soteriology: Goodness as the Gateway

The heart of Ven. Cheng Yen's practice-oriented teaching is the principle that "the door of goodness is the gateway to the Buddha's gate" (善門入佛門). Drawing on the canonical priority of ethical conduct (Śīla) as the foundation of the threefold training, she argues that the most accessible entry into Buddhist practice for ordinary people is not only doctrinal study or meditative technique, but the sincere and selfless service of others. Her celebrated pedagogical formulation — "sutras are paths, and paths are for walking" (經者道也，道者路也) — expresses a distinctive epistemological claim: that the Dharma must be enacted and embodied to be understood, and that participation in compassionate service generates experiential insight into the First Noble Truth of suffering, and also Impermanence and Interdependent Arising in ways that textual study alone cannot produce.

This approach finds its soteriological expression in Ven. Cheng Yen's application of the

"Threefold Emptiness of Giving" (三輪體空) — the recognition that authentic generosity involves no substantial giver, recipient, or gift. Translating this Mahayana metaphysical principle into a concrete psychological discipline, she instructs practitioners not only to give without seeking return, but to "express gratitude to the recipient" (付出無所求還要感恩), thereby systematically diminishing ego-clinging through altruistic exercise. The implicit claim is significant: compassionate service, properly understood and practiced, is not merely morally good but is itself an inseparable path to enlightenment — a realization of the Bodhisattva path (菩薩道) made concretely available to ordinary laypeople in contemporary conditions.

Great Love and Interfaith Engagement

Ven. Cheng Yen's most theologically original contribution is her systematic reinterpretation of religion itself. Analyzing the Chinese term zongjiao (宗教), she defines zong (宗) as the "guiding purpose of life" and jiao (教) as "education for living," deriving a functional definition of religion grounded not in theoretical content or institutional affiliation but in its capacity to guide human beings toward goodness and compassionate action. On this basis, she holds that all authentic religions share the same fundamental orientation: as the Jing Si Aphorism (靜思語) expresses it, "Religions are largely the same, with minor differences; the difference lies in the breadth of one's mind" (宗教是大同小異，心大則同，心小則異).

The concept of Great Love (大愛) — the heart of her vision — reframes the Mahayana virtues of loving-kindness (metta 慈) and compassion (karuna 悲) as universally accessible human capacities available to all persons regardless of religious background, and institutionalizes them through Tzu Chi's global volunteer networks. Tzu Chi volunteers are explicitly not required to be Buddhist; what is required is sincerity and commitment to goodness. This universalization is concretely enacted in Tzu Chi's practice of rebuilding places of worship for other religious traditions following natural disasters — constructing mosques in Indonesia, rebuilding Catholic institutions in Haiti, reconstructing a church in Ecuador, and coordinating multilateral Muslim-Catholic-Buddhist relief for Orthodox Ukrainian refugees in Poland. These cases embody the spirit that the suffering of human beings constitutes a moral claim on compassionate deeds that takes precedence over religious distinctions.

Scriptural Grounding

This universalist orientation is not an innovation imposed upon Buddhism from without but a recovery of principles embedded in the canonical tradition. The Madhyama-āgama no. 133 (中阿含經第 133 經; Pali Upālisutta MN 56) provides paradigmatic scriptural support: when a convert proposed to restrict his generosity to the Buddha's disciples, the Buddha explicitly rejected this sectarian limitation, teaching that merit flows from the diligence and virtue of the recipient, not from religious membership. This Buddhist principle — that karma is universal, non-sectarian, and indifferent to institutional groups — directly legitimates Ven. Cheng Yen's universalist practice at the doctrinal level. Further scriptural grounding is provided by the "Sick Boatman" metaphor from the Sutra of Infinite Meanings (無量義經): a boatman ill in body can still ferry passengers across the river if his vessel is sturdy — affirming that even an ordinary practitioner still beset by afflictions can act as a Bodhisattva and, through such action, progressively realize enlightenment.

Conclusion

Two formative events in 1966 — the death of an indigenous pregnant woman denied medical care due to poverty, and a challenge from Catholic nuns regarding Buddhism's social engagement — catalyzed the decisive insight that Buddhist compassion must be organized and practically engaged to address actual human suffering, leading Ven. Cheng Yen is directly involved in the founding of Tzu Chi. Dharma Master Cheng Yen's religious view represents a consequential new stage in the development of Humanistic Buddhism — preserving its core commitments to social engagement and lay participation while introducing a universalist ideal of Great Love, a distinctive institutional architecture of global humanitarian practice, and an interfaith orientation grounded in coherent Buddhist doctrinal reasoning.

Ven. Cheng Yen's conviction that "without harmony among religions, there can be no peace in the world," and her vision of Tzu Chi as a platform of Great Love on which people of different faiths work together in common service, offer a practically realized model of interreligious cooperation of considerable significance for an era marked by civilizational tension and ideological conflict. Her religious perspective may ultimately be understood as a new chapter in Mahayana Buddhism's encounter with modernity — written not in the language of theoretical abstraction,

but in the daily acts of millions of volunteers who have chosen to become Living Bodhisattvas in the world (人間菩薩).

The Integration of Non-arising and Ever-renewing Life: Tzu Chi's Practical Interpretation of the Sutra of Infinite Meanings—An Approach via the Three-State Theory of Being and the Synthesis of Confucianism and Buddhism

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Abstract

Utilizing the Three-State Theory of Being as a methodological framework, this paper explores Tzu Chi's practical interpretation of the Sutra of Infinite Meanings. The eight-line verse—"With minds tranquil and clear, vows vast as the universe, they remain unwavering for countless kalpas. Infinite Dharma doors readily appear before them. They attain great wisdom and completely understand all Dharma"—constitutes a complete sequence of spiritual cultivation that profoundly corresponds to the three states of being: Source, Manifestation, and Actualization. The Jing Si Dharma Lineage embodies the realization of the Source, while the Tzu Chi School of Buddhism

represents the Actualization of practical resolve. Tzu Chi's Four Missions demonstrate the diverse Manifestation of "infinite Dharma doors," allowing compassion to manifest in the present moment, ultimately attaining great wisdom and understanding all Dharma. This process achieves a thorough integration of Non-arising (Wu-sheng) and Ever-renewing Life (Sheng-sheng). Tzu Chi transcends the limitations of the traditional Confucian "consanguineous vertical axis" by embodying "unconditional loving-kindness", realizing the Confucian-Buddhist ideal where the Law of Non-arising subsumes the Law of Ever-renewing Life. This research reveals that Tzu Chi, as a "Religion of Awakening," provides 21st-century civilization with a comprehensive path from mental cultivation to social praxis, moving toward a "Community of Great Love." This constitutes the profound meaning of "creating a Pure Land in the human realm" and represents Tzu Chi's fundamental contribution to contemporary Buddhism.

Keywords: Tzu Chi, Sutra of Infinite Meanings, Three-State Theory of Being, Non-arising (Wu sheng-fa), Ever-renewing Life (Sheng-sheng-fa), Confucian-Buddhist Synthesis

I. Problematic and Theoretical Approach

Contemporary Buddhist studies face a dual predicament. Theoretically, the study of Buddhist doctrine has long been confined to the "study of terminology" (ming-xiang zhi xue 名相之學), failing to genuinely respond to the existential needs of modern individuals. Practically, the flourishing of Humanistic Buddhism (ren-jian fo-jiao 人間佛教) urgently requires a deepened philosophical foundation to avoid the crises of "praxis without scholarship" or a "disconnection between theory and practice." As the most representative practical organization of contemporary Humanistic Buddhism, Tzu Chi has for over fifty years transformed the Buddhist spirit into concrete social action under the mission "For Buddhism and for all sentient beings." However, its underlying ideological system still awaits systematic philosophical construction.

This paper adopts the "Three-State Theory of Being" as its core approach to explore Tzu Chi's practical interpretation of the Sutra of Infinite Meanings. It argues how Tzu Chi achieves a

contemporary integration of the "Law of Non-arising" (Wu-sheng-fa 無生法) and the "Law of Ever-renewing Life" (Sheng-sheng-fa 生生法) through the profound practice of the eight-line verse:

> 靜寂清澄，志玄虛漠，守之不動，億百千劫
> 無量法門，悉現在前，得大智慧，通達諸法
>
> (With minds tranquil and clear, vows vast as the universe, they remain unwavering for countless kalpas. Infinite Dharma doors readily appear before them. They attain great wisdom and completely understand all Dharma.)

This research aims to address the theoretical and practical challenges of Humanistic Buddhism, construct a philosophical foundation for Tzu Chi Studies, and elucidate its significance for 21st-century civilization.

The Three-State Theory of Being proposes a dialectic of three states: Source, Manifestation, and Actualization. The Source corresponds to the Law of Non-arising—unborn, undying, and primordially pure, transcending concrete attachments. Manifestation serves as the pivotal transition from Non-arising to Ever-renewing Life, representing the unfolding of the original source into concrete existence. Actualization corresponds to the specific praxis of the Law of Ever-renewing Life, grounding being within the human world. These three states are not isolated opposites but exist in a dialectical relationship of "common origin, mutual penetration, and perfect harmony," circulating endlessly to integrate Non-arising and Ever-renewing Life. This framework overcomes the limitation of severing noumenon from phenomenon, returning to the lifeworld and the historical-social totality, thereby providing a new theoretical horizon for the synthesis of Confucianism and Buddhism.

II. An Ontological Interpretation of the Eight-Line Verse

The eight lines frequently taught by Venerable Cheng Yen constitute a complete sequence of spiritual cultivation that profoundly corresponds to the Three-State Theory of Being.

"With minds tranquil and clear" (jing-ji qing-cheng 靜寂清澄) corresponds to the primordial appearance of the Source of Being. "Tranquil" (jing-ji) denotes a mind-nature

undisturbed by delusion, while "clear" (qing-cheng) refers to a purity as transparent as crystal. This is not a state of passive void but a primordial condition of "finding stillness in motion and vitality in stillness." It is the practitioner's point of entry into Non-arising and the internal prerequisite for "giving without seeking anything in return."

"Vows vast as the universe" (zhi-xuan xu-mo 志玄虛漠) corresponds to the directional conviction of the Manifestation of Being. "Vows" (zhi) signifies the practitioner's spiritual orientation; "vast" (xuan) indicates profound depth, while "the universe/void" (xu-mo) points to a state of serene detachment. This line transforms the realization of the Source into the driving force for Manifestation, acting as the pivotal nexus connecting Non-arising to Ever-renewing Life, embodied in the lifelong vow of Tzu Chi volunteers to serve "for Buddhism and for all sentient beings."

"Remain unwavering" (shou-zhi bu-dong 守之不動) corresponds to the meditative stability safeguarding the Actualization of Being. "Remain" (shou) implies the steadfast protection of mental purity and conviction; "unwavering" (bu-dong) signifies a refusal to retreat. This line ensures that the actualization of being does not deviate from the essence of Non-arising. It marks the critical transition from conviction to praxis, embodied in the Tzu Chi practitioner's discipline to "eternally grasp the moment and offer sincere, ceaseless devotion."

"For countless kalpas" (yi bai qian jie 億百千劫) reflects the cyclic continuity of the three states. "Countless" (yi bai qian, literally "hundreds of thousands of millions") refers to immense durations, and "kalpas" (jie) are Buddhist units of time, emphasizing the persistent, eternal, and cyclic nature of cultivation. This line places individual praxis within the dimension of eternal time, allowing the Source, Manifestation, and Actualization of being to circulate and deepen over vast epochs.

"Infinite Dharma doors" (wu-liang fa-men 無量法門) demonstrates the multiplicity of Manifestation. "Infinite" (wu-liang) means limitless, while "Dharma doors" (fa-men) refer to paths of cultivation, emphasizing the wisdom of "different streams from the same source, reaching the same destination through various paths." This allows a single source to manifest in the human realm through innumerable expedient means, corresponding to the diverse practices of Tzu Chi's

Four Missions and Eight Footprints.

"Readily appear before them" (xi-xian zai-qian 悉現在前) represents the consummate Manifestation of the three states. "Readily" (xi, literally “all”) signifies completely, "appear" (xian) means to manifest, and "before them" (zai-qian) refers to appearing before one's eyes and within one's mind, emphasizing the perfect unity of inner enlightenment and external praxis. This line achieves the immediate unification of noumenon and phenomenon, allowing the diverse practices of the "infinite Dharma doors" to synthesize in the present moment.

"They attain great wisdom" (de da zhi-hui 得大智慧) is the noetic sublimation of the three states. Wisdom (zhi-hui) here encompasses the non-dual integration of fundamental wisdom (realizing Non-arising) and expedient wisdom (practicing Ever-renewing Life). It enables one to simultaneously perceive the primordial nature of all phenomena and discern the causal conditions of practice, transforming perfect praxis into intellectual achievement.

"And completely understand all Dharma" (tong-da zhu-fa 通達諸法) is the ultimate fulfillment of the three states. "Completely understand" (tong-da) signifies an unobstructed, thorough insight, while "all Dharma" (zhu-fa) refers to all phenomena and existence in the world. This line emphasizes an unobstructed, thorough insight into the primordial nature and causal conditions of all existence, achieving the thorough integration of Non-arising and Ever-renewing Life, thereby completing the trajectory from inner cultivation to saving the world, and finally to the perfection of the Way.

III. The Three-State Manifestation and the Integration of "Non-arising" and "Ever-renewing Life" in Tzu Chi’s Praxis

Tzu Chi’s concrete practice is a living embodiment of the eight-line verse transforming from text into life. The Jing Si Dharma Lineage corresponds to the cultivation and realization of the Source of Being. The daily practice at the Jing Si Abode is the concrete implementation of being "tranquil and clear." Master Cheng Yen’s concept of "purity at the source" refers not only to environmentalism but to the primordial purity of the mind-nature. Only with such mental purity can one "give without seeking anything in return," free from attachment to karmic rewards. This

embodies the praxis of "returning to Being"—restoring the constancy of life through cultivation.

The Tzu Chi School of Buddhism corresponds to the practical Actualization of Being. Master Cheng Yen's teaching that "Buddha is in the heart, and Dharma is in action" reveals that the Dharma must be grounded in daily life. With the meditative stability to "remain unwavering," Tzu Chi volunteers transform the spirit of giving into concrete action, continuously dedicating themselves to disaster relief, poverty alleviation, medicine, and education. In this way, the Actualization of Being is a concrete manifestation and further grounding of the Source. The practice of Ever-renewing Life is not a departure from Non-arising, but rather its most tangible presentation.

The Four Missions and Eight Footprints correspond to the diverse Manifestation of Being. The multifaceted practices of Charity, Medicine, Education, and Humanistic Culture are the concrete embodiment of "infinite Dharma doors." The same vow, across different times, spaces, and needs, manifests in various forms of practice, allowing compassion to "readily appear" in every moment. Tzu Chi volunteers do not become attached to the form of the Dharma doors; instead, they recognize the noumenon behind them, guarding their pure, original mind without being bound by form. This embodies the wisdom that "expedient means are many, but the source is one."

Tzu Chi's continuous transmission reflects the enduring spirit of "countless kalpas." From the "Bamboo Bank Era" to global charity, and from the vows of a few to the collective practice of millions, the Tzu Chi spirit has been passed down through the river of time, ever-renewing and unceasing. Master Cheng Yen's teaching that "wisdom-life grows through giving" reveals that internal cultivation and external action are not momentary efforts, but an accumulation spanning lifetime after lifetime.

Specific practical examples further highlight the integration of Non-arising and Ever-renewing Life. In body donation (Silent Mentors)—epitomized by the saying, "I'd rather have hundreds or thousands of incorrect incisions on my body than a single mistake on a patient's body."—one relinquishes the impermanent physical body (Non-arising) to cultivate eternal wisdom-life (Ever-renewing Life), reflecting the stability of "remaining unwavering" and the wisdom to "completely understand all Dharma." International disaster relief transcends borders,

races, and religions, embodying the egalitarian spirit of "Great Compassion for those with whom one has no prior bond," allowing "infinite Dharma doors" to "readily appear" in foreign lands. Environmental recycling, governed by the ethos of "coexisting with the Earth," transforms ecological care into concrete spiritual practice, protecting sentient beings across the long river of time.

Furthermore, Tzu Chi's Great Love transcends the limitations of the traditional "consanguineous vertical axis," progressing from the Confucian ideal of "loving one's kin" to the egalitarian spirit of "unconditional loving-kindness and universal compassion" (wu-yuan da-ci, tong-ti da-bei 無緣大慈、同體大悲). It surpasses the boundaries of bloodline, race, and religion. For instance, during the massive Angke River flood relief and relocation project in Indonesia, ethnic Chinese volunteers actively assisted native Indonesian residents, helping to bridge deep-seated historical and ethnic divides. Similarly, in Turkey, local Muslims have embraced the foundation's ethos, becoming certified Tzu Chi commissioners dedicated to humanitarian service. Both cases vividly illustrate a cross-cultural and trans-religious universal love. This is the concrete embodiment of the "Law of Non-arising subsuming the Law of Ever-renewing Life": because one realizes Non-arising (tranquil and clear), one can transcend all dualistic distinctions (understanding all Dharma) to reach what Tzu Chi terms the "Community of Great Love" (da-ai gong-tong-ti 大愛共同體)—a state where all lives are interconnected and interdependent.

IV. Significance for Contemporary Buddhism and 21st-Century Civilization

Theoretically, Tzu Chi has achieved a shift from "metaphysical preservation" to "practical opening," fully embodying the spirit of "learning by doing, awakening through learning" and the unity of essence and function (ti-yong 體用). For nearly three decades, I have frequently advocated in academic circles for a transition from a "moral metaphysics" to a "humanistic anthropology of morality." Tzu Chi serves as the concrete paradigm for this humanistic anthropology of morality—grounding ethics from abstract noumenon into human praxis, transforming the eight-line verse into actionable life wisdom. Post-New Confucianism emphasizes a reverse thinking of "reaching inner sagehood through outer kingliness" (wai-wang er nei-sheng 由外王而內聖); Tzu Chi's practice corroborates this: social praxis (outer kingliness) fortifies mental cultivation (inner

sagehood), purifying oneself through the act of helping others.

Practically, the cultivation philosophy that emphasizes "walking the Sutras" (xing-jing 行經) over merely "reading the Sutras" pioneers a new practical path for Humanistic Buddhism. Master Cheng Yen's declaration that "Tzu Chi is a restoration of Buddhism, not an innovation" highlights a return to the spirit of the Buddha's Mahayana teachings—utilizing the Dharma door of "walking the Sutras" to benefit others while delivering oneself, realizing the true meaning of the scriptures through praxis. The phenomenon of young volunteers taking part in Sutra Adaptation performances pushes this spirit to new heights. By expounding the Dharma through body language and "using the body to remember Tzu Chi's stories," classics are transformed from text into living experience, attaining spiritual healing and sublimation through physical exertion. This is the ultimate manifestation of "walking the Sutras": not merely reading or interpreting them, but "performing" and "living" them.

Culturally, Tzu Chi, as a "Religion of Awakening," provides a new paradigm for 21st-century human civilization. I believe the world has reached an era that demands greater participation from Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist wisdom. Centered on "awakening" (jue-xing 覺性), such a religion differs starkly from the exclusivity of monotheism, making it far more suitable for inter-civilizational dialogue. Tzu Chi's egalitarian Great Love, which makes no religious distinctions, offers a practical model for global ethics, allowing "unconditional loving-kindness" to transcend religious boundaries. The perceptual shift from "anthropocentrism" to the "equality of all sentient beings" directly addresses contemporary ecological crises. Master Cheng Yen's teaching that "all sentient beings possess Buddha-nature" reveals that this encompasses countless tangible and intangible life forms, leading Tzu Chi to turn environmental protection into a concrete spiritual practice. Furthermore, her insight that "natural disasters stem from human-made calamities"—where the greenhouse effect is fundamentally diagnosed as a "mind-chamber effect" (xin-shi xiao-ying 心室效應)—points to the "purification of people's hearts" as the ultimate solution for global crises. This marks a return to the fundamental path of being "tranquil and clear," embodying what I refer to as "logotherapy" (meaning therapy).

V. Conclusion: The Contemporary Fulfillment of the Eight-Line Verse and the

Community of Love

Tzu Chi's practical interpretation of the Sutra of Infinite Meanings has accomplished the contemporary transformation of the eight-line verse from text to life, from the other shore to this shore, and from theory to verification. The eight lines constitute a complete sequence of cultivation that corresponds profoundly with the Three-State Theory of Being: tranquil and clear maps to the Source of Being; vows vast as the universe to the orientation of Manifestation; remaining unwavering to the verification of Actualization; countless kalpas to the cyclic continuity of the three states; infinite Dharma doors to the diverse display of Manifestation; readily appearing before them to the consummate display of the three states; attaining great wisdom to the sublimation of intellect; and completely understanding all Dharma to the ultimate integration of the three states.

The Jing Si Dharma Lineage embodies the foundational realization of being "tranquil and clear," while the Tzu Chi School of Buddhism embodies the practical stability of "remaining unwavering." The Four Missions reflect the diverse manifestation of "infinite Dharma doors," and its sustainable legacy reflects the enduring spirit of "countless kalpas." Concrete case studies further highlight the consummate realms of "readily appearing before them," "attaining great wisdom," and "completely understanding all Dharma." Rooted in being "tranquil and clear," driven by "vows vast as the universe," and stabilized by "remaining unwavering" through "countless kalpas" without regression, Tzu Chi opens "infinite Dharma doors" to respond to the human realm. This ensures compassion "readily appears" in every moment, ultimately "attaining great wisdom" and "completely understanding all Dharma," thus achieving the thorough integration of Non-arising and Ever-renewing Life. This is the profound meaning of "creating a Pure Land in the human realm" and Tzu Chi's deepest contribution to contemporary Buddhism.

Undoubtedly, Tzu Chi's praxis ultimately points toward the "Community of Great Love"—expanding from the traditional Confucian reverence for "Heaven, Earth, Sovereign, Parent, and Teacher" (representing the natural, consanguineous, socio-political, and cultural communities) to encompass the "three thousand large thousand worlds" of Buddhism. It embodies the ultimate concern of "unconditional loving-kindness and universal compassion," recognizing that all lives are interconnected and interdependent. Tzu Chi provides a comprehensive path from "mental

cultivation" to "social praxis," and from "individual awakening" to "collective healing," ultimately advancing toward this ideal of Great Love. This is precisely the contemporary fulfillment of the Sutra of Infinite Meanings' injunction to "sow the seeds of goodness to develop fields of merit and virtue, and enable all beings to sprout the shoots of Bodhi." Moving from the 20th into the 21st century, Tzu Chi Studies stands undeniably as a contemporary paradigm for the synthesis of Confucianism and Buddhism, integrating Non-arising and Ever-renewing Life, and manifesting the ideal of a Pure Land on Earth.

[Note: Abstract for conference use; references and citations are omitted for now.]

「無生」與「生生」的融通：慈濟對《無量義經》的實踐詮釋——以「存有三態論」與儒佛會通為進路

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Abstract

本文以「存有三態論」為進路，探討慈濟對《無量義經》的實踐詮釋。八句經文「靜寂清澄，志玄虛漠，守之不動，億百千劫，無量法門，悉現在前，得大智慧，通達諸法」構成完整修行次第，與存有三態（根源、開顯、執定）形成深刻對應。靜思法脈體現「靜寂清澄」的根源體證，慈濟宗門體現「守之不動」的實踐定力，四大志業展現「無量法門」的多元開顯，讓慈悲「悉現在前」於當下，終「得大智慧」而「通達諸法」，實現無生與生生的徹底融通。慈濟超越傳統儒家「血緣性縱貫軸」的限制，以「無緣大慈」體現「無生法融攝生生法」的儒佛會通理想。研究揭示：慈濟作為「覺性的宗教」，為 21 世紀文明提供從心性修養到社會實踐的完整路徑，邁向「大愛共同體」。此即「預約淨土在人間」的深層意涵，也是慈濟對當代佛教的根本貢獻。

關鍵詞：慈濟、無量義經、存有三態論、無生法、生生法、儒佛會通

一、問題意識與理論進路

當代佛學研究面臨雙重困境：在理論層面，佛教義理研究長期陷入「名相之學」的窠臼，未能真正回應現代人的生命需求；在實踐層面，人間佛教的蓬勃發展亟需哲學基礎的深化，以避免「行而無學」或「學行脫節」的危機。慈濟作為當代人間佛教最具代表性的實踐團體，五十餘年來以「為佛教、為眾生」為宗旨，將佛法精神轉化為具體的社會行動，然而其背後的思想體系仍有待系統性的哲學建構。

本文經由「存有三態論」為核心進路，探討慈濟對《無量義經》的實踐詮釋，論證慈濟如何通過「靜寂清澄，志玄虛漠，守之不動，億百千劫，無量法門，悉現在前，得大智慧，通達諸法」八句經文的深層實踐，實現「無生法」與「生生法」的當代融通。研究旨在回應人間佛教的理論與實踐挑戰，為慈濟學建構哲學基礎，並闡發其對 21 世紀文明的啟示意義。

「存有三態論」提出「存有的根源—開顯—執定」三態辯證：存有的根源對應「無生法」的不生不滅、清淨本然，超越具體執著；存有的開顯是「無生」向「生生」的過渡樞紐，是根源存有向具體存有展開的過程；存有的執定對應「生生法」的具體實踐，是存有在人間世界的落實。三態並非割裂對立，而是「同源、互通、圓融」的辯證關係，循環往復，實現「無生」與「生生」的融通。此一架構克服了本體與現象割裂的侷限，回歸生活世界與歷史社會總體，為儒佛會通提供新的理論視域。

二、八句經文的存有學闡釋

證嚴上人經常開示的八句經文，構成完整的修行次第，與「存有三態論」形成深刻的對應關係。

「靜寂清澄」 對應存有根源的本然顯現。「靜寂」指心性寧靜無擾，遠離妄念執著；「清澄」指心性清淨純粹，如琉璃通透無染。這不是消極的死寂，而是「動中取靜、靜中顯活」的本然狀態，是修行者契入無生的起點，也是「付出無所求」的內在前提。

「志玄虛漠」 對應存有開顯的信念定向。「志」指心志信念，修行者的精神定向；「玄」指深遠玄妙；「虛漠」指虛靜淡泊。此句將存有根源的體證，轉化為存有開顯的定向動力，是從「無生」通向「生生」的關鍵樞紐，體現為慈濟人「為佛教、為眾生」的終身願力。

「守之不動」 對應存有執定的定力保障。「守」指堅守守護心性清淨與信念願力；「不動」指不動搖退縮。此句確保存有的執定不偏離無生本體，是從信念到實踐的關鍵轉折，體現為慈濟人「恆持剎那，真心奉獻而無休」的修行定力。

「億百千劫」 體現存有三態的循環延續。「億百千」指極長時間，「劫」為佛教時間單位，強調修行的持續性、永恆性、循環性。此句將個體修行置於永恆時間維度，讓存有的根源、開顯、執定在漫長歲月中循環往復、不斷深化。

「無量法門」 展現存有開顯的多元性。「無量」指數量無限，「法門」指修行方法途徑，強調「同源異流、殊途同歸」的修行智慧。此句讓同一根源以無量方便應化人間，對應慈濟四大志業、八大腳印的多元實踐。

「悉現在前」 是存有三態的圓滿開顯。「悉」指全部，「現」指顯現，「在前」指眼前心中，強調內心開悟與外在踐行的圓滿統一。此句實現本體與現象的當下統一，讓「無量法門」的多元實踐在當下統一起來。

「得大智慧」 是存有三態的智慧昇華。此處的智慧包括根本智（體認無生）與方便智（踐行生生）的圓融不二，既能洞察諸法本然，又能明辨實踐因緣。此句將實踐的圓滿轉化為智慧的成就。

「通達諸法」 是存有三態的終極圓滿。「通達」指通曉貫通、無有障礙，「諸法」指世間萬法、一切存在，強調透徹洞察諸法本然與諸法因緣，實現無生與生生的徹底融通，完成「內修心性→濟世度人→圓滿成道」的完整修行歷程。

三、慈濟實踐的三態體現與「無生」而「生生」的融通

慈濟的具體實踐，是八句經文從文字轉化為生命的生動體現。

靜思法脈對應存有根源的修行體證。靜思精舍的日常修行，正是「靜寂清澄」的具體落實。證嚴上人「清淨在源頭」的理念，不只指向環保，更指向心性根源的清淨。唯有心性清淨，方能「付出無所求」，不執著於功德回報。此即「存有的回歸」思想的實踐體現——透過修行回歸生命之常。

慈濟宗門對應存有執定的實踐落實。證嚴上人「佛在心中，法在行中」的開示，揭示佛法必須落實在生活中。慈濟人以「守之不動」的定力，將「付出無所求」的精神化為具體行動，在救災、扶貧、醫療、教育等領域持續奉獻。如此一來，「存有的執定」是根源的具體彰顯，進一步的落實。生生實踐不是對無生的背離，而是無生的具體呈現。

四大志業、八大脚印對應存有開顯的多元展現。慈善、醫療、教育、人文等多元實踐，正是「無量法門」的具體體現。同一願力在不同時空、面對不同需求，展現為不同的實踐形式，讓慈悲「悉現在前」於每一個當下。慈濟人不執著於法門的形式，而是透過法門體認背後的本體，守住清淨本心而不被法門形式束縛，體現「方便多門、歸元無二」的修行智慧。

慈濟的永續傳承體現「億百千劫」的恆久精神。從「竹筒歲月」到全球慈善，從少數人的願力到數百萬會員的共同實踐，慈濟精神在時間長河中薪火相傳、生生不息。證嚴上人「慧命從付出中增長」的開示，揭示內修外行不是一時努力，而是貫穿生生世世的積累。

具體實踐案例更深刻彰顯「無生」與「生生」的融通。大體捐贈——「寧可在我身上劃錯千刀，也不要在病人身上錯劃一刀」——捨下有形生滅之軀（無生），造就永恆慧命精進（生生），體現「守之不動」的定力與「通達諸法」的智慧。國際賑災跨越國界、種族、宗教的援助，體現「無緣大慈」的平等精神，讓「無量法門」在異域「悉現在前」。環保回收「與地球共生息」，將愛護大地轉化為具體修行，在時間長河中守護眾生。

進一步言之，慈濟大愛超越傳統「血緣性縱貫軸」的限制，從「親親而仁民」進而達到「無緣大慈、同體大悲」的平等精神，超越血緣、種族、宗教的界限——印尼紅溪河援助中，華人志工幫助當地居民，穆斯林慈濟委員在土耳其奉獻，皆體現跨文化、跨宗教的共同大愛。這正是「無生法融攝生生法」的

具體體現：因為體證無生（靜寂清澄），故能超越一切分別（通達諸法），達到慈濟所說的「大愛共同體」。

四、對當代佛教與 21 世紀文明的啟示意義

在理論層面，慈濟實現了從「形而上保存」到「實踐開啟」的轉向，充分體現了，「做中學，學中覺」，體用合一的精神。近三十年來，吾人在學界，也常主張從「道德的形而上學」轉向「道德的人間學」，慈濟正是「道德的人間學」的具體典範——將道德從抽象本體落實為人間實踐，讓八句經文成為可踐行的生命智慧。後新儒學強調「由外王而內聖」的逆轉性思考，慈濟實踐印證：社會實踐（外王）可以強化心性修養（內聖），在幫助他人中淨化自己。

在實踐層面，「行經」重於「讀經」的修行理念，為人間佛教開創新的實踐路徑。證嚴上人「慈濟是佛教的復古，不是創新」的開示，揭示回歸佛陀大乘教法的精神——以「行經」之法門，利他度己，在實踐中體悟經文真義。青年志工的「經藏演繹」現象，更將此精神推向新的高度：青年志工以肢體說法，「用身體記住慈濟的故事」，讓經典從文字轉化為生命體驗，在身體的苦累中獲得心靈的療癒與昇華。這是「行經」的極致體現——不只是讀經、解經，更是「演經」、「行經」。

在文明層面，慈濟作為「覺性的宗教」，為 21 世紀人類文明提供新典範。吾人以為，整個世界已到必須讓儒道佛智慧更多參與的年代。覺性宗教以「覺性」為核心，迥異於一神論的排他性，更適合多元文明對話。慈濟不分宗教的平等大愛，為全球倫理提供實踐典範，讓「無緣大慈」超越宗教界限。從「人類中心主義」到「眾生平等」的視域轉換，回應了當代生態危機——證嚴上人「蠢動含靈皆有佛性」的開示，揭示有情眾生包含無量數有形無形的生命及物命，慈濟環保回收將愛護大地轉化為具體修行。證嚴上人「天災肇因於人禍」——溫室效應落實為「心室效應」的提法，為全球危機的化解指出「淨化人心」的根本方向，此即回歸「靜寂清澄」的根本途徑，這也是吾人所說「意義治療學」的具體體現。

五、結語：八句經文的當代完成與愛的共同體

慈濟對《無量義經》的實踐詮釋，完成了八句經文從文字到生命、從彼岸到此岸、從理論到證成的當代轉化。八句經文構成完整的修行次第，與存有三態論形成深刻的對應關係：靜寂清澄對應存有根源，志玄虛漠對應存有開顯的定向，守之不動對應存有執定的證成，億百千劫對應三態的循環延續，無量法門對應開顯的多元展現，悉現在前對應三態的圓滿開顯，得大智慧對應智慧的昇華，通達諸法對應三態的終極融通。

靜思法脈體現「靜寂清澄」的根源體證，慈濟宗門體現「守之不動」的實踐定力，四大志業體現「無量法門」的多元展現，永續傳承體現「億百千劫」的恆久精神，具體實踐案例則彰顯「悉現在前」、「得大智慧」、「通達諸法」的圓滿境界。以「靜寂清澄」為根基，以「志玄虛漠」為願力，以「守之不動」為定力，歷「億百千劫」而不退轉，開「無量法門」以應化人間，讓慈悲「悉現在前」於每一個當下，終「得大智慧」而「通達諸法」，實現「無生」與「生生」的徹底融通。此即「預約淨土在人間」的深層意涵，也是慈濟對當代佛教最深層的貢獻。

無疑地，慈濟實踐最終指向「大愛共同體」——從「天地親君師」(天地自然共同體、血緣人倫共同體、政治社會共同體、文化教養共同體)，最終擴及佛教三千大千世界，體現「無緣大慈、同體大悲」的終極關懷。慈濟提供了從「心性修養」到「社會實踐」、從「個體覺悟」到「集體療癒」的完整路徑，最終邁向「大愛共同體」的終極理想。這正是《無量義經》「布善種子，遍功德田，普令一切，發菩提萌」的當代完成。一路行來，無疑地，從 20-21 世紀的人類文明，慈濟學可以說是儒佛會通的當代典範，融通了「無生」與「生生」，體現了人間淨土的理想。

【案】：會議用的摘要，參考資料及引註，暫時省略。

The Buddhist Nature and Universality of the Tzu Chi School of Buddhism Established by Dharma Master Cheng Yen Based on the *Lotus Sutra*

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Abstract

I. The Tzu Chi School of Buddhism and the Jing Si Dharma Lineage: A Dharma Gate Established by Dharma Master Cheng Yen Based on the *Lotus Sutra*, Taking the Buddha's Heart and Her Master's Mission as Her Own

Dharma Master Cheng Yen shares a profound karmic connection with the *Lotus Sutra*. As early as September 1960, carrying only a tattered copy of the text, she embarked on a journey in search of the Way alongside Dharma Master Hsiu Tao (修道法師 *Xiudao fashi*). They eventually settled at the Wangmu Temple (王母廟 *Wangmu miao*) in Luye, Taitung. In December of that year, she resided at Dongjing Temple (東淨寺 *Dongjing si*) in Hualien. Shortly thereafter, during brief visits to the Taitung Buddhist Lotus Society to spread the Dharma, she visited the home of a

devotee, Mrs. Wang. There, she encountered a Japanese edition of the *Great Lectures on the Lotus Sutra* (法華大講座 *Fahua da jiangzuo*—also known as the "Threefold Lotus Sutra") for the first time. During the period she borrowed the text, she transcribed its *Sutra of Infinite Meanings* (無量義經 *Wuliangyi jing*) into Chinese.

In March 1963, she traveled to Taipei to receive the Triple Platform Ordination, where she took refuge under Venerable Master Yinshun (印順導師 *Yinshun daoshi*). She received the Dharma name "Cheng Yen" (證嚴 *zhengyan*) and the courtesy name Huizhang (慧璋), alongside the direct instruction: "For Buddhism and all sentient beings" (為佛教，為眾生 *wei Fojiao, wei zhongsheng*). Upon returning to Hualien in May of the same year, she built a small wooden hut fifty meters behind the Puming Temple (普明寺 *Puming si*) in Xiulin Township, where she engaged in secluded cultivation of the *Lotus Sutra*. Lacking the funds to purchase flowers or fruit as offerings to the Buddha, she would transcribe a copy of the sutra each month and burn incense marks on her arm as an offering, dedicating the merit to all sentient beings.

Reflecting on this period, she later recalled: "I remember when I was young, in that small wooden hut, I would prostrate for every single character of the entire *Lotus Sutra*. Because the sutra is the Way, and the Way is the path, we must use the utmost sincerity to pay homage to it. Each character felt as if we had recited it, bowed to it, and taken a step forward. One must advance with continuous diligence, treating every word as a precious gem, allowing each to enter our hearts. With every prostration, it is as though we take another step forward. Therefore, paying homage to the sutra is like walking toward the Vulture Peak Dharma Assembly (靈山會 *Lingshan hui*). As we bow, it is as though we begin to march; each bow is a step bringing us closer and closer to the Vulture Peak. This is the visualization one must hold."

Thus, it is evident that Dharma Master Cheng Yen's initial entry into Buddhism was firmly rooted in the *Lotus Sutra*. This trajectory perfectly corresponds with the mandate "For Buddhism and all sentient beings" bestowed upon her by her refuge master.

In her November 20, 2006, *Address at the Global Commissioner Spiritual Training Seminar*, Dharma Master Cheng Yen stated:

> Tzu Chi exists because of my master, Venerable Master Yinshun. When I took refuge, he gave me six characters: 'For Buddhism and all sentient beings.' These six simple characters pierced my heart and etched themselves into my bones. I made a vow that I absolutely must fulfill them. After taking refuge and receiving the precepts, I spent six full months—exactly six months—in that small wooden hut, engaging in quiet and deep contemplation. My master had asked me to work 'For Buddhism and all sentient beings,' but how was I to do it? Naturally, conditions arose. With so many texts in the Buddhist canon, which direction should I take? I chose the *Lotus Sutra*. The principles of the *Lotus Sutra* are truly profound, yet the logic within it perfectly aligns with the concept of Bodhisattvas going amongst the people.

Furthermore, in the October 25, 2019, broadcast of *Wisdom at Dawn: The Lotus Sutra* (靜思晨語·法華經 *Jingsi chenyu: Fahua jing*), she explicitly pointed out:

> Within the Jing Si Dharma Lineage and the Tzu Chi School of Buddhism, the Dharma practiced collectively by Tzu Chi volunteers is living out the *Lotus Sutra*. We often hear of everyone engaging in group practice at Tzu Chi's Jing Si Halls or offices across the island—is this not paying homage to the *Lotus Sutra*? Therefore, we approach every word of the 'Preface to the Lotus Sutra' with the utmost sincerity, treasuring each character. Sincere worship is a defining characteristic of Tzu Chi volunteers; it is our spiritual sanctuary. When everyone engages in regular group practice to pay homage to the 'Preface to the Lotus Sutra,' I hope that you do so with exactly this mindset—the most devout and sincere mindset.

II. Dharma Master Cheng Yen Regards the *Lotus Sutra* as the Soul and Action Guide of the Tzu Chi School of Buddhism

When taking refuge under Venerable Master Yinshun, Dharma Master Cheng Yen received the six-character mandate "For Buddhism and all sentient beings." During her spiritual cultivation, she chose the *Lotus Sutra* as her guiding direction, believing that although its principles are profound, they are the most congruent with the logic of "Bodhisattvas going amongst the people."

Before the Buddha delivered the *Lotus Sutra* at the Vulture Peak Assembly, texts such as the

Avatamsaka Sutra (華嚴經 *Huayan jing*) had already articulated the philosophical framework of the Bodhisattva path. However, it was only with the *Lotus Sutra* that the practical characteristics of the Bodhisattva path were truly and completely expounded, establishing that the fundamental essence of the text is the active practice of this path. Adopting this as the Buddha's original intent (the Buddha's heart), and guided by Venerable Master Yinshun's entrustment, Dharma Master Cheng Yen established the *Lotus Sutra* as the roadmap for Tzu Chi's missions.

Dharma Master Cheng Yen once stated:

> In the beginning, the Buddha taught the *Avatamsaka*, the *Agamas*, the *Vaipulya*, and the *Prajnaparamita* sutras. In those times, He continuously adapted His teachings to the varying spiritual capacities of sentient beings. Yet, forty-two years passed, and the Buddha observed that the people's capacities remained unchanged—they were still bound by their respective attachments, clinging either to emptiness or to existence. Realizing this approach was insufficient, the Buddha urgently began to preach the *Lotus Sutra*, straightforwardly discarding provisional means to deliver one definitive message: practice the Bodhisattva path. Therefore, from the very beginning, I felt that to lead people on the Bodhisattva path, I should not preach overly profound theories to them; they just need to walk the path and do the work.

It is exactly because of this that all aspects of Tzu Chi's missions are guided by the practical application of the Bodhisattva path as elucidated in the *Lotus Sutra*, ultimately giving rise to Tzu Chi's "Four Missions and Eight Footprints" (四大志業，八大腳印 *sida zhiye, bada jiaoyin*) we see today. For instance, Dharma Master Cheng Yen expounds on the "Chapter on the Parable of the Conjured City" (化城喻品 *Huacheng yu pin*) to lead Tzu Chi in progressively building its various missions in ten-year phases, and references the "Chapter on Never-Slighting Bodhisattva" (常不輕菩薩品 *Changbuqing pusa pin*) to teach Tzu Chi members mutual gratitude, respect, and love. By lecturing on the "Chapter on Devadatta" (提婆達多品 *Tipodaduo pin*), she teaches members understanding, tolerance, and the highest realm of patience—enduring without the concept of enduring.

To clarify the Buddha's compassionate fundamental intent of delivering all sentient beings, she preaches the "Chapter on the Tathagata's Lifespan" (如來壽量品 *Rulai shouliang pin*),

affirming that the Tathagata never truly entered Nirvana. Similarly, through her teachings on other chapters, she actively quotes the *Lotus Sutra* to enlighten and guide Tzu Chi volunteers in delving deeply into the text.

Therefore, whether it is the inner cultivation of stillness and clarity in "the Jing Si Dharma Lineage's path of diligent practice," or the outward practice of loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity in "the Tzu Chi School of Buddhism serving as a road through the world," both are guided by the *Lotus Sutra*, embodying the Bodhisattva path of Humanistic Buddhism.

III. The Tzu Chi Collective Community Established by the Tzu Chi School of Buddhism and the Jing Si Dharma Lineage is Simultaneously a Sangha, a Religious Order, and a Social Organization, Transcending Traditional Buddhist Sects and Embodying the Characteristics of Modern Civilization

A prominent characteristic of modern civilization is its pluralism, a trait similarly reflected in modern social communities. The Tzu Chi collective community functions simultaneously as a sangha, a religious order, and a social organization. As a sangha, the Tzu Chi Merit Association (慈濟功德會 *Ciji gongdehui*) is, first and foremost, a monastic body represented by ordained monastics.

However, a traditional *sangha* is predominantly composed of monks and nuns who exhibit the conventional appearance of monastics; without this, it cannot be classified as such. Yet, the modern Tzu Chi Merit Association has transcended this conventional imagery. This evolution was notably highlighted on October 17, 2019, when an ordination ceremony was held for "pure practitioners" (清修士 *qingxiushi*), endowing the Merit Association with its first cohort of male and female practitioners who maintain a monastic life while keeping their hair.

During this ceremony, Dharma Master Cheng Yen explicitly stated:

> Under the Tzu Chi School of Buddhism, pure practitioners are equivalent to ordained monastics. Before renouncing lay life, your direction in life may not have been clear; but having now heard the Buddha Dharma and found that direction, you must use the Dharma to thoroughly comprehend the path in this world, ensuring that principles and actions correspond. Having left behind worldly

> afflictions and family burdens, you must learn from Never-Slighting Bodhisattva, going amongst society with a broad mind and a gentle attitude. The world is filled with suffering, and I hope everyone can learn from Guanyin Bodhisattva to hear the cries of the suffering, 'taking the world as one's home and all sentient beings as one's family.'

Three points are noteworthy here: First, pure practitioners are an essential component of the Tzu Chi School of Buddhism. Second, pure practitioners are equivalent to monastics, meaning they are the monastics of a new era. Aside from not wearing traditional Dharma robes, they are no different from conventional monastics, and they possess their own unified attire. Third, Dharma Master Cheng Yen encourages pure practitioners with the example of Never-Slighting Bodhisattva. This Bodhisattva is not a separate figure independent of Shakyamuni Buddha, but rather the bodily manifestation of Shakyamuni Buddha during his causal stage of cultivation. The primary characteristic of Never-Slighting Bodhisattva is his steadfast conviction never to belittle others, thereby practicing the conduct of respect. This implies that pure practitioners exist to embody the Bodhisattva form, generate *Bodhicitta*, and walk the Bodhisattva path.

The Tzu Chi collective community comprises two major entities. The Tzu Chi Merit Association is centered around ordained monks, nuns, and pure practitioners, while also including lay Buddhists, operating as a Buddhist religious order. Conversely, the Tzu Chi Charity Foundation (慈濟慈善事業基金會 *Ciji cishan shiye jijinhui*) operates as a transnational, cross-religious philanthropic organization. It is built around the core of the Merit Association and adheres to the guiding principle of the Jing Si Dharma Lineage: "Inner cultivation of sincerity, integrity, faith, and honesty; external practice of loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity."

This philosophy is unequivocally the original vow of the Buddha, corresponding to the teaching: "Do no evil, perform all good, and purify one's own mind; this is the teaching of all Buddhas." This concept is explicitly recorded in the *Ekottarika Agama* and the *Mahayana Mahaparinirvana Sutra*, as well as in Volume Four of Sui Dynasty Master Zhiyi's *Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra* (法華玄義 *Fahua xuanyi*), and in texts highly influential to Chinese Buddhism such as the *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya* and the *Sarvastivada Vinaya*. "Purifying one's own mind" constitutes inner cultivation, while "doing no evil and performing all good" represents

outward practice. As long as one adheres to this framework, it aligns with the Dharma and embodies Buddhism.

However, the principle of "Do no evil, perform all good, and purify one's own mind" also serves as a universal cultural value. This set of values transcends time and space, geography and nation, and religion and creed. Consequently, while the Buddha viewed it as Buddhism, the elites across various cultures recognize it as inherent to their own traditions. This universally resonant nature allows people from diverse backgrounds around the world to become integral parts of the Tzu Chi Charity Foundation, provided they align with Tzu Chi's philosophy.

According to mainland China's Baidu Baike encyclopedia, the Tzu Chi Charity Foundation (in mainland China) was established in 2008 with the approval of the State Council. It is a national foundation registered with the Ministry of Civil Affairs, headquartered in Suzhou, and was officially designated a "charitable organization" in 2017. In the national social organization grading evaluations conducted by the Ministry of Civil Affairs in 2012, 2017, and 2023, it was consistently rated as a 4A-level foundation. In 2026, it obtained the qualification for pre-tax deduction for donations to public welfare social organizations for the period of 2026 to 2028. It is widely known that mainland China strictly prohibits foreign religious entities from entering to proselytize or conduct religious activities, barring special events explicitly approved by the government. This indicates that official authorities in mainland China fully accept the Tzu Chi Charity Foundation in its capacity as a "charitable organization" rather than a Buddhist one. In fact, the broad recognition the Foundation enjoys globally is primarily attributed to its status as a charitable entity, a distinction particularly evident in regions like Indonesia.

Therefore, the Tzu Chi School of Buddhism, established based on the *Lotus Sutra*, operates dually: it is both a *sangha* and religious order possessing distinct Buddhist characteristics, and a charitable organization that de-emphasizes its overt Buddhist traits to elevate the Tzu Chi School's spirit—"Inner cultivation of sincerity, integrity, faith, and honesty; external practice of loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity"—as a universal and core value.

證嚴法師依《法華經》建立慈濟宗門的佛教性與普世性

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摘要

一、慈濟宗門、靜思法脈是證嚴法師以佛心為己心、以師志為己志，以《法華經》為依據而建立的法門。

證嚴法師與《法華經》有甚深的因緣。早在 1960 年 9 月，他就曾帶著一套破舊的《法華經》與修道法師兩人相偕出走求道，落腳台東鹿野王母廟。同年 12 月，他掛單花蓮東淨寺，不久前往台東佛教蓮社短暫弘法，應邀拜訪信眾王太太家，首次接觸日文版《法華大講座》（亦即「法華三部」），借閱期間將其中〈無量義經〉抄寫成中文。1963 年 3 月，他赴台北求受三壇大戒，因緣皈依印順導師，獲賜法名「證嚴」，字「慧璋」，並親承師訓：「為佛教，為眾生」。同年 5 月，他返回花蓮，並在秀林鄉普明寺後方五十公尺處建一小木屋閉門潛修《法華經》，因沒錢買花果供佛，故每月抄好一部《法華經》就燃臂供佛，回向眾生。他還回憶說：「記得我年輕時在小木屋，全部的《法華經》，就是每字一拜，因為經就是道，道就是路，所以，我們要用最虔誠的心，來禮經，字字都好像我們念過了一字，拜過了一字，就好像向前一步一樣，要步步精進，字字

珠璣，每一個字都可以入我們的心。我們每一禮一拜，我們都好像再進一步，所以禮經如行向靈山會，我們在禮經就好像我們開步走，我們禮一拜就是進一步，向著靈山會愈來愈接近，這就是，要有這種觀想。」因此，可以說，證嚴法師學佛初期就是從《法華經》入門的。這也正契合了皈依師印順導師給他的「為佛教，為眾生」的教導。

證嚴法師在 2006 年 11 月 20 日〈海外培訓精神研習證嚴上人開示〉中說：「慈濟是因為我的師父，上印下順導師，我皈依的時候，他給我的六個字，『為佛教，為眾生』，六個字，那麼簡單的六個字，但是進入我的心坎裡，刻骨銘心，我立願，我一定要做到，『為佛教，為眾生』。皈依、受戒以後，就是六個月，足足六個月的時間，在這個小木屋裡，好好地、靜靜地在靜思，我的師父，要我『為佛教，為眾生』，我要如何做呢？當然也是有因緣，藏經那麼多，佛經那麼多，我要從哪一個方向走？我就選擇了《法華經》，《法華經》的道理，真的很深奧，但是，它是很契合菩薩入眾生群的，這裡面的道理。」

2019 年 10 月 25 日《靜思晨語·法華經》（第 2 集）〈法華經序（二）〉中又明確地指出：「靜思法脈、慈濟宗門，慈濟人共修的法，就是禮拜《法華經》，常常聽到我們全省的靜思堂，或是分支聯絡處，大家在共修，不就是禮拜《法華經》嗎？所以〈法華經序〉，字字我們都很虔誠，字字為寶。所以虔誠禮拜，這是我們慈濟人的特色，心靈的道場，也是靜思法脈慈濟宗門，慈濟人的心靈道場，平時大家在共修，禮拜〈法華經序〉，希望大家若是共修時，禮拜〈法華經序〉，就是要以這樣的心態，最虔誠的心態。」

二、證嚴法師將《法華經》視為慈濟宗門的靈魂與行動指南

證嚴法師皈依印順導師時獲贈「為佛教，為眾生」六字，並在修行過程中選擇了《法華經》作為方向，認為其道理雖深，卻最契合「菩薩入眾生群」的道理。

佛陀在靈山會上講說《法華經》之前的《華嚴經》等雖然已經闡述了菩薩道思想，但是只有到了《法華經》這裡，才真正完整地闡發菩薩道的實踐特性，認為《法華經》的本質就是行菩薩道。證嚴法師正是以此作為佛陀的本懷（佛

心），並在印順導師「為佛教、為眾生」的囑託之下，將《法華經》作為慈濟志業的指導原則和行動指南。

證嚴法師曾說：「佛陀開頭說《華嚴》，說《阿含》，講《方等》，談《般若》，在這種的時代，不斷應眾生根機來說法，不過佛陀，四十二年過去了，看大家的根機還是一樣，各有執著，執空、執有，所以佛陀認為這樣不對，趕緊　　說《法華經》，正直捨方便，一句話，行菩薩道。就是菩薩道，所以，師父開始，覺得說我要帶人走菩薩道，不要對他講很深的道理，走就對了，做就是了。」

也正是這樣，慈濟志業的各個方面都是以《法華經》所闡揚的菩薩道實踐作為引領，才有了我們今天所看到的「四大志業，八大腳印」。如證嚴法師講說《法華經》中〈化城喻品〉，領導慈濟以十年為單位逐步建設各項志業，並引說〈常不輕菩薩品〉，教導慈濟人相互感恩、尊重、愛。他講說〈提婆達多品〉，教導慈濟人善解包容，忍辱的最高境界，忍而無忍，並舉佛陀安忍提婆達多之喻，說惡人改過也能成佛的。為明佛陀度化眾生的慈悲本懷，她講說如來未曾涅槃的〈如來壽量品〉。其他如她講說〈藥草喻品〉、〈見寶塔品〉、〈法師品〉、〈勸持品〉等等，引用《法華經》內容，積極開示和引導慈濟人行菩薩道，深入法華。

因此，無論是內修靜寂清澄的「靜思法脈勤行道」，還是外行慈悲喜舍的「慈濟宗門人間路」，都是以《法華經》為指引，踐行「佛心」、「師志」的人間佛教的菩薩道。

三、慈濟宗門、靜思法脈所建立起來的慈濟志業共同體，既是僧團，也是教團，同時還是社團。這使得慈濟志業完全超越了傳統佛教宗派和教派，更具有現代文明特色。

現代文明的一個重要特徵就是它的多元化。現代社群共同體也體現出多元化的特徵。作為僧團，慈濟功德會首先是一個以出家眾為代表的僧團。但是，傳統的僧團是以現出家相的僧尼為主體的，否則不可稱之為僧團。而現在的慈濟功德會已經超出了現出家相的傳統僧團形象，尤其是 2019 年 10 月 17 日舉行了隆重的清修士授證儀式，使慈濟功德會有了第一批出家男女眾帶髮修行的清

修士。

證嚴法師在授證儀式上明確指出:「慈濟宗已立,清修士即是等同出家,未出家前,不知人生的方向,既聞佛法,又找到了人生的方向,就要用佛法去體解人間道,理事要相應;既捨掉了煩惱、家累,便要學習常不輕菩薩,以開闊的心、柔軟的態度行入人群。天下苦難偏多,期許人人都能學習觀世音菩薩的聞聲救苦,『以天下為家,以眾生為親』。」這裡有三點值得注意:一是清修士是慈濟宗門下的重要組成部分,沒有慈濟宗,就沒有清修士;二是清修士等同出家人,也就是說,清修士是新時代的僧人,除了沒有身披法傳統法衣,其他與僧人無異,況且他們也有統一的清修士服飾;三是證嚴法師以常不輕菩薩來勉勵清修士,就是要踐行《法華經》中〈常不輕菩薩品〉所闡釋的常不輕菩薩要義。常不輕菩薩並不是獨立於釋迦牟尼佛之外的另一位佛,而是釋迦牟尼佛在因地修行時的菩薩身。因此,常不輕菩薩雖為菩薩身,實是佛陀自身。常不輕菩薩的主要特徵,就是恆常不輕視他人,修尊重行。這也就是說,清修士是以菩薩身形,發菩提心,行菩薩道,愛護眾生,利益眾生為目的。

慈濟志業共同體,包括慈濟慈善事業基金會和慈濟功德會兩大主體。慈濟功德會無疑是以出家的僧(尼)眾和清修士為主體,同時還包括皈依三寶的學佛居士及信眾。可以說,慈濟功德會是一個包括出家僧尼和清修士的佛教教團。但是,慈濟慈善事業基金會則是一個以慈濟功德會為核心,以慈濟宗門、靜思法脈的「內修信實誠正,外行慈悲喜舍」為宗旨的跨國界、跨民族、跨地域、跨宗教、跨信仰的公益慈善團體。

「內修信實誠正,外行慈悲喜舍」,毫無疑問是佛陀的本願,即「諸惡莫作,眾善奉行,自淨其意,是諸佛教」。在《增一阿含經》和《涅槃經》中有明確的記載,隋代智者大師《法華玄義》卷四以及在中國佛教影響很大的《四分律》、《十誦律》中也都有記載。這也就是說,佛陀創立佛教的根本目的,就是「諸惡莫作,眾善奉行,自淨其意」。「自淨其意」是內修,「諸惡莫作,眾善奉行」是外行。佛陀並不執著於佛法或佛教與世間的分別,無論是入世間還是出世間,只要是「諸惡莫作,眾善奉行,自淨其意」,就合乎佛法,就是佛教。

可是,「諸惡莫作,眾善奉行,自淨其意」,或者說「內修信實誠正,外行

慈悲喜舍」，也是普世的文化價值觀。這一價值觀是超越時間和空間，超越地域和國家、超越宗教和信仰、超越民族和種族的。因此，在佛陀的眼裡，它是佛教，在各文化、民族、國家和宗教的精英們眼中，它也是屬於他們的。這就使得世界各地不同文化、信仰、制度和民族國家的人們，只要認同慈濟「內修信實誠正，外行慈悲喜舍」的理念，都可以成為慈濟人，都可以成為慈濟慈善事業基金會的一分子。

根據大陸百度網百度百科的報導，慈濟慈善事業基金會於 2008 年經國務院批准成立，是由民政部註冊的全國性基金會，總部位於蘇州，2017 年獲准認定為「慈善組織」。在民政部組織的 2012、2017、2023 年度全國性社會組織等級評估中均被評為 4A 級基金會，2026 年獲得 2026 年度至 2028 年度公益性社會組織捐贈稅前扣除資格。眾所周知，中國大陸對於境外宗教勢力進入大陸傳教和開展各種宗教性活動，是嚴格禁止的，除了政府特別批准的特別活動以外。這也就是說，中國大陸官方完全接受慈濟慈善事業基金會作為一個「慈善組織」，而不是一個佛教性組織。事實上，慈濟慈善事業基金會在世界許多國家和地區被廣泛認可，也主要是作為一個慈善組織，而不是一個宗教性組織。這在東南亞的印尼等地表現得尤為明顯。

因此，以《法華經》為依據而建立的慈濟宗門，既是一個具有鮮明佛教特質的僧團和教團，也是一個佛教性特質淡化而將「內修信實誠正，外行慈悲喜舍」的慈濟宗門精神作為普遍價值和核心價值的慈善組織。

Reconsidering Human Security: Tzu Chi–Style Service Buddhism and the Contemporary Bodhisattva Path

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Abstract

Since the end of the Cold War, the concept of human security has shifted attention from state sovereignty and military defence toward individual vulnerability, dignity, and survival. While this turn marks an important move beyond the logic of "ending war," much human security scholarship remains dominated by frameworks of risk management, governance, and institutional intervention. As a result, the ethical and inner dimensions of human security are often under-theorised.

This paper takes the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation as its central case to rethink the ethical foundations of human security through religious practice. It proposes the concept of Tzu Chi–style service Buddhism, arguing that Tzu Chi should not be understood merely as a functional non-governmental actor within global governance. Rooted in the Bodhisattva path and Venerable Cheng Yen's ethic of great love (da ai), this form of Buddhism places deep respect for human

dignity at the centre of service, offering a more comprehensive response to suffering that integrates physical care, emotional support, and spiritual reassurance. Such religiously grounded service does not replace secular humanitarianism, but demonstrates how faith-based ethics can generate a thicker and more holistic form of human security.

Drawing on Tzu Chi's engagement in medical care, education, environmental protection, disaster relief, and community volunteering, the paper shows that these activities share a coherent ethical structure. Service here is not instrumental provision but a relational practice of care, accompaniment, and empowerment. To conceptualise this ethical logic, the paper introduces common goodness, understood not as a policy-driven "common good," but as an ethical condition generated within non-hierarchical service relationships shaped by great love. Through such practices, human security is reimagined as including inner peace and moral reassurance.

The paper does not claim that Tzu Chi represents the only possible model of religious humanitarianism. Rather, it argues that Tzu Chi offers a particularly clear illustration of the ethical contributions that religious NGOs can make to human security—contributions that are often overlooked when security is framed primarily in institutional or technocratic terms. The paper concludes by suggesting that Tzu Chi operates most meaningfully at the level of world society, offering an ethically grounded alternative to state-centred approaches to human security.

Infrastructuring Compassion: | The Moral Economy of Tzu Chi's Humanitarian Relief

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Abstract

Introduction

The moral economy underlying the humanitarian initiatives of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation is anchored in the principles of jiuyuan (救援 rescue and support) and Fuwei (膚慰 soothing, enveloping comfort). Building on the concept of the infrastructural turn (Burchardt, 2022; Graham & Macfarlane, 2015), this study introduces the concept of "infrastructuring compassion," which explains the methodologies through which Tzu Chi master, clergy, professional staff, and volunteers operationalize their foundational ideals into tangible practices, bridging the gap between conceptual frameworks and actionable interventions. The notion of infrastructuring invites a close study of both human and non-human actants, emphasizing the interconnected roles of individuals, technologies, documentation, and the organizational structure of the Tzu Chi organization as integral components that collectively produce social effects. This approach not

only focuses on the complication of humanitarian work but also expands our understanding of how compassion is enacted within a structured organizational context.

The concept of "infrastructuring compassion" represents a shift from the paradigm of religious humanitarianism, which typically focuses on spiritual teachings, moral imperatives, or individual acts of benevolence. Instead, this approach highlights the systematic development and assembly of material resources and infrastructure to facilitate effective disaster relief efforts.

Graham and Macfarlane (2014) conceptualize infrastructure not simply as a 'thing', 'system', or 'output', but rather as a complex interplay of social and technological processes that either facilitate or obstruct specific types of actions within the urban environment. Burchardt adopts the concept and further applies it to the study of urban religion. “By infrastructuring religion, I mean the ways in which religious life is premised upon the production, maintenance, and working of mundane materials that link spaces into networks of provision and make possible the circulation of energy, goods, coded meanings, and bodies.” Informed by prior research, I adopt the concept of "infrastructure" as it pertains to the complex processes through which relief efforts are facilitated. This concept encompasses the design, production, and utilization of everyday materials that serve to connect various ideas and resources within support networks. Fundamentally, this notion acknowledges the critical importance of functional objects. I study objects that have been invented for humanitarian relief, such as relief blankets, instant rice, clean water filters, and temporary housing. My focus is on how these items shape the environments of beneficiaries and encourage compassionate actions, especially in contexts marked by dangerous and unstable disaster conditions.

A Case Study: Tzu Chi Pop-up bed

When showing the photos of relief missions to the master Sheng Yen, the master saw a blind mother who could not find her toddler, sitting on the ground beside a puddle of water after the flood. The blind mother who was sitting on the floor, unable to locate her toddler after the flood, became the focal actor. The master instructed Tzu Chi's engineering staff to design a pop-up bed for the disaster survivors. This is to mobilize human actors; therefore, engineers are enrolled in the network of humanitarian needs. Their role, to some extent, is defined by the master’s compassion,

and Humanistic values guide technical design. Material constraints and artifacts shape the innovation process; those innovations must consider the eco-material, production speed, product transportation, and, simply, assembly, and be safe, of course, for survivors.

How does the urgency of disaster relief sites shape innovation? During the fieldwork, when asked about the issue of cost, the answer was that it was not an important concern. Time and space become active elements in the network. Limited time for design and production, and bear in mind that the engineers were also in charge of water filter preparation. Transportation networks influence feasibility. Therefore, the first generation of pop-up beds, rollable plastics selected for speed and portability, are simple to assemble and transport. The choice mediates between compassion and logistics.

How do those invented artifacts embody socio-material compassion? It was the master's buren (不忍 empathic reflex), the humanistic kindness, that pushed the innovation. Such an analysis contributes to an understanding of how compassion, a central idea in Buddhism, can be systematically supported through infrastructural frameworks, ultimately leading to improved outcomes in disaster relief and recovery efforts. The fieldwork discovers that the first generation of pop-up beds has emerged as a stabilized artifact within the network. Compassion translated into material infrastructure. Cost considerations, based on the instructions given to engineers, are subordinated to humanitarian values.

The pop-up beds have developed into a second generation and been displayed in Tzu Chi Hong Kong and New York during my visit. The "infrastructuring" concept urges us to rethink the infrastructure of humanitarian response, framing it as an interplay between material artifacts and the social networks that bring them to life. The infrastructure is relational, not just material. Pop-up beds link compassion, engineers, materials, logistics, and survivors. Infrastructure becomes a socio-technical assemblage. Humanitarian response is framed as an interplay of artifacts and social networks. The concept of "infrastructuring" emphasizes that the pop-up bed innovation is not simply a technical fix but the outcome of a complicated network: compassion (the master's buren), engineers, materials, time, transportation, and survivors all co-produce the infrastructure. Compassion is translated into material form through the network, showing that humanitarian infrastructure is a relational achievement rather than a static artifact.

Preliminary conclusion

Fassin (2012) critiques that humanitarian reason is driven by feelings such as compassion, pity, and empathy. These emotions highlight the suffering of others and create a moral obligation to respond. Fassin introduces the idea of "humanitarian government," which involves the state utilizing moral sentiments to oversee and control human lives, especially those of marginalized and oppressed groups, both within and outside national borders.

This study is an attempt to use the concept of "infrastructuring compassion" to offer a procreative critique of Fassin's "humanitarian government" by transforming fleeting compassion into a decentralized, sustained material practice. By embedding "compassion" into tangible systems like ritual logistics and disaster relief, the Tzu Chi organization shifts from top-down moral oversight to reciprocal empowerment, fostering horizontal solidarity rather than paternalistic control. This model demonstrates how compassion acts as a structural force for grassroots agency rather than a tool for managing marginalized populations. Unlike Fassin's 'humanitarian reason,' Tzu Chi's empathic reflex (buren) and enveloping comfort (Fuwei) function as a bottom-up infrastructure.

Eco-Bodhisattvas in the Anthropocene: Generational, Gendered, and Transnational Dimensions of Tzu Chi's Climate Activism

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Abstract

I. Introduction: Religion, Ecology, and Climate Change

In response to the contemporary global realities of climate change, an increasing number of religious leaders and scholars from diverse traditions have begun to offer ecological reflections rooted in their respective faiths. These reflections seek to provide a moral imperative regarding climate change and contemporary ecological issues. For instance, in November 2021 at the COP26 in Glasgow, Scotland, Pope Francis convened nearly forty interfaith leaders to issue a joint climate declaration, urging political decision-makers to propose effective strategies for the current ecological crisis. The calls from religious and faith-based organizations have increasingly become an indispensable component of global climate advocacy.

Responding to the sense of urgency brought about by the environmental crisis and climate

change, the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation began its environmental mission in Taiwan as early as 1990, focusing on recycling and resource recovery. Today, Tzu Chi's environmental endeavors have expanded from Taiwan to various regions worldwide. This paper explores Tzu Chi's global ecological advocacy and environmental practices, specifically those driven by the participation of women and youth, within the context of global climate advocacy and reflections on the Anthropocene.

II. The Anthropocene and Public Religion

In response to the current realities of climate change, what role can religion play? How can it possibly respond to or address contemporary environmental crises? Jurgen Habermas (2010) explored the relationship between faith and reason within "a post-secular age." Furthermore, in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, several scholars have dedicated themselves to investigating the actual and ideal roles of religion in public life (Butler, Habermas, Taylor, & West 2011). This study attempts to explore the specific functions of "public religion" within these conceptual frameworks.

From the perspective of interdisciplinary reflections on the Anthropocene, examining the intrinsic values of religious organizations in response to climate change offers a significant conceptual lens. Since Nobel laureate Paul Crutzen introduced the term "Anthropocene" in 2000, it has resonated across numerous academic fields. As scientists increasingly conclude that human activity has become a dominant influence on the Earth's systems, the concept has fueled extensive interdisciplinary debate over the past decade.

In the West, the development of "Green Buddhism" (Kaza 2019) represents a critique of modernity and an attempt to call for an alternative path of development. Buddhist ecological ethics posits that all life forms are equal and interdependent—a stark contrast to the anthropocentric view that prioritizes humans over all other beings. In analyzing the phenomena and impacts of climate change, the role of religion is gaining increasing recognition. Specifically, Master Cheng Yen's advocacy for " Living in Harmony with the Earth" offers a profound case of how Buddhist ethics can actively respond to climate change, making the role of Tzu Chi as a public religion worthy of in-depth exploration.

III. Case Study: Tzu Chi USA

This study adopts a globalized perspective on climate change, identifying Tzu Chi USA as the primary case for analysis. As a highly autonomous overseas entity relative to the headquarters in Taiwan, Tzu Chi USA serves not only as a bridge for international connectivity and organizational capacity building for the global foundation but also as a vital platform for youth participation. Furthermore, it functions as a key actor in driving Tzu Chi's international ecological advocacy and responding to the climate crisis.

To gain a profound understanding of how various internal actors within Tzu Chi participate in global environmental initiatives, this research utilizes qualitative in-depth interviews. Interviews were conducted with core leadership from both the Taiwan headquarters and Tzu Chi USA, youth delegates, Tzu Chi commissioners involved in global ecological advocacy, and volunteers from the Life Science Farm in Los Angeles.

IV. Tzu Chi's Transnational Climate Action Network

Since the inception of its environmental protection initiatives in 1992, Tzu Chi's environmental mission has evolved over three decades into one of the organization's core pillars. Beyond establishing a localized recycling infrastructure throughout Taiwan, Tzu Chi's environmental endeavors have demonstrated a clear trajectory toward globalization, aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Liu 2024). Lee & Han (2015) observed that Tzu Chi's environmental discourse has increasingly resonated with global intellectual currents surrounding climate change movements, positioning environmental protection as a proactive methodology for addressing the climate crisis. Since 2005, "climate change" has become an integral concept within the Tzu Chi lexicon (Lee & Han 2015: 317).

As global attention to the climate crisis intensified, Tzu Chi began to address its tangible realities and social impacts. Building upon its foundational environmental mission, the organization started engaging with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the annual Conference of the Parties (COP). Tzu Chi's decade-long journey through COP can be categorized into three primary stages:

Stage I: Emergence and Initiation (2013-2015)

In 2013, at COP19 in Poland, Tzu Chi became an official observer of the UNFCCC. This international recognition of its NGO status was largely due to its extensive practical experience in environmental protection and international disaster relief. At COP21 in 2015, Tzu Chi premiered a multilingual video of Dharma Master Cheng Yen's speech, *"Caring for Our Earth,"* to promote its environmental philosophy on a global stage.

Stage II: Institutionalization and Conceptual Constitution (2016-2019)

From 2016 onward, Tzu Chi consistently integrated its environmental concepts and mission outcomes into the COP international platform. This period focused on a dual objective: gaining a more sophisticated grasp of how its environmental practices respond to climate change, and critically observing how its Buddhist-based model of environmental praxis could resonate more effectively with a global audience. During this stage, Tzu Chi progressively utilized the COP platform to present its core environmental philosophies, practices, and innovations as a direct response to the climate crisis.

Stage III: Strategic Expansion and Organizational Synergy (2021–Present)

Tzu Chi has entered a phase of proactive cross-organizational exchange and multi-faceted collaboration. Centering its advocacy on "Plant-based Diets and Environmental Protection" as a means to restore the Earth's vitality, the organization has fostered close ties with other environmental groups and interfaith organizations. By 2023, Tzu Chi demonstrated the capacity to organize interfaith and cross-organizational seminars and has begun selecting youth delegates to observe and participate directly in the conferences.

V. Ecological Practices Rooted in Women and Youth Initiatives

Tzu Chi's ecological advocacy and practices within the United Nations framework focus primarily on two key sub-sectors of participation:

First, in alignment with the United Nations' emphasis on the role of women in advancing ecological initiatives, Tzu Chi's international ecological advocacy has strategically engaged climate issues through female perspectives. This approach has successfully fostered network synergies with

international women-led ecological movements. Key figures include the former CEO of Tzu Chi USA, a commissioner from the German branch, and a staff member from the Department of Global Collaboration and Youth Development. These three prominent Chinese women have been instrumental in Tzu Chi's participation in the COP (Conference of the Parties), amplifying women's voices within the organization's international ecological advocacy.

Furthermore, in recent years, Tzu Chi has placed significant emphasis on the role of youth in international advocacy, a priority that aligns closely with the United Nations' focus on youth-led climate action. However, the question of how to ensure sustained empowerment for youth participation in international climate discourse remains a long-term strategic challenge. This involves cultivating a global perspective among youth, fostering a sense of mission regarding ecological issues, and effectively localizing international initiatives into sustainable community-based actions.

For Tzu Chi's international ecological advocacy, youth empowerment represents a new point of departure. In 2021, the organization launched the International Youth Leadership Program (IYLP). Under this initiative, the Taiwan headquarters oversees the selection and training of youth delegates, while the USA branch provides the international platforms necessary for these delegates to participate in high-level forums, such as the UN Climate Change Conference (COP) and the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). Opening these channels for youth participation not only strengthens Tzu Chi's global presence but also serves to bridge intergenerational gaps within the organization.

VI. Conclusion and Discussion: Buddhism in the Anthropocene

Tzu Chi promotes the "Bodhisattva Path" as a means to provide comfort to both the Earth and all sentient beings, embodying the humanistic concern and social praxis of Engaged Buddhism. The ecological advocacy and actions undertaken by Tzu Chi USA in response to climate change demonstrate the organization's active role as a "public religion."

In recent years, research intersecting religion, climate change, and sustainable development has gained increasing scholarly attention. Buddhism is an integral part of this discourse,

particularly concerning its response to the Anthropocene and the potential roles it may play within this epoch (Conty 2024; Saskia Abrahms-Kavunenko & Jovan Maud 2024).

The religious discourse and environmental practices underlying Tzu Chi's United Nations ecological advocacy serve as a significant case study for understanding how Buddhism addresses climate change and responds to the Anthropocene. Furthermore, they highlight the "ecological turn" within Asian Buddhism and the distinctive characteristics of Anthropocene Buddhism.

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Tzu Chi Volunteers in Mainland China: Humanistic Buddhism, Moral Discipline, and the Making of Volunteer Spirit

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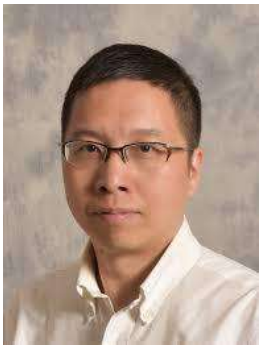

Abstract

This paper examines Tzu Chi volunteers in mainland China, with a particular focus on Guangzhou, in order to analyze how a Taiwan-based Buddhist charitable organization cultivates volunteer spirit in the context of contemporary urban society. Originating in Taiwan, the Tzu Chi Foundation is a globally influential Buddhist non-governmental organization whose development in mainland China has been closely connected to the movement of Taiwanese businesspeople, social networks, and charitable ideas across the Taiwan Strait. As Tzu Chi entered mainland cities, including Guangzhou, it did not simply transplant a set of philanthropic activities. It also brought with it a distinctive moral discourse, an organizational structure of volunteer advancement, and a religiously grounded vision of self-cultivation through service. This paper therefore treats Tzu Chi not merely as a charitable institution, but as a social and moral world in which volunteer action is systematically produced, shaped, and sustained.

Based on fieldwork and ethnographic inquiry, the paper takes the formation of volunteer groups, the processes of discipline and moral edification, and the characteristics of volunteer spirit as its main analytical framework. Its central question is how Tzu Chi volunteers in Guangzhou, situated within a rapidly changing urban and market-oriented society, come to embrace a durable form of volunteerism supported by religious ideas and organizational training. In this sense, the study moves beyond a narrow understanding of volunteering as spontaneous altruism or occasional participation in public welfare. Instead, it argues that the volunteer spirit cultivated by Tzu Chi is an everyday, sustainable, and deeply structured disposition. It is rooted in Humanistic Buddhism, reinforced through repeated organizational practices, and embodied in the ordinary conduct of volunteers both within and beyond charitable settings.

The paper situates this case within the broader transformation of modern Chinese Buddhism, especially the rise of Humanistic Buddhism. Humanistic Buddhism represents a major shift away from world-renouncing forms of Buddhist practice centered on ritual transcendence and toward an ethically engaged orientation focused on this-worldly life, social improvement, and the building of a "Pure Land on earth." In this intellectual and institutional tradition, Buddhist compassion is not confined to temple worship or personal salvation, but is expressed through education, welfare, relief, and service to society. Tzu Chi is one of the most influential examples of this transformation. Its development illustrates how Buddhist ethics can be reinterpreted through modern organizational forms and directed toward large-scale charity, social care, and moral education. From this perspective, the study of Tzu Chi volunteers in mainland China also becomes a study of how Humanistic Buddhism is localized, embodied, and reproduced across different social contexts.

One of the core arguments of the paper is that Tzu Chi volunteerism is inseparable from the making of a collective identity. In Guangzhou, Tzu Chi does not rely only on abstract preaching or on temporary recruitment for charitable events. Rather, it forms volunteers through a layered organizational system, repeated participation, and dense interpersonal relations. Volunteers move through different stages, from ordinary volunteers to more advanced and recognized positions, and this process of advancement is tied to long-term commitment, labor, discipline, and moral visibility within the organization. The group is structured through mentoring, functional teams, ritual

gatherings, and a familial idiom that frames the organization as a moral community rather than a loose association of helpers. Through these mechanisms, volunteers gradually come to identify themselves as "Tzu Chi people," a shared identity that strengthens organizational recognition, emotional attachment, and collective belonging. In an urban society often marked by individualization and instrumental calculation, this collective identity provides participants with a stable moral framework and a meaningful social location.

A second major argument is that Tzu Chi forms volunteer spirit through the dual process of discipline and moral edification. The paper borrows from discussions of discipline while adapting them to the context of religious charity. Tzu Chi's practices do not primarily operate through coercion or punishment. Instead, they work through carefully structured training, repeated ritualized activity, shared codes of behavior, and a moral language that encourages self-regulation. Reading groups, volunteer training, collective singing and signing, formal procedures in community events, and rules of comportment all function as techniques for shaping the body, emotions, speech, and everyday habits of volunteers. These practices cultivate politeness, order, emotional restraint, humility, and a readiness to serve. Importantly, the paper argues that such discipline is not experienced simply as external control. It is presented and internalized as education, cultivation, and transformation. In this sense, Tzu Chi's volunteer culture depends not only on organizational management but also on the internal acceptance of moral reform as a desirable path of becoming a better person.

The paper further emphasizes that this process of transformation is sustained by religious meanings. Tzu Chi volunteers are not motivated solely by secular humanitarian concern. Their service is interpreted through Buddhist concepts such as karmic causation, merit accumulation, compassion, blessing, and the bodhisattva path. These ideas provide a framework in which charitable action becomes spiritually intelligible and emotionally rewarding. Giving is not understood as a purely self-sacrificial act, nor simply as moral obligation. Rather, it is framed as a form of self-cultivation in which helping others also purifies the self, reduces attachment, and generates wisdom. In this moral economy, altruism and self-transformation are not opposed. Acts of service carry both other-regarding and self-regarding significance. The paper therefore challenges any simplistic interpretation of Tzu Chi volunteerism as either pure altruism or mere

instrumentalism. It shows instead that volunteers are sustained by a complex ethical orientation in which personal fulfillment, moral refinement, and service to others are mutually reinforcing.

This moral logic is captured especially clearly in the discourse of joyful giving found among Tzu Chi volunteers. The paper notes that Tzu Chi's teachings encourage participants to understand service as a blessing rather than as burden. The phrase that volunteers should be "willing to do and happy to bear" reflects an ethic in which labor, sacrifice, and even hardship are endowed with positive moral meaning. To give is not to suffer loss but to realize one's capacity to benefit others; to serve is not merely to expend time and money but to affirm one's fortunate position as someone able to extend help. Such discourse transforms volunteer action into an emotionally sustainable practice. Rather than emphasizing exhaustion, resentment, or heroic sacrifice, Tzu Chi emphasizes gratitude, joy, and "bliss in the Dharma." This helps explain why many volunteers continue their commitment over long periods and why organizational norms can be accepted so deeply without being experienced as oppressive.

At the same time, the paper insists that Tzu Chi's volunteer spirit must be understood within the social conditions of contemporary China. The study begins from the observation that post-reform Chinese society has undergone profound changes, including the decline of older collectivist structures, the expansion of market rationality, and the increasing individualization of social life. In such a context, the rise of religiously grounded volunteerism is significant. Tzu Chi offers participants a way to reconstruct moral meaning, social trust, and public engagement beyond the narrow domains of family, work, and private interest. It provides a channel through which urban residents can respond to the perceived moral coldness of modern life and reconnect charitable action to everyday existence. The paper thus interprets Tzu Chi volunteerism as a response to both personal moral aspiration and wider social transformation. It is not an accidental by-product of charity, but a structured response to the need for belonging, value, and ethical orientation in a changing society.

Methodologically, the paper adopts a multi-sited ethnographic approach. Its primary field site is the Tzu Chi organization in Guangzhou, supplemented by short-term fieldwork in Taiwan. This design allows the study to compare volunteers in Guangzhou with their counterparts in Taiwan and to examine how cross-strait interaction contributes to the formation of volunteer spirit

on the mainland. The paper finds that Guangzhou volunteers are shaped not in isolation, but through ongoing contact with more established Taiwanese Tzu Chi practices. Training, certification, exchange activities, and symbolic reference to senior Taiwanese volunteers serve to reinforce organizational standards and reproduce a shared moral culture. At the same time, the mainland setting gives Tzu Chi volunteerism its own distinctive features, as volunteers negotiate the social realities of urban China while drawing on a translocal religious and organizational framework. By using multi-sited ethnography, the paper is able to show both continuity and variation in Tzu Chi's volunteer formation across regions.

Another important dimension of the paper is its attention to the relation between religion and public life. Tzu Chi consistently emphasizes charitable practice while avoiding overt political involvement. This principle is part of the broader Humanistic Buddhist orientation described in the comparative article on Tzu Chi and Dharma Drum Mountain, which argues that Humanistic Buddhism promotes charitable action under the ideal of "encouraging goodness without engaging in politics." This orientation helps explain both the appeal and the limits of Tzu Chi's public role. On the one hand, non-political charity allows the organization to maintain moral legitimacy, organizational stability, and broad social acceptability. On the other hand, such an approach also limits its capacity to engage directly with structural questions of public policy and inequality. For the purposes of this paper, however, the more immediate significance is that the non-political framing enables volunteerism to be understood as moral practice, self-cultivation, and compassionate service rather than as activism or protest.

Overall, this paper argues that the case of Tzu Chi volunteers in mainland China reveals a distinctive form of religiously grounded volunteerism. This form of volunteer spirit is not reducible to simple notions of doing good, accumulating merit, or participating in charity as an isolated act. Rather, it is generated through the interaction of Humanistic Buddhist ideas, organizational discipline, community belonging, ritualized practice, and embodied moral education. Tzu Chi enables volunteers to enter Buddhism through the "gate of goodness," while simultaneously transforming charitable work into a path of ethical refinement and spiritual cultivation. In doing so, it turns everyday service into a means of building both the self and a moral community. However, this paper also points out: While Tzu Chi's volunteer spirit appears morally

admirable in its emphasis on compassion, self-discipline, and joyful giving, it may also reproduce subtle forms of hierarchy, conformity, and depoliticization. The organization presents itself as egalitarian, yet volunteers advance through staged training, visible commitment, and moral evaluation, so that greater sacrifice often brings greater voice and recognition. Repeated ritual practice and behavioral regulation may cultivate civility and self-restraint, but they can also produce compliant bodies and discourage dissent. Moreover, Tzu Chi's insistence on avoiding political involvement helps preserve organizational stability, yet it may limit engagement with structural sources of inequality and weaken its capacity to influence public policy. In this sense, Tzu Chi's volunteerism should be understood not only as a form of moral empowerment, but also as a disciplined mode of social participation shaped by its religious and organizational boundaries. The study, therefore, contributes to understanding how religion, organization, and civic action intersect in contemporary China, and how charitable practice can become a powerful site for the making of disciplined, meaningful, and socially embedded volunteer subjectivities.

Keywords: Tzu Chi; volunteers; mainland China; Guangzhou; Humanistic Buddhism; volunteer spirit; discipline and moral edification

Writing Religious Charisma: The Buddhist Publishing Industry and Bhikshuni

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Abstract

In this article, the terms "writing" and "religious charisma" are specifically defined as follows, based on the author's synthesis of theories from preceding scholars. The concept of "writing" is not limited to personal authorship; it encompasses any written discourse produced under their name that records and presents the individual's religious charisma. The protagonists in these papers or monographs may write personally, dictate, or be reported on, thereby facilitating the textual dissemination of the Dharma.

As for "religious charisma", it is defined broadly. Depending on the protagonist's life course and the time of publication, it is presented in three distinct stages: early life experiences, the founding of a religious order, and becoming a socially recognized religious leader. The characteristics of religious charisma described in each stage have different focal points but are closely interconnected.

The early life experiences require legends of innate talent or divine election and strong personal willpower to demonstrate that the religious charisma of the future founding master is sufficient to serve as a paradigm for cultivation and to attract followers.

Upon founding a religious order, the institutionalization of the order's operations is necessary to support the authority of the founding master, thereby facilitating organizational division of labor and maintaining consensus. During this stage, the systematization of the founding master's thought, along with the promulgation of the purpose and methods of cultivation, will gradually form the brand characteristics of the order.

In the third stage, during the process of the founding master gaining social recognition, they rely on a more clearly defined reputation and brand of both the religious leader and the order. Conversely, due to the need for popularization, their religious charisma will undergo self-limitation, or even experience a process of disenchantment.

Throughout these three stages, religious charisma is not lost; rather, it transforms in correspondence with the expansion of the audience. For instance, when religious leaders step from the religious sphere into the social sphere to become public leaders, they must simultaneously translate and transform Buddhist terminology while maintaining the religion's superior irreplaceability.

Naturally, writing and publishing more frequently led to a higher public profile. Nevertheless, the conditions of the Buddhist publishing industry in the early post-war period were suboptimal. The publication of most monastic works was organized on a case-by-case basis—for instance, publishing a single biography or complete works in a lifetime, utilizing earmarked funds. The prolific publication of monastic works ultimately fostered a cohort of professors specializing in Taiwanese Buddhist history.

In Research on the Publishing Activities of Buddhist Bhikshunis in Taiwan after the Retrocession (2022), Shi Jianju utilized the library and database resources of the Luminary Bhikshuni Sangha to detail the classification and quantity of publications produced by Taiwanese Bhikshunis between 1961 and 2021. She discovered that during 1987-2005, marking the peak of individual publications by Taiwanese Bhikshunis, accounting for 52%. Based on publication

volume statistics, Shi Jianju listed the top 4 Taiwanese Bhikshunis as follows: Cheng Yen of Tzu Chi, the Bhikshuni group of Fo Guang Shan, Hiu Wan of Huafan, Chao-hwei of Hongshi. Shi Jianju categorized these Bhikshuni leaders based on their publication content as follows: (1) Cheng Yen: emphasizing charity and ethics through the integration of Buddhism and Confucianism; (2) Hiu Wan: integrating Zen and art into the Buddha's educational ideals; (3) Chao-hwei: emphasizing social movements and feminist consciousness.

Her quantitative survey results show that the publication volume of Bhikshunis aligns quite well with our "understanding" (or more accurately, societal commentary) of the ranking of Buddhist organizations—Fo Guang Shan 47% > Tzu Chi 14% > Dharma Drum Mountain 9%, and Buddhist organizations 88% > general non-Buddhist publishers 12%. Therefore, "the disparate ratio of publication volume is directly proportional to the size of the organizational structure". The content of the published genres—ranging from voluminous sutra series to translations, from Buddhist writings to comic books and children's books, and from literary creations and travelogues to cookbooks—also indicates that the division of labor among monks and nuns in the Buddhist publishing enterprise corresponds to the gender division of labor in general society.

Li Yu-chen discovered that up to 2021, a total of 19 standalone biographies of Taiwanese Bhikshunis have been published post-war. Prior to 1988, biographies of Bhikshunis were entirely recorded by men (most notably Chen Hui-jian) and were included in collective biographies, without any standalone volumes. The mass publication of Bhikshuni biographies after the year 2000 was undertaken by certain Sanghas themselves to build consensus and enhance recognizability, as part of publishing plans aimed at writing Sangha history or elevating the charisma of their leaders. Moreover, Venerable Wu Yin went further to propose that "Bhikshunis should write Bhikshuni history.", inheriting the teaching of Venerable Tien Yi that "Bhikshunis can manage Bhikshuni affairs."

The publications of Bhikshunis demonstrate that knowledge (especially an academic professional identity) serves as the backing for the majority of Bhikshuni authors. The higher the educational background of Bhikshunis, the greater their sensitivity to their own historical positioning, and the stronger their discursive power.

In addition to academic education, Master Cheng Yen's leadership in guiding followers to engage in the modern technological sphere, ranging from charity to humanitarian aid, indicates that Bhikshuni Sangha attract the participation of modern intellectuals, achieving the maternal religious charisma of these nun leaders.

The degree of professionalization among Taiwanese Bhikshuni Sanghas is exceptionally strong. Their core purpose in establishing these religious orders is clear, and their focused objectives are consistently manifested in talent cultivation, discourses on cultivation, and the mobilization of laypeople, yielding highly significant results. This kind of professionalization transcends gender boundaries, and the relatively egalitarian and classless leadership style they maintain helps to expand their religious charisma.

Keywords: Taiwanese Buddhist nuns, Charisma and Publication, Ven. Cheng Yen, Nuns' education, the three stages of charismatic formation

Compassion Network: The Tzu Chi Pure Practitioners in the Age of Globalisation

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Abstract

This paper argues that the global expansion of the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation cannot be understood through the language of compassion alone. While Tzu Chi is widely recognised for its humanitarian relief, medical care, environmentalism, and transnational volunteerism, its capacity to scale compassion across continents depends equally on a codified ethical infrastructure: the Ten Tzu Chi Precepts and the disciplined forms of subject formation they sustain. At the centre of this paper is a group that brings this moral infrastructure into especially sharp focus: Tzu Chi's Pure Practitioners (Qingxiu shi 清修士). Neither fully monastic nor conventionally lay, the Pure Practitioners embody a distinctive mode of modern Buddhist life in which rigorous self-cultivation, institutional service, and public engagement are integrated. By placing them at the centre of analysis, this paper shows how Tzu Chi has crafted a specifically Taiwanese and globally portable form of Buddhist moral modernity.

Existing scholarship on Tzu Chi has rightly emphasised Master Cheng Yen's charisma, the movement's rhetoric of compassion, and its remarkable ability to mobilize lay volunteers across national boundaries. Yet this focus on compassion often obscures the internal ethical architecture that renders compassion actionable, repeatable, and organisationally durable. My argument is that Tzu Chi's globalisation rests on two interlocking pillars: first, a compassion network that articulates a universalist ethics of care; second, an innovative precept system that institutionalizes that care into portable, enforceable, and adaptable rules for contemporary life. The Pure Practitioners reveal the relationship between these two pillars with unusual clarity. They are not peripheral to the organisation, but rather exemplify how moral discipline is embodied, transmitted, and stabilised within Tzu Chi's global framework.

The category of Pure Practitioners is analytically important because it crystallises a major transformation in modern Buddhism: the relocation of disciplined religious life from the exclusive domain of the monastery into the sphere of lay-centred public service. Historically, Buddhist monastic codes regulated renunciant communities separated from household life. Tzu Chi, by contrast, has refunctioned moral discipline into a lay-based, service-oriented regime suited to the conditions of global civil society. The Pure Practitioners stand at the forefront of this transformation. They do not simply assist the monastic sangha or serve as exemplary volunteers; rather, they occupy an intermediate ethical position through which the boundaries between lay and monastic, renunciant and civic actor, spiritual cultivation and humanitarian professionalism are productively reconfigured. In this sense, they are a crucial lens through which to understand how Buddhist traditions generate new forms of modernity from within their own civilisational resources.

The paper develops this argument through the framework of multiple modernities. Against models of modernisation that assume convergence toward a single Western pattern, Eisenstadt emphasises that modernity is continually reconstituted through culturally embedded programs, institutional experimentation, and the active reinterpretation of tradition. This perspective is particularly useful for understanding Buddhist organisations in East Asia, where modernity is often expressed not through the sacralisation of the political centre but through civil-society formations, social ethics, and lay religious practice. Tzu Chi represents such a case. Its moral

program is neither a derivative copy of Western NGO rationality nor a simple preservation of premodern Buddhist discipline. Instead, it is a distinctively Buddhist moral modernity: lay-centred, service-oriented, organisationally codified, and globally scalable. The Pure Practitioners embody this moral modernity in especially concentrated form, because they make visible the ethical labour through which Tzu Chi translates compassion into institutional action.

At the level of ethical form, the Ten Tzu Chi Precepts are crucial. They combine classical Buddhist norms—no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct, no false speech, and refraining from intoxicants—with contemporary stipulations such as abstaining from smoking, gambling, drug use, and betel nut chewing; practicing filial piety and gentle comportment; obeying traffic rules; and refraining from political participation or demonstrations. These additions are not merely secondary or pragmatic. They reveal how Buddhist ethics are translated into the infrastructures of modern life: roads, media, public safety regimes, family roles, and the politically sensitive spaces of humanitarian work. The Pure Practitioners serve as especially visible carriers of this code. Through their disciplined comportment, routinised service, and pedagogical role within the organisation, they transform the precepts from doctrinal statements into living protocols. They exemplify what I call moral infrastructure: portable, standardised, and enforceable rule-sets that shape subjectivities, coordinate collective action, and stabilise trust across sites.

This concept of moral infrastructure helps explain why Pure Practitioners matter so much. In infrastructural terms, the Ten Precepts operate like a protocol stack. At one level, they regulate bodily abstentions and habits; at another, they govern speech, comportment, and interpersonal ethics; at yet another, they establish public-facing boundaries such as traffic obedience and political non-partisanship. The Pure Practitioners, however, are not just followers of this infrastructure. They are also among its most important mediators. They model the ethical aesthetic of Tzu Chi in visible ways, help reproduce organisational norms through training and mentoring, and give the broader volunteer corps a concrete image of what disciplined compassion looks like. Their role demonstrates that Tzu Chi's expansion depends not only on affective inspiration but on embodied exemplarity. Compassion mobilises; codification governs; Pure Practitioners connect the two.

The paper therefore shifts attention from compassion as sentiment to compassion as organised discipline. Tzu Chi's own pedagogical language frequently joins rule and care: "take

precepts as the institution; take love as the principle of management." This formulation is not rhetorical ornament. It expresses a managerial spirituality in which discipline is not opposed to compassion but is its enabling condition. Pure Practitioners are the clearest manifestation of this logic. Their significance lies precisely in their capacity to inhabit a rigorous spiritual regimen while remaining engaged in the world rather than withdrawing from it. They show that contemporary Buddhist discipline need not be monastic in the narrow sense to be intense, durable, and transformative. In this respect, they unsettle the assumption that modern spirituality is necessarily privatised, therapeutic, or detached from institutional authority. Instead, they point to a form of spirituality that is communal, rule-governed, and civically embedded.

Methodologically, the paper combines textual analysis, interviews, and comparative interpretation. I analyse Tzu Chi's official precept materials, bilingual educational texts, training manuals, volunteer resolutions, and movement media as curricular instruments that codify expectations and facilitate transnational portability. I also draw on interviews with monastics, chapter heads, training staff, and volunteers of varying tenure in order to examine how precepts are interpreted, taught, enforced, and lived. Within this broader field, the Pure Practitioners function as a particularly revealing node: they bring into focus questions of authority, role differentiation, and the ethical co-production of lay and monastic forms of life. Rather than reproducing a divide in which monastics regulate while laity merely support, Tzu Chi creates a partnership in which monastics provide charismatic and doctrinal authority while disciplined laity operationalize compassion in public service. The Pure Practitioners intensify this lay–monastic integration by serving as a bridging category whose authority derives less from ordination than from ethical formation and institutional commitment.

The comparative dimension of the paper places Tzu Chi's precept regime alongside Japanese Shin Buddhism. This juxtaposition is not meant to collapse the two cases but to clarify how Buddhist traditions in East Asia have produced divergent yet equally modern responses to changing social realities. In Shin Buddhism, the normalization of clerical marriage and meat-eating redefined the relationship between clergy and lay society, embedding institutional authority within family and community structures. Tzu Chi, by contrast, has developed a lay-oriented ethical system for a globalised public sphere, using portable precepts to coordinate volunteers across multiple legal

and cultural environments. The Pure Practitioners sharpen this contrast. If Shin Buddhism represents one trajectory of clerical domestication, Tzu Chi's Pure Practitioners represent another trajectory: not the domestication of clergy into lay life, but the intensification of lay discipline into a spiritually charged mode of civic participation. Together, these trajectories reveal the plural and context-dependent character of Buddhist modernities in East Asia.

In conclusion, this paper argues that Tzu Chi's Pure Practitioners illuminate a crucial yet under-theorized dimension of global Buddhism: the creation of modern spiritual subjects through disciplined lay participation. They exemplify how Buddhist ethics are translated into portable organizational forms, how compassion is stabilized through codification, and how lay actors become central agents in the production of a modern moral order. A focus on Pure Practitioners therefore allows us to see Tzu Chi not simply as a humanitarian NGO with Buddhist characteristics, nor merely as a compassionate movement with efficient management, but as a religious formation that has generated its own distinctive moral infrastructure for the age of globalization. In this formation, spirituality is neither privatized nor anti-institutional. It is collective, regulated, and oriented toward public service. The Pure Practitioners stand at the heart of that formation, making visible a specifically Taiwanese and globally resonant example of multiple Buddhist modernities.

Modern Body-Giving Bodhisattvas: Affect, Emotional Practice, and Ethics in the Whole-Body Donations to Tzu Chi

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Taiwan Tsing Hua University

Abstract

Since 1995, the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation's "Silent Mentors" whole-body donation curriculum has fundamentally transformed end-of-life practices in Taiwan, inspiring secular medical institutions nationwide to adopt similar commemorative frameworks. By the end of 2025, over 1,200 donors have completed their donations for gross anatomy or surgery simulation at Tzu Chi, becoming what the tradition calls body-giving bodhisattvas. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted since 2012 at both Tzu Chi University and a secular university in northern Taiwan, this paper examines how voluntary cadaver donation has reshaped the moral, affective, and temporal dimensions of death in Taiwan's "super-aged" society.

I argue that family members are central to the realization of Silent Mentors, performing sustained affective labor across a prolonged process spanning end-of-life care,

years of deferred cremation, and participatory commemoration. This deferral of social death creates a new ritual timeline, fulfilling what I term the "moral career" of the dead body and restructuring the traditional rite of passage associated with death. Crucially, unlike conventional funerary practice, which affords little space for emotional expression, whole-body donation places affect at its very core. The grief, devotion, and emotional engagement of donor families during final ceremonies actively contribute to the body's sanctification, marking a significant departure from Taiwan's traditional death rituals.

Situated within the ethical turn in anthropology, I propose that the rise of modern body-giving bodhisattvas reflects a broader cultural transformation across Taiwan and Asia more widely: the ethicalization of death. Understood anthropologically as the reflexive practice of freedom rather than through Buddhist doctrine alone, this ethicalization signals the opening of new possibilities for navigating mortality beyond traditional ancestral frameworks. The Silent Mentors phenomenon ultimately illuminates an emergent and significant trend in which the journey toward death becomes an arena for moral self-cultivation and the expression of a deeply relational selfhood.

Day 3:
Design Futures after Buddhism: Worldmaking by Other Means

An Archive of Impossible Objects

Anthony Dunne & Fiona Raby
Parsons School of Design
The New School

Abstract

The archive consists of objects that celebrate the ontological imagination, and new kinds of literacy. They might come from the edges of science, where competing models of reality flourish. From writers who spend their days imagining expansive fictional realities. Or from the history of ideas, where what is considered real at any moment in time can fade in and out of existence, leaving behind infrastructure, institutions, ideas, and objects from outmoded frameworks that continue to shape and limit the reality. To this we can add nonhuman ontologies that by their very nature are impossible to grasp for human-shaped minds. In design, the archive might also serve as a resource for moving beyond “futures" as the primary way of framing possible worlds.

Reconstrained Design

James Auger
RMIT

Abstract

Design practice always happens under a particular set of forces or conditions, commonly known as constraints. These constraints may be straightforward and indisputable, such as a physical or material quality—the force of gravity or the tensile strength of a structural beam. They can be the subject of discussion and compromise, such as a financial cost or a timeline. They can relate to aesthetic or cultural considerations, such as a fashion trend or social movement. Constraints of this basic type influence the design process by providing tangible limits that can be adhered to or challenged. But constraints also exist in more covert, abstract or oblique forms, such as national infrastructure systems like energy grids. These become so normalised that they force designers to simply design for or within the dominant paradigm. Myths of progress act to reduce the technological future to recycled utopian imaginaries that maintain the status quo and divert attention from its fundamental flaws, and constraints imposed by design's economic relationship with the market encourage, among other things, questionable approaches to resources, labour, distribution and repair. This presentation will firstly explore some of the more dominant oblique constraints and the ways in which they negatively influence the role and purpose of design. The second part will describe the approach of Reconstrained Design, which takes the identified constraints and develops ways to reverse, work around or simply ignore them. This expands the potential of the design and the designer's ability to radically rethink modes of practice.

Designing Enlightenment: Computational Simulation of Cultural Systems and the Reconfiguration of Cognitive World

Chenchen Lu
Harvard FAS CAMLab

Abstract

This paper presents Journey to Enlightenment as a case study in rethinking design beyond representation—toward the computational simulation of cultural systems. Developed at Harvard FAS CAMLab in collaboration with the Tzu Chi Foundation, the exhibition approaches Buddhist heritage not as a collection of discrete historical artifacts, but as an integrated epistemic system encompassing cosmology, ritual practice, perceptual training, and models of mind.

Rather than reconstructing sites such as Borobudur or Dunhuang as purely visual environments, the project operationalizes their underlying logics—axiality, mandalic organization, karmic temporality, and mental transformations —as parameters within immersive media design. In this sense, the exhibition functions as a form of computational iconography: a translation of symbolic and cosmological structures into dynamic experiential systems that can be navigated, inhabited, and cognitively engaged.

This approach reframes design as a practice of worldmaking. It constructs environments that do not simply communicate meaning, but actively reorganize perception, attention, and affect. Drawing on cognitive aesthetics, the paper examines how immersive installations modulate temporal experience, induce states of attentional deceleration, and create conditions for reflective awareness—offering an alternative to the accelerated, stimulus-saturated environments of contemporary media culture.

Situating Buddhist thought as a relational and process-based ontology, the paper argues that such systems provide critical resources for design futures. Concepts such as interdependence, non-linearity, and distributed agency challenge dominant paradigms of user-centered design and technological instrumentalism. By engaging ancient cultural intelligence through computational means, CAMLab proposes a new design methodology—one that bridges historical depth with technological innovation to address urgent contemporary questions of cognition, meaning, and human experience.

Trees as Teachers

Shiela Kennedy
MIT Architecture

Abstract

Trees are central to Buddhist tradition, representing both a spatial refuge for practice and symbol of a path to change and awakening. In her talk, the architect Sheila Kennedy explores how trees may serve as teachers to guide an architecture that is consistent with a central Buddhist idea that the health of the natural world is interconnected with human well-being. Through a discussion of TREE FORM, a research and design project presented at the Berggruen Foundation's NEXT EARTH Exhibition at the 2025 Venice Biennale di Architettura, Sheila's talk draws connections between ancient arboreal wisdom, contemporary design thinking and digital tools at the intersection of computation, climate urgency, forest ecology and architectural futures.

TREE FORM is inspired by the intelligence of trees as diverse spatial forms with inherent strength created over millions of years though natural evolution. How can we understand and visualize the capacities of branching trees as structural and spatial form in architecture? And how can the assembly of trees create new ways of building and living in a regenerative architecture that benefits forests, people, and the spaces they inhabit? TREE FORM embraces the diversity of trees in their varying natural form as the lowest carbon-emitting structural system available. It imagines how architecture might move from the extractive, modern-era free plan of standardized structural

elements to a regenerative “tree plan” where tree form becomes a distinctive instructor and collaborative partner in the daily lives of people.

TREE FORM supports a value chain of relational benefits for trees, forests, people, and the spaces they inhabit. Harvesting small-diameter, invasive, or low-value branching trees is essential for forest health, fire resiliency, and ecologically responsible construction. TREE FORM demonstrates a new computational and design workflow that is being developed at MIT to redefine and transform forest ‘waste’ into higher-value structures in architecture that sequester carbon long term. This incentivizes the sustainable management of forests, supports local forest communities, and demonstrates how architects can learn from and design with the wild character of trees in ways that are improvisational, respectful and precise.

Reworlding Sansu through Nature-Drawn Boundaries

Jungyoon Kim
Harvard GSD & PARKKIM

Abstract

Drawing on my practice PARKKIM and the recent Harvard GSD conference and exhibition, Designers of Mountain and Water: Alternative Landscapes for a Changing Climate, this talk will ask how inherited cosmologies of nature in East Asia can be re-framed through the landscape architectural methodologies of the designers of mountain and water (山水 sansu) by looking at the contemporary landscape works as the materialization of their reactions to the respective bioregion.

In Buddhist and Neo-Confucian cultures, sansu has long been framed through painting, poetry, and garden art as an object of viewing: distant peaks, mist, and rivers that organize an "other" world available to the cultivated mind. In contemporary Asian cities such as Seoul, however, mountains and rivers are no longer remote; they are the literal ground of everyday life—engineered, channelized, paved, and increasingly volatile under climate change. If classical sansu offered a spiritual elsewhere, the task of the contemporary landscape architects now is to design them into a working system.

I introduce PARKKIM's notion of "alternative nature," in which sansu is treated as an expandable category of constructed ecologies. Projects such as floodplains that choreograph silt rather than simply resist it; performance landscapes sited by collaborating with climate engineers on mountain-driven wind; bridges that structurally reconstruct erased ridgelines; and urban plazas that behave as distributed watersheds—all are understood as new sansu conditions that are operational and systematic. Worldmaking here occurs through hydrology, geomorphology, and public experience, not through reproducing a "natural" look.

Methodologically, I discuss our use of bioregions, rather than nation-states or religious traditions, as the primary frame for reading 58 projects by 23 Asian practices in the GSD exhibition. Using rice as an ecological and cultural indicator species, we reassembled a post-national geography across Eastern Palearctic and Indomalayan realms in which designers of mountain and water operate as situated agents.

By repositioning sansu as both legacy and laboratory, the talk proposes landscape architecture as a key arena for "worldmaking by other means" after Buddhism: translating inherited visions of mountain and water into replicable, bioregionally specific systems for living with a changing climate.

On the Being of Plants

Chang Huai-yan & Goh Yu Han
Salad Dressing

Abstract

For centuries, plants have been treated as silent and passive—part of the backdrop to human life. Yet they sense, respond, and inhabit the world in ways that challenge our assumptions of intelligence and agency.

In the Avataṃsaka Sūtra, it is said that "in one particle are contained all worlds; in all worlds, a single particle."

This talk begins with a simple question: what if our understanding of plants has always been limited by our own way of seeing? Through a series of reflections and projects, it considers how design might shift—from shaping environments for humans, to engaging more carefully within a wider field of life.

Journey to Enlightenment—a Musical Pathway into Meditative States

Monique Mead
Carnegie Mellon University

Abstract

In a culture shaped by speed, distraction, and constant cognitive demand, traditional meditation practices can often feel inaccessible. Sound offers another entry point—one that engages and quiets the mind without prior training or sustained effort.

Drawing from her work as a musician and sound practitioner, Monique Mead presents sound meditation as a form of experience design. She demonstrates a compositional approach using elements such as tonality, pacing, harmonic beats, and silence to shape the listener's internal state over time. These principles are demonstrated live with violin and singing bowls, allowing the audience to experience how subtle shifts in sound reorganize attention and awareness.

Situated within a broader conversation about perception and worldmaking, this work approaches sound as a medium that transforms awareness, offering a direct, sensory pathway into meditative states. This presentation extends into the CAMLab Journey to Enlightenment exhibition, where live sound meditations offer an immersive, spatial experience of the concepts explored in the talk.

Hor nag maṇi: Buddhist Chanting and Community-Building in Northeastern Tibet

Cuilan Liu
Department of Religious Studies
University of Pittsburgh

Abstract

Indian Buddhism prohibits its ordained monks and nuns from making or consuming music. Yet for over a millennium, Buddhists in Tibet adopted music-making as a central tool for expressing and sharing religious experience, as exemplified by the religious chants (mgur) composed and performed by the Buddhist yogin Mi la ras pa (1052–1135) in central Tibet. This tradition of performing religious chants was unfortunately interrupted, and no systematic chanting tradition survives today in central Tibet. In this paper, I discuss a unique living Buddhist chanting tradition preserved among a handful of Tibetan monks in a small Dge lugs pa monastery in northeastern Tibet — the Mani Festival in the Fifth Month in the Hor nag region (Hor nag lnga ba'i ma maṇi), dating to 1360 — to understand how music-making creates, shapes, and connects religious communities in Tibetan Buddhism to the present day.

In the Spirit of Recycle and Reuse: Preserving Buddhist Wall Painting through Replication

Sonya Lee
University of Southern California

Abstract

The Buddhist charity Tzu Chi Foundation has spearheaded one of the most successful recycling missions in the world. The way it grew out of a lecture given by its religious leader Master Cheng Yen in 1990 to a global operation involving over one hundred thousand volunteers in nineteen countries three decades later offers an inspiring lesson in grassroot efforts to address some of the most daunting challenges we face today. Combining business savvy with social activism, spirituality, and promise of personal growth and betterment, Tzu Chi's recycling campaign can in fact serve as a generative source for developing new ideas to tackle other major issues of our time. This paper thus aims to bring Tzu Chi's approach to recycle and reuse in dialogue with the preservation and management of premodern religious material culture today for cross-fertilization. Notwithstanding the obvious differences between these two domains of activities and discourses, both are concerned with material objects that no longer retain their original function and ways to make these objects useful and meaningful again. A comparative discussion of how the process of repurposing and meaning-making is conceptualized and put into practice in both systems would yield new perspectives and insights that could be mutually beneficial. Focusing on wall painting

fragments from Buddhist cave temples along the Silk Road as a case study, I will discuss how the Tzu Chi approach to environmental issues is helpful for reimagining preservation and display strategies that can enhance the relevance of Buddhist images now housed in museums and at historic sites for contemporary audiences. Taking cues from some of Master Cheng Yen's key ideas that form the conceptual foundation of Tzu Chi's recycling program, I argue that heritage objects can be animated and made useful in ways similar to how Tzu Chi volunteers have learned to perceive and engage with discarded materials like plastic bottles and paper waste. A comparable solution in the preservation of ancient wall painting is the creative use of replicas in material and digital forms, which would offer a practical, effective way of boosting knowledge dissemination, viewer engagement and participation, all central to achieving the fundamental goals of heritage conservation.

On August 23, 1990, Master Cheng Yen gave a speech in Taichung City, in which she urged her followers to join the local government's recycling program to reduce waste and make Taiwan a beautiful island. (cited in Yang and W. Huang 2021, 75) This marked the beginning of Tzu Chi's foray into environmental activism, which was a later addition to its portfolio as a charity of poverty relief along the east coast of Taiwan. Tzu Chi's approach to reuse and recycle in many ways follows the same modus operandi that they have developed for their signature missions in medical care for the poor and disaster relief, namely, by attracting lay volunteers to perform services for others that can also help them achieve religious goals at the personal and familial levels. At the same time, the environmental mission took shape at a time when Tzu Chi was expanding outside of Taiwan, a move that had enabled the group to assume a global identity distinct from other Buddhist organizations with a more other-worldly orientation. (W. Huang 2009: 92) In fact, the recycling program is Tzu Chi's way of introducing its unique brand of socially engaged Buddhism to the world by tackling a problem that would require human participation on a planetary scale to solve.

The teaching of Master Cheng Yen is at the heart of Tzu Chi's environmental mission. I will highlight two key points to lay the groundwork for my discussion of Buddhist wall painting later in this talk. The first concerns the centrality of the Earth to the spiritual journey of all Buddhists. As the master explains, the path to enlightenment is to exercise compassion and follow the Buddha's example, through the course of which one will discover one's own Buddha nature. For

human practitioners, the Earth is the only realm in the Buddhist cosmos in which they can achieve this goal. It is thus imperative to do whatever they can to save the planet, so that they can also save others by preserving the conditions necessary for all sentient beings to embark on the same path toward enlightenment. By linking self-cultivation to environmentalist action in this way, Cheng Yen has in effect made a powerful religious rationale for environmental ethics. (Yang and Huang 2021, 83–84)

What kind of actions can Buddhists take to save the Earth while pursuing their spiritual goals at the same time? Tzu Chi's response to this question is the second point I would like to make. I would like to stress in particular Master Cheng Yen's call to her followers to treat manufactured products as living things and with compassion. This is an exceptional interpretation of the Buddhist stance on sentience, considering that some Buddhist thinkers in the past had considered plants as sentient beings but not manmade objects. (Schmithausen 2009) In Cheng Yen's teaching, Tzu Chi members have found a compelling reason to reanimate and extend the lifespan of things creatively. The recycling program was thus designed to maximize the usefulness of materials of all sorts through the so-called "Five R's": Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Repair, and Recycle. Everyone is encouraged to put these lessons into practice at home and through volunteering at recycling centers and other events run by Tzu Chi. In fact, active participation by members at both personal and group levels is critical to the continued success of the recycling program in Taiwan and elsewhere in the world. Those who volunteer tirelessly for the green mission are known as "Environmental Bodhisattvas."

The frugal lifestyle that Master Cheng Yen advocates to deal with a host of environmental challenges today has led some of her followers to adopt a hardline form of nature conservancy. As illustrated by the writings of a Tzu Chi member named Hsiao Chiu-ling, the use of natural resources for monumental projects such as Buddhist stupas and temples is considered wasteful and wrong-headed, because constructions of this kind would deplete local forests and increase the negative impact of deforestation. (Cited in Yang and Huang 2021: 81–82) As an art historian, I strongly disagree with this way of thinking about natural resources. The long, complex history of Buddhist material culture in Asia has proven that such undertakings cannot be interpreted simply as the product of a wasteful lifestyle that endangers the Earth. On the contrary, Buddhist

devotional objects and monuments have contributed enormously to making the planet more conducive for self-cultivation. For the present study, I will focus on the legacy of Buddhist material culture today through a case study on the preservation and display of wall painting. Drawing from lessons from the Tzu Chi recycling program, I argue that the use of replicas is critical to reanimating these heritage objects, making them a useful tool in visitor interpretation and knowledge production.

The practice of making copies of wall painting was as old as painting pictorial images on wall surfaces of architectural structures. It has also been an integral part of modern heritage conservation. Until the invention of flash photography, caretakers of ancient sites relied on artists making copies of pictorial content in-situ for preservation, documentation, and information dissemination purposes. Due to the limited time we have, I will introduce an exhibition held in 2024 at the Beijing Minsheng Art Museum in China that featured a diverse range of copies of ancient Buddhist wall paintings. Titled Echoes of Camel Bells: Arts and Civilizations along the Silk Roads, the show showcased different types of mural copies alongside authentic wall painting fragments from various sites in Khotan, Kucha, Turfan, and Dunhuang. These mural copies were presented in their own distinct setting. For the large-sized standalone copies, they were put in frames and displayed on the gallery walls like individual artworks. The mode of presentation is similar to the way authentic fragments were shown in the same exhibition, namely, each piece was also framed and displayed within a large case together with other cultural artifacts. In contrast to this typical museum display method is the replica cave, an artificial space especially set up in the gallery to show the entire pictorial program in the same size at the original location. There are two types of replica caves at the Echoes of Camel Bells exhibition. The first was exemplified by Yulin Cave 29 in Dunhuang, in which copies painstakingly made by artists on paper were stitched together to resemble the cave temple's actual interior on the same scale. The second was Kizil Cave 8 in Kucha, in which digitally reproduced murals were pasted onto the walls of the replica cave structure that was of the same size as the original unit. Unlike Yulin Cave 29, which still exists largely intact at the site, Kizil Cave 8 at the Beijing Minsheng Art Museum exhibition was a reconstruction of what the cave originally would have looked like—the wall paintings in Kizil Cave 8 were removed by German explorers in the early 20th century and are now in the Museum of

Asian Art in Berlin, Germany.

The diverse range of mural copies presented at the Echoes of Camel Bells exhibition offers a helpful demonstration of the different ways of reanimating ancient Buddhist wall paintings that often exist in incomplete, fragmentary state today. Although Buddhist wall paintings from the ancient Silk Road have been reinscribed with different values in modern heritage conservation, they often languish in anonymity. Presenting them in an exhibition allows today's visitors to see these works and learn about the unfamiliar sites from which they come. As they experience them in a replica cave setting, they may become curious about the work's function and meaning. The visitors can then pursue their interest further by looking at authentic fragments as well as other standalone copies in the same exhibition. The strategic pairing of different displays in one setting thus helps enhance visitor engagement with the wall paintings. The use of copies provides the exhibition organizers with more flexibility in planning and design, considering that wall paintings were part of an immovable structure that doesn't travel and there are only a limited number of fragments housed in museum collections that can be loaned. More germane to the present discussion is that displaying authentic mural fragments together with copies to recreate the site's original pictorial setting helps bring the site alive for the visitors, making it meaningful through the in-person encounter. The experience is not unlike taking an active part in sorting garbage in a recycling center where Tzu Chi volunteers often derive satisfaction from turning discarded materials into something useful again.

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Cosmic Models: Poetic Reveries on the Dunhuang Library Cave

Xiaoze Xie
Stanford University

Abstract

Inspired by his residency at the Dunhuang Academy in 2017, artist Xiaoze Xie started a project, Amber of History: Reimagining the Library Cave at Dunhuang, that focuses on the troubled history of the Library Cave and the encyclopedic content of manuscripts and relics it once stored. Bringing together elements of notes, diagrams, calligraphy, architecture, concept drawings, as well as image fragments of unearthed artifacts from the Cave, Xie developed a long scroll brush and ink drawing in many sections to document a process of study, imagination, and conceptualization that provided a blueprint for future series of paintings, sculptures, and multi-media installations. Xie's ongoing project combines scholarly research with philosophical contemplation and poetic imagination, reconstructing historical memories, lost meanings as well as complex models of the universe in Buddhist views of the cosmos. Xie will share his artistic vision and working process through his richly illustrated lecture.

Applied Buddhism and
the Contemporary Bodhisattva Path

Exploring the Future of Buddhism

應用佛法與當代菩薩道：前瞻佛教的未來