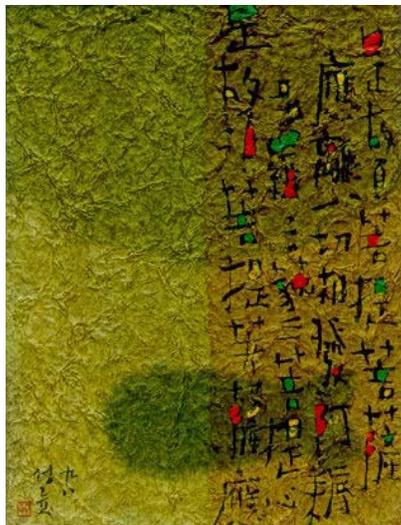


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Modernization and Traditionalism in Buddhist Almsgiving:
The Case of the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu-chi Association in
Taiwan

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Article

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Abstract

This article presents two separate analyses. The first concerns the structure of conversion to the Buddhist Compassion Relief Ciji Association ("Ciji") in economic and sociological terms, arguing that the sudden wealth generated during Taiwan's period of rapid economic development created a need to give that wealth meaning and the wealthy an identity, and that Ciji provided one way to meet that need. The second argues that Ciji provided a way of adapting traditional Buddhist rhetoric and imagery to facilitate the move from traditional "almsgiving" to "modern scientific charity." The concluding section will show that these two issues connect to each other, with the modernization of charity enabling the formation of a new identity for converts that lends meaning to their wealth.

Introduction

In 1966, a young, unknown nun living in the poorest part of Taiwan was considering relocating to the temple where her tonsure-master resided. A group of local women, who had grown fond of her, sent a delegation to convince her to stay. She listened to them, and agreed to stay on if the women would cooperate in a new kind of Buddhist

discipline based on the daily practice of charitable giving and assistance to the poor. With their concurrence, the nun put a plan into operation that, in an astonishingly short time, led to the establishment and growth of one of the largest philanthropic organizations in the world: The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu-Chi Association (Fojiao Ciji gongde hui 佛教慈濟功德會, hereafter "Ciji").

The very success of this organization has inspired much scholarly reflection and analysis, and my own work in recording the history of Buddhism in Taiwan has put me into the company of researchers who have looked at its history and mission from many different angles. At this time, studies have appeared that analyze it from the point of view of history (Jones, 1999; Jiang, 1996), politics (Laliberté, 1999, 2003; Madsen, 2007), women's studies (Weller and Huang, 1998), modernity theory (ibid.), transnationalism (Huang, 2009), and other frames of reference. To add some new analyses to this mix, I will spend some time rehearsing the story of Ciji for readers not already familiar with it, and then analyze its rise and impact as a manifestation of the movement from "almsgiving" to "modern scientific charity." After that, I will briefly consider the interesting relationship that Ciji members have with the organization and the process by which they construct new and distinctive Buddhist identities in an ambiguously modern key.

Ven. Zhengyan's Life and the Founding of Ciji

The reader may find detailed accounts of Zhengyan's early life in scholarly works (such as Jones, 1999 and Laliberté, 1999) and official Ciji sources (such as Ching, 2002 and Huang Junzhi, 1996), so I will mention only the few highlights that the reader needs for the subsequent analysis.

Ven. Zhengyan 證嚴, the founder of the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu-Chi Association, was born under the name Wang Jinyun 王錦雲 in 1937 in the town of Qingshui 清水 in Taizhong County 台中縣. While she was still quite young, her family moved from Qingshui to Fengyuan 豐原, a somewhat larger town where her

adoptive father ran a chain of movie theaters. She also experienced the hardships and fear of the Sino-Japanese war, which began the year of her birth, and the World War II Allied bombing campaigns against Taiwan, which at the time was a part of Japan. During one of these air raids, as she crouched in a shelter with others, she heard people praying to the bodhisattva Guanyin 觀音 for deliverance. Her background therefore contains elements of traditional Taiwanese village life and women's roles combined with a modern education and business experience.

The standard account of Zhengyan's youth and young adulthood always include several episodes that appear to point the way forward to her founding of Ciji. In 1952 her mother nearly died of a perforated ulcer, but recovered after Zhengyan made and kept difficult vows and had a dream of the bodhisattva Guanyin giving her a bundle of medicine. In 1960 her father died of a stroke, and she blamed herself for this since the attending physician scolded her for having unwisely had him transported home over bumpy roads. During the funeral, she pondered his corpse and wrestled with the question of what had become of him as if it were a Zen kōan. She frequented a nearby Buddhist nunnery and became close to one particular nun named Xiudao 修道, with whom she left home once to be discovered and fetched back, a second time for good. After a period of living like hermits in an abandoned temple near Taidong 台東, they relocated in 1962 to the east coast town of Hualian 花蓮, where Zhengyan remained a self-ordained nun even after Xiudao returned home. In 1963, Zhengyan sought proper ordination in Taipei but was initially refused, since the ordaining masters did not recognize the validity of her self-tonsuring and required that she have a proper master. Quite unexpectedly, she managed to get the Ven. Yinshun 印順, one of the most respected scholar-monks of the day, to tonsure her, and at his hands she received the monastic name Zhengyan and qualified for an orthodox ordination.

Returning to Hualian, she lived a very austere life in a wooden cabin behind the Puming Temple 普明寺, eating one meal a day, burning incense scars, and refusing alms for her own upkeep. Neighbors claimed to see supernatural light coming from her cabin, which

caused consternation and eventually impelled her to quit the cabin and move in with a local laywoman. Then in 1966, two final incidents took place that set in motion the chain of events that would lead to the founding of Ciji. First, while visiting a local clinic, she noticed a pool of blood in the waiting room. The people there told her it was from an aboriginal woman who had suffered a miscarriage and died after being refused treatment because her relatives could not pay the doctor's fee. (1) Second, three Roman Catholic nuns came to try and convert her to Christianity, and among other arguments they noted that Buddhism was very passive in the face of poverty and social need, while the Catholic Church operated many charitable enterprises. These two events got her thinking about Buddhism's place in a modern society. She felt she needed help in setting a new direction for herself.

Zhengyan at first intended to move to the town of Jiayi 嘉義 to be close to her master Yinshun. When her followers in Hualian heard of her plan, they approached her and asked her to remain where she was. In consenting to stay, she set the condition that everyone in this group, about thirty housewives, would have to cooperate with her venture. Each of them was to set aside a small amount of their daily grocery money (equivalent to U.S. 0.2¢) in order to build a fund that would help poor people to defray the cost of medical care. This procedure would fulfill both of the objectives noted above. The fund would go to help the poor, and at the same time the daily practice of putting aside small amounts of money (as opposed to larger amounts at less frequent intervals) would provide a daily opportunity to practice the virtue of giving and thus provide a means of developing the participants' spirituality.

The achievements of 1966 were modest. The women each put aside their pittance every day, spread the word to their friends and convinced others to participate, and the total budget for the group was equivalent at that time to US\$30.00 (Huang, 2005: 185). From these beginnings, the organization quickly burgeoned and began to grow almost exponentially. In 1980, the group registered as a civic organization with the central government under the name Ciji Gongde Hui 慈濟功德會, which in its own English-language

literature is translated as "Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu-Chi Association." This is a corpus of volunteers centered around a core group of people called "commissioners" (weiyuan 委員) who oversee the ordinary volunteers. In addition, the financial corporation that administers Ciji's funds is called the Ciji Foundation (Fojiao ciji jijinhui 佛教慈濟基金會), with a staff of over 500 people who oversee assets that, as of the year 2000, totaled US\$342 million. That same year, the Foundation gave away US \$157 million (Huang, 2005: 186). The original group of thirty housewives has also expanded to an international organization which claims five million members, although many of these are one-time contributors only.

In addition to the collection and granting of financial resources, Ciji also has come to command a great amount of human resources in the form of volunteer time and effort. When Ciji opened in 1966, it took as its first case an elderly woman from mainland China who was unable to care for herself. In addition to assisting her financially with medical costs, volunteers also went to visit her, clean her house, and prepare food. The object was to give her total care and not just a one-time donation as if she were a beggar (Jones, 1999: 206). In dealing today with larger-scale projects, such as helping victims of the 1999 earthquake in Taiwan, flooding in mainland China, or earthquakes in Pakistan and Iran, Ciji has always made it a matter of policy to field its own volunteers rather than give money to another organization on the scene (such as the Red Cross). I am not aware of any source that provides statistics on the donation of man hours, but it must be as substantial as the monetary outlay.

As the organization has grown, so its mission has evolved. It began as a general mandate to raise money to help the poor obtain medical care and to provide volunteers to assist shut-ins, but it has since been elaborated as the "four missions":

1. charity (on-site investigation, evaluation, and long-term care);
2. medical work (hospitals, clinics);
3. education (university, teachers' association, youth camps); and

4. culture (publications and TV broadcasts).

These were labeled respectively ci 慈, bei 悲, xi 喜, and she 捨. Later, the two additional endeavors of international relief and running a bone-marrow bank were added to bring the list to six, and together these were interpreted as six aspects of a single mission with the phrase "One step, six footprints" (yibu liu jiaoyin 一步六腳印) (Huang, 1996: 128-129).

Still later, the list added another list called Ciji's "four footprints" (si jiaoyin 四腳印):

1. international disaster relief;
2. bone-marrow bank;
3. environmentalism; and
4. community volunteerism (Huang, 2005: 188). (2)

During a visit that I made to the Ciji headquarters in Hualian in November 2004, I saw that the mission now includes a concerted effort to elicit donations of cadavers for medical training, something that traditional Chinese funerary beliefs had previously impeded. Thus, it is clear that the mission and vision are continually evolving.

The "nuts and bolts" of Ciji's growth, organization, relations with the government, and operations have been well studied and documented elsewhere (See especially Huang, 2005; Huang and Weller, 1998; Jones, 1999; and Laliberté, 1999). For the remainder of this article, I would like to focus on various factors, both Buddhist and secular, that provide the underpinning for all this charitable activity. (3)

Elements of Ciji's Success

Although Ciji is not a traditional Buddhist organization, it still articulates its ideals in terms of Buddhist beliefs and worldview, though with its own set of emphases. Zhengyan's, and therefore Ciji's, own specialty over the years has been focused on the

provision of medical care, in particular of the most modern, technologically advanced (some might say "western") medicine. Certainly Buddhism has thought about its teaching in terms of medicine before, and at various times in Buddhist history, Buddhist organizations and temples have provided medical care as a charitable work. Furthermore, all of the iconic moments in Zhengyan's hagiography (4) relate to medical crises and dilemmas: her mother's illness, her father's sudden death, the death of the aboriginal woman, and the visit of the Catholic nuns all impressed upon Zhengyan's mind the importance of making medical care available, and of Buddhism's shortcomings when compared to the Christian missionaries in this regard.

In addition, compassion (*cibei* 慈悲) has traditionally been regarded as a Buddhist virtue, and almsgiving as one of the Six Perfections. However, while traditional Buddhism has made compassion the equal of wisdom, and has either presented the Six Perfections as equal in value (or else elevated the Perfection of Wisdom to the head position), Zhengyan has made compassion the primary virtue and almsgiving the preeminent practice, and has reframed the other five perfections in relation to these. Doing humble volunteer work around the hospital leads to the perfection of forbearance. Doing volunteer work or setting money aside every day leads to the perfection of discipline. Attention to giving and volunteer work over a lifetime leads to the perfection of effort. Focusing one's mind on the poor while serving them leads to the perfection of concentration. Reflecting on the donor's, recipient's, and the gift's lack of self, and the perfect interfusion of the three in the midst of the act of giving, lead to the perfection of wisdom (Jones, 1999: 214-215).

Zhengyan's own appeal to her followers is also based on factors that seem very traditional. Above all else, every scholar and journalist who has written on Ciji has noted the founder's charisma as an essential element in her ability to attract and retain followers, and many have offered widely varying explanations of the source of this charisma. The Taiwan scholar (and subsequent Ciji member) Lu Huixin 盧蕙馨 points to Zhengyan's ability to play the role of strict father and gentle mother simultaneously, something that appeals

very powerfully within Chinese cultural values (Lu, 1994: 11). Jiang Canteng notes her eloquence in speaking the Minnan 閩南 (or "Taiwanese" taiyu 台語) dialect that is the native tongue of the majority of Taiwan's population, which appeals to nativist sentiments (Jones, 1999: 209). The austerity of her early practice, which included severe (but not extreme) fasting, scripture chanting, burning of incense scars, hand-copying sutras, and the making and keeping of difficult vows all contribute to her credibility and appeal. Reported displays of supernatural light from her humble cabin gave her the cachet of the Buddhist saint, and to this day her followers point to her otherworldly demeanor. They frequently describe her gait as "gliding" rather than walking, and some of her nuns have commented that, even when going through mud to visit the poor, her shoes and the hem of her robe never got dirty even as theirs became sodden. Ciji literature refers to Zhengyan by the honorific title shangren 上人, or "superior person," an epithet that, in religious contexts, means something like "saint."

This focus on Zhengyan's charismatic personality, which serves as both magnet and motivator bringing people not so much to join Ciji as to convert to it, give the Association some unique features. Organizationally, it makes for a hub-and-spoke form of corporation rather than a bureaucratic one. Zhengyan is the unquestioned leader of Ciji, and all decisions and directives emanate from her. Many commentators, including myself, have noted that this presages problems in the future: Zhengyan is now over 70 years of age, and she has not just neglected to name a successor, she has actively refused to do so, noting how the historical Buddha likewise did not name the next generation leader of his sangha (Laliberté, 1999: 117). The sudden vacuum of power that will appear when she passes away will make for a difficult, but probably not fatal, period of transition.

The cult of personality that has coalesced around Zhengyan also gives her a role more akin to the founder of a Japanese New Religion than a leader of a traditional Chinese Buddhist association. While it is true that Zhengyan did study Buddhist doctrines and scriptures to some extent, these have faded in importance as time has gone by. Her youthful dream of the woman bearing medicine that she had

during her mother's illness, as well as the experience of Allied bombing campaigns during the second World War, gave her early practice a focus on the bodhisattva Guanyin 觀音菩薩 and the Lotus Sutra. However, over the years Zhengyan has become an incarnation of the bodhisattva Guanyin for her followers. Thus, as Huang and Weller comment, Zhengyan's own books have become quasi-scriptural for Ciji members, and are read, printed, and disseminated more than any Buddhist scripture by the organization (Huang and Weller, 1998: 383). This lack of emphasis on higher Buddhist studies may seem odd for a figure whose tonsure master was the most revered Chinese Buddhist scholar of the early twentieth century, but it is borne out by examining the publishing record of Ciji. André Laliberté has noted that, despite the prominence that education seems to enjoy as one of the four major elements of Ciji's mission, in fact the publications are relatively sparse when compared to Foguang Shan or Dharma Drum Mountain, (5) and the cultural outreach seems more aimed at proselytizing than education (Laliberté, 1999: 110).

At the same time, much has been made of the apolitical nature of Ciji. As an association that receives and disburses millions of dollars in funds each year and commands a bloc of hundreds of thousands of voters, politicians have certainly tried to tap into its power. Ciji itself has the potential to use its muscle to influence elections and governmental policies toward the poor, and, since its financial support comes from completely private donations and it relies on no governmental funding, political scientists have puzzled over the fact that it lets this power lie fallow (Laliberté, 1999: 119). Not only does Zhengyan herself stay aloof from political involvement, but the set of five precepts that she devised for her followers as an expression of a modernized Buddhist ethics includes the vow not to participate in demonstrations or political campaigns (Huang, 2006: 13). We may understand this from either the point of view of Buddhist traditionalism, or from the standpoint of realpolitik.

Many of Zhengyan's followers agree with her that Buddhism should be strictly apolitical. Her master Yinshun insisted that Buddhist clergy avoid political groups in a sentence that lumped them

together with brothels and musical theater (Laliberté, 1999: 125). In Taiwan, calling a cleric a "political monk/nun" (zhengzhi seng 政治僧) is to criticize him or her. Zhengyan's refusal to advocate for structural changes in society or in the distribution of wealth may also reflect ancient Confucian moralism. Confucian teachings over the past two millennia have insisted that the rectification of the individual is all that is needed to create the virtuous society; it did not ever advocate, or even pay attention to, structures themselves as sources of evil even when staffed by good people. From the other view, however, we may see Ciji's lack of political involvement as more calculating. Ciji may not depend on the government for money, but it certainly needs government cooperation in other respects such as construction permits, accreditation of its educational institutions, and so on. In order to assure the smooth functioning of future operations, Zhengyan may have realized that it is good to cooperate with whoever wins the election, and thus wise not to take sides before the voters have spoken.

The Ciji Conversion Narrative

Even a charismatic leader can make no headway unless she is in the right place at the right time, and other scholars have seen her as the perfect person to channel charitable and religious energy in contemporary Taiwan. Ciji's period of spectacular growth began in the late 1970s and gathered speed through the 1980s, the period when Taiwan itself was undergoing rapid economic expansion – the so-called "Taiwan miracle." The sudden influx of cash into the economy boosted the standard of living at a dizzying rate, and many people, while enjoying this infusion of funds, had difficulty giving it meaning. Ciji, by providing an outlet for charitable giving, provided a way to dispose of some of the income in a way that created significance for it. Elise DeVido goes so far as to speculate that Zhengyan symbolizes Taiwan society's rise from initial poverty to sudden wealth, and the creation of meaning for that wealth in her own life. This makes her an apt exemplar for others struggling with the same issues (DeVido, 2004: 96-97). Members of Ciji frequently give testimonials about their transformation from dissolute men who either gamble and drink or devote all their energy

to their jobs to the neglect of their families and society, or women who hang around department stores and are addicted to shopping and gossip, to citizens whose charitable activities give meaning to their money.

We may illustrate this point by examining stories from a series of small paperback books that Ciji publishes about the lives of its core members called "Seeing the Form of the Bodhisattva" (Kanjian pusa shenyong 看見菩薩身影).

One book in this series (Yuan and Ruan, 2005) deals with Mr. Huang Rongnian 黃榮年, a man whose father established a highly successful coconut-palm product export and processing business in Indonesia called the "Golden Light Group" (Jinguang Jituan 金光集團). (6) The youngest of four brothers, Huang learned from his father how to work hard day and night to grow a business, but also how to make the business good for the community. Even before joining Ciji, Huang was noted for treating his workers well (Yuan and Ruan, 2005: 64), and the company built schools in its workers' communities and then handed ownership of them over to local government (Yuan and Ruan, 2005: 59-62). Still, Huang put in long hours under very hard conditions overseeing local projects in places that lacked even the most basic urban amenities, and the day came when he felt that he was giving too much of his life to his career, and wanted to spend more time benefiting others in ways not directly connected to the company. Thus, he joined Ciji. His brothers were skeptical of this move at first, but later admitted that this gave their younger brother a more balanced temperament and smoothed out his life (Yuan and Ruan, 2005: 67). Huang Rongnian's case is emblematic of the male convert whose story describes a move from overwork and too much focus on career to someone who is able to relax and look beyond his own work life to embrace larger concerns.

The other usual story arc for male Ciji members involves turning away from typical male vices such as drunkenness and gambling to a life of virtue. A rather extreme example of this is a man called "old Lin" (lao Lin 老林), who was so addicted to gambling that he would deliberately write bad checks to cover gambling debts and then force

his wife or grown sons to cover the checks in order to stay out of trouble. This behavior finally caused his family to expel him. Going on a trip with a friend to Hualian, which he had been led to believe was a vacation trip to local casinos, Old Lin found himself at the Still Thoughts Vihara (Jingsi jingshe 靜思精舍), Zhengyan's home temple. At first he was so angry at the trick that he ran away and spent the night in the forest around the vihara, but went back the next day and heard the master preach. She touched his heart and he repented in tears and became a stalwart Ciji member. His family took him back, he found new meaning for his life, and has led many others to join Ciji (Huang, 1996: 245-247).

While men's conversion narratives tend to follow one of these two paths, the women's stories seem more uniform, at least when the women in question come from families that were benefiting from the "Taiwan miracle" and suddenly found themselves doing very well financially. Wen Suzhen 文素珍, whose story is told in Yuan and Ruan 2004, grew up in a well-to-do family that had maids to do the cleaning and cooking. She says that from the outside, her life looked lovely, but inside she felt empty:

Because I had so much time, I did not know how to make use of it. Every morning I would get up and call my friends on the telephone to say how bad my life was. But to my family and friends, my life looked like heaven. I did not have to worry about either food or clothing. Actually, my mental life was in hell, because I was not happy. In the afternoon, I did not know where I would go to kill time; in the evening, I did not know which restaurant I wanted to eat at. Ten or so years ago, I might buy some article of clothing for 7000 or 8000 NT dollars, wear it twice, and then not wear it again because my friends had already seen me in it. [...] I got everything I enjoyed for myself, and I was unable to concern myself with others (Yuan and Ruan, 2004:16-17).

Apart from her pride and consumerism, she also felt she did not know how to be a proper wife and mother: "Before joining Ciji, I

was very harsh with my husband because I thought 'I am so loveable that since I was willing to marry you, you should of course give me good things to eat, nice clothes to wear, a good place to live, and good things to use,' and I never had a bit of understanding of how hard he worked outside the house" (Yuan and Ruan, 2004: 23).

Joining Ciji turned her from a useless, overconsuming parasite to a contributing member of society and instilled her good circumstances with meaning. She says, "I am very grateful to the Master for taking a bunch of disreputable women (sanguliupo 三姑六婆) who only know how to gossip and cruise department stores, and turned them into [women who can] throw themselves into social work, into useful people. I was able to change from a bad wife and a person with a narrow heart to someone who can understand how to repay kindness and be responsive" (Yuan and Ruan, 2004: 23). She even stopped spanking her son, who thus thinks Buddhism is all right (Yuan and Ruan, 2004: 106).

Li Huiying's 李惠瑩 story, told in Yuan and Ruan 2003, says some of the same things, but her account reveals an interesting quality of these women's conversion stories. At the age of 25, she was working for the Hualian county government, and decided she needed to do better things with her life. She joined Ciji and went right to work in their cultural division, producing their radio and television programs. In talking about what she finds good about Ciji's teachings for women, she says:

We women basically only know to window-shop and drink coffee, all day long and gossip about our neighbors. If we did not have the master's teaching, I don't know how much we would be able to engage in social welfare work! The master has taken [women with] excess energy but nothing to do and reclaimed us, making us into reusable recycled resources. [She is] truly a great environmentalist! (Yuan and Ruan, 2003: 35)

This is interesting because, while it echoes Wen Suzhen's story as given above, it clearly does not represent Li Huiying's own life. She

joined Ciji at a relatively young age and while in far less privileged circumstances. Similarly, Huang Rongnian, while perhaps justified in feeling overworked, does not present us with the classic case of the narrow-minded businessman who lives for the next deal and neglects his family. His life story shows him as a decent man who, even before joining Ciji, took an interest in wider issues and exercised care for his workers and concern for social issues. In both cases, one may suspect that a narrative has been retrofitted onto Li's and Huang's pre-Ciji lives.

These are instances of something that sociologists have long noted: that part of the process of conversion is the retrospective recasting of the convert's previous life into a standardized story line (See Stark and Finke, 2000: 122). In *Master Zhengyan: One Hundred Stories*, the benefit that Ciji brings to its female members is stated in this way:

Ciji has taken a lot of women and drawn them together and recycled them. It has caused them to cease wasting their time cruising department stores and gossiping about other people, and to become useful to society (Huang, 1996: 134).

In context, this is presented as a statement of what Ciji does, and is not attached to anyone's life story in particular. Thus, Ciji literature itself provides the script for the conversion narrative (at least for women), and so the process of becoming a female bodhisattva comes across in these terms, even if it does not strictly fit the biography of the individual telling the story.

We may also suppose that, if the "Taiwan miracle" created a class of people who needed meaning for their good fortune, then Ciji would not be the only organization to offer such meaning. Indeed, Richard Madsen reports interviewing a female member of another prominent Buddhist organization in Taiwan, Dharma Drum Mountain (Fagushan 法鼓山), who also represented herself as having been a dissolute shopaholic. Through her growing involvement in Dharma Drum Mountain's social service projects, she also came to feel that her life gained meaning and purpose (Madsen, 2007: 100). Clearly,

the "Taiwan miracle" produced the need for a particular type of religious good, and Ciji has been the most successful (but not the only) purveyor of this good.

These are not the only story-lines in Ciji literature. Another common thread involves disabled people who formerly received Ciji's aid and decided to join Ciji out of gratitude, to feel useful by doing productive work, or simply because it gives them an opportunity for employment otherwise unavailable (See, for instance, Guo, 2006 and Ye, 1996 for typical examples). Beyond these stories of life-transformation, one must bear in mind the number of people who regard Ciji as a charity and contribute funds to help it advance its work without generating stories of conversion or life-transformation. I choose to emphasize the narratives given above because Ciji itself does, demonstrating through such activities as publishing books and articles publicizing them that such stories are important to its work and image.

The Ongoing Pas de Deux between Almsgiving and Philanthropy

The Ciji bodhisattva is a modern bodhisattva. Neither an ordinary Mahayana devotee practicing rituals to feed hungry ghosts or accumulate merit nor a godlike celestial being performing miraculous rescues, the Ciji bodhisattva is the middle class individual who is materially successful but whose energies seem misdirected in overwork, vices, or consumerism and gossip. Upon joining Ciji, they practice compassion through a combination of traditional Buddhist piety conjoined with modern "scientific" social welfare work. They do not simply give alms as a spiritual discipline without regard to the concrete effect that their donation will have (or not have) upon the recipient. Rather, they take case histories, organize efforts to achieve maximum efficiency, generate statistics to measure outcomes, and work through entirely transparent, non-mysterious ways to achieve their goals. They are truly practitioners of "Buddhism in the human realm" (renjian fojiao 人間佛教).

One way to focus on some aspects of Ciji's modernization is to look

at parallel developments in western philanthropy. In the pre-modern west, charity was, by and large, equated with almsgiving directed at individual recipients identified as needy (beggars) or institutions whose receipt of one's gift rendered religious merit (monasteries and churches). In Buddhism, we recognize the former in the extravagant tales of alms given by the Buddha in previous lives as recounted in the Jataka tales, and in stories of great acts of compassion done by great Buddhist masters such as Asanga. The latter echoes the Buddhist monastic order as a particularly good recipient of donations. They are the "field of merit" (futian 福田) into which one sows one's seeds of charity in order to reap merit later, the recipients whose worthiness amplifies the merit-making potential of the gift. As observed in the rise of modern "scientific charity," Ciji rejects both of these. As we saw in the biographical sketch, Zhengyan refused to take donations directly, and Ciji, like any western charity, takes donations on behalf of the poor and discourages direct cash presentations to individual beggars (See Bishop, 1902 and Rosner, 1982 for the western case).

Premodern charity also operates primarily from religious rationalization in which the act of charity is recommended as a means of spiritual self-cultivation that benefits the giver. At least in the case of gifts to individual beggars rather than institutions, the worthiness of the recipient does not enter into consideration. Neil Rushton, reporting on the almonry of Westminster Abbey in the Middle Ages, notes that the abbey dispensed its alms in conformity to patristic ideals that explicitly excluded any "means-testing" of the recipients (Rushton, 2004: 67-70). Proceeding into later periods, we see various Christian authors actively discouraging means-testing as an impediment to the spiritual growth available through the practice of charity. William Law (1686-1761) exhorted his readers:

It may be, ... that I may often give to those that do not deserve it, or that will make an ill use of my alms. But what then? Is not this the very method of Divine goodness? Does not God make 'His sun to rise on the evil and on the good'? [Mt. 5:45] Is not this the very goodness that is recommended to us in Scripture, that, by imitating of it, we may be

children of our Father which is in Heaven, who 'sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust? ... Now this plainly teaches us, that the merit of persons is to be no rule of our charity; but that we are to do acts of kindness to those that least of all deserve it. ... [S]urely I am not to deny alms to poor beggars, whom I neither know to be bad people, nor any way my enemies (Law, 1906: 82-83).

In a similar vein, Robert Crowley (1518?-1588), after affirming the existence of bad and deceitful beggars, concludes his poem *Of Beggars* with this sentiment:

Yet cease not to give to all, without any regard;
Though the beggars be wicked, thou shall have thy reward.
(Quoted in Bremner, 1994: 32)

A more characteristically modern approach to charity emerged in the mid-nineteenth century in the west. While not excluding religious values as a motivation, it re-envisioned the task of the donor and the role of the recipient. Spiritual self-cultivation became a side-effect of philanthropy; lifting the poor from their condition and helping them become self-sufficient, contributing members of society, or providing a safety net for those truly disabled became the main goal. To this end, authorities discouraged indiscriminate giving to individual beggars on the grounds that it led to "pauperism," a state of permanent dependency imposed on someone who otherwise could work. Scientific charity, with its distinction between deserving and undeserving poor, its horror of an indiscriminate alms that would encourage "pauperism," and its use of means testing and concern for efficiency, comes from this period. (7) Charity should be directed either to those who really cannot do for themselves because of disability, and toward those who could be rehabilitated. It also sought to make the lives of those supported by charity wretched enough that they would never rationally choose to live permanently as beggars (Bishop, 1902: 599; Rosner, 1982: 365-366). To this end, case workers took applications from and made field visits to potential beneficiaries in order to determine what they really needed in order to pull themselves out of poverty, and to distinguish the

"truly needy" from the shirker and free rider. Charity became organized in order to share information and maximize efficiency.

Similar developments may be noted in China. Vivienne Shue, in a 2006 article in *Modern China*, recounted the case of an institution called the "Hall for Spreading Benevolence" (Guangren Tang 廣仁堂) in Tianjin. Founded in 1878, on the cusp of modernity, the hall originally served a purely Confucian end: in order to preserve the chastity of widows (particularly young widows), the hall provided a fortress-like shelter for them and their children. The founders, having gotten them off the street and out of the way of sexual misconduct and danger, declared its goals met and made no further provision for the inmates. However, as the twentieth century came, the newer vision of organized charity intruded, and the directors of the hall began to think about the inmates as "cases" whose needs required assessment in order to provide services that would eventually get them out of the institution and back into normal lives. These services ranged from vocational education for their children to matchmaking services for the widows and their daughters (Shue, 2006).

This progress from "almsgiving" to "modern scientific charity" has been neither uniform nor inevitable. Indeed, the paradigms of "premodern" and "modern" charity can only serve as "ideal types" against which to interpret the reality. This being the case, we must not look at the growth of Ciji expecting to find a simple transition from one model to another. Indeed, the mixture of the traditional and the modern in Ciji's rhetoric and practice calls for more sophisticated analysis, which will appear in the next section. For now, it is sufficient to note this mixture in Ciji's very traditional rhetoric of Buddhist almsgiving alongside its use of case studies, needs assessment, and modern technology in the delivery of its beneficence. In addition to these features, we also noted above that Ciji literature recounts many stories of formerly shut-in recipients of charity who went to work for Ciji, mostly in its recycling operations, and thus achieved self-sufficiency, an outcome much sought in modern charities that wish to discourage pauperism. In its own way, Ciji has followed the arc seen in the overall trajectory of charity both

east and west.

Concluding Analysis

The reasons why Zhengyan and the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Association have been such objects of fascination for scholars and reporters should be quite clear by now. Ciji's sheer size and the loyalty it evokes from its many members make it a force worthy of note to observers of the religious and political scene. Beyond its sheer heft and muscle, however, there are many other angles from which one may analyze them. I will conclude with a few brief remarks on aspects that I find salient, noting first that there are many other ways to approach and understand Ciji (For instance, the fact that Ciji is primarily a women's organization makes it an apt subject for analysis from the women's studies perspective).

Zhengyan may at first appear to operate out of a matrix of beliefs and practices that mix the traditional and the modern in perplexing ways. Her leadership is based on traditional Buddhist practices (scripture services, incense scars, asceticism, simplicity, vows, and even miracles), yet her organization is anything but traditional. Ciji is a modern, rational, technologically advanced, and efficient charitable organization that measures its success in quantifiable results (money raised, volunteer time given, number of names in its bone marrow registry, funds disbursed, patients treated, and so on).

Zhengyan's followers appear also to exhibit the same mix of the traditional and the modern. On the one hand, people note her otherworldliness and charisma, respond to even a few words from her with tears of repentance and changes of life, make vows to be reborn along with her in their next lives, and experience personal transformation. On the other hand, they fully support the modern, progressive agenda of Ciji even when it means repudiating traditional Chinese medical practices and beliefs to make way for modern, technological medicine and the donation of bone marrow and cadavers. Ciji itself uses very modern technology in its medical practices, educational facilities, broadcast programs, and other

endeavors, yet refuses to embrace a modern view of political involvement and advocacy for any structural changes in society, choosing instead to remain committed to a venerable Confucian view of morality and change. Zhengyan and Ciji are not fully traditional, but they are not fully modern, either.

A useful heuristic for teasing apart the various components of this mix is a distinction that Bruce Lawrence used in his analysis of fundamentalism: that between "modernity" and "modernism." The first is simply the trappings of modernity, above all its technological advances. "Modernism," on the other hand, is the worldview of the modern global citizen: the disparagement of the miraculous, the drive for quantifiable results, and the rationalization of programs in order to achieve goals with maximum efficiency. A religious group may reject both the technology and the worldview (as some Amish groups do), may embrace the technology but reject the worldview (as a televangelist who uses the most advanced communications technology to broadcast a traditional religious message), or may embrace both (as many mainline Protestant denominations have done) (Lawrence, 1989: 27).

Ciji is clearly an organization of the second type, modern but not wholly modernist. However, typology does not substitute for analysis, and this identification serves only to broach the deeper question: Why would Ciji choose this identity and strategy? We can begin by noting a genuine ambivalence in the narrative of Ciji that reflects the ambivalence of Taiwan Buddhists as they made a transition from a traditional agrarian society to a modern technological one, and rose rapidly from poverty to prosperity.

Zhengyan's life spans this transition. She was born toward the end of the Japanese colonial period (1895-1945), a period marked by the beginning of this transition. The Japanese application of modern medical practices had already been showing its effectiveness for some decades when she was young (Jones, 2003: 30-31). Growing up in a town family rather than a rural farm family, she would have had more exposure to this in her youth. After the end of the Second World War, just as she was discovering Buddhism and trying to find

her path within it, she replicated Taiwan society's own vacillation between attachment to the traditional past and attraction to the benefits of modernity. For some, the management of this conflict led to a rejection of the past and the advancement of new visions of Buddhism adapted to the times, but Zhengyan sought a way to blend the two.

When she elevated a highly traditional Buddhist virtue, compassion, to prominence and found that her very traditionally-conceived charisma could attract support, she found that way. She could appeal to Buddhists and gain followers through very traditional means in order to support very modern ends. She could even make those ends meaningful in traditional terms. A daily donation of cash became a means of self-cultivation. The donation of one's cadaver became an act of compassion based on the bodhisattva's willingness to immolate his whole body as praised in the Lotus Sutra. But this time, rather than a self-immolation that served no rational end, the donation of one's body helped train medical students so that they would be better doctors and heal people in the future. Traditional religion could thus be a bridge to modernity, not an impediment to it requiring a Cultural Revolution to get it out of the way.

The mix of the traditional and modern in Ciji also looks like good strategy if one applies the distinction between *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft*. The former is an association of people who pool their resources in order to pursue a common goal in the most efficient way. The latter names a group of people who come together for deeper reasons: shared values, a need to forge lasting relationships, a common identity, and so on. For the members of a *Gemeinschaft*, efficient pursuit of common goals flows from these factors, and may be incidental to them, whereas for the *Gesellschaft* it is the organization's entire rationale. It is the difference between a church and a trade association (Renwick Monroe, 1994: 884).

If we look at Ciji through this lens, its blending of the premodern and the modern make more sense. Ciji is not merely a *Gesellschaft*-type association of individuals whose sole purpose is to organize medical care for the indigent. Rather, it is a *Gemeinschaft*-type group of

people who come together to leave behind a past identity—workaholic, gambler, gossip, parasite—and adopt a new common identity—compassionate Mahayana Buddhist. In this way, their gifts of time and funds are more than just a "good deed"; they are an expression of their core identity. Richard Madsen, working alongside Ciji members to build housing after the catastrophic earthquake of September 21, 1999, observed: "The volunteers treated their work not simply as an instrument to achieve some good end, but as an expression and actualization of their Buddhist sense of interconnectedness with all beings" (Madsen, 2007: xvii). Through his or her volunteer efforts, then, the converted Ciji Buddhist manifests his or her sense of self.

As Nancy T. Ammerman asserts, the formation of a new identity is not simply a cognitive act; it flows from practice:

[O]ld analytical notions of identity, organization, and function are not nearly as helpful as an analysis based on practice. Practices are both structured and fluid. Practices require choosing agents, but situate those agents in social and cultural contexts. What I have tried to suggest here are some of the ways in which our study of religion might be transformed by recognizing the full implications of the postmodern world that modern voluntarism has created (Ammerman, 1997: 213-214).

In the case of Ciji, this means that the conversion establishes both a new identity and a new praxis, and that subsequently the praxis continually expresses and reinforces the identity. But the Ciji convert is not the sole agent at work here; a *Gemeinschaft* is an association of many actors, and the other members contextualize both the identity and the praxis. Having undergone the conversion process and become a "Ciji Buddhist," members now find their practice of charity reframed. Within this *Gemeinschaft*, they display their charitable acts in front of a new "reference group" of other Ciji members, which sets the bar of charity higher than it might be in other reference groups or in the population at large (see Rose-Ackerman, 1996: 714 for the idea of "reference group").

It is crucial to remember that individual selves are not given; they are constantly negotiated and re-negotiated. In her survey of theories of altruism, Kristen Renwick Monroe describes a cognitive approach to altruism in which an important component is the actor's "schema," a way of organizing the world so that the self can situate itself vis-à-vis others and the world itself. To boil her text down a bit, she describes a scenario in which the individual actor negotiates an identity through interaction with the world. After these interactions, the actor then develops a narrative that articulates and justifies the schema (Renwick Monroe, 1994: 884). In this way, Ciji seems to know that its members need a certain narrative in order to re-vision themselves in the world. The standard narratives (women who shop and gossip, men who devote too much of themselves to work) are vital tools in a conversion process essential to a reschematization and the construction of a new identity: the Ciji Buddhist, the one who serves others, the one who is of help to the world.

To summarize, then, this article has presented various factors of Ciji's membership, organization, and charitable activities. It came into being at the end of a process of modernization that appears to have transpired both in China and the West whereby "almsgiving" became modern "scientific charity." Its founder, more urban than rural in her background, saw the process of modernization and economic development in Taiwan during her lifetime. During this period, many people came into sudden wealth, and their good fortune required the creation of meaning for it. At the same time, modernization, economic development, and new technology caused traditional religions to rethink their place, and the scope of their worldviews needed reframing so as to accommodate these new conditions.

Zhengyan brilliantly crafted an organization that responded to all of these exigencies. It retained traditional Buddhist ideas about generosity and spiritual self-cultivation in such a way that people whose wealth required meaning could come together in a Gemeinschaft-style organization in which they could find such meaning in concert with a new group of significant peers. The

modern methods of charitable giving and disbursement accorded well with their economic and educational backgrounds and did not appear to be a step backwards into the past. Their conversion and the formation of a new identity amplified the charitable response and brought forth a much greater outpouring of charitable giving and volunteer time than a Gesellschaft-style organization could have mobilized. For all these reasons, the modified model of "modern but not modernist" in Lawrence's typology made sense as a strategy that served a number of needs and purposes.

In short, Zhengyan has learned how to assist people in bridging the gap between traditional culture and modernity by using a re-interpreted traditionalism in order to point them toward modernism. The question that Ciji will face in the future, therefore, goes beyond simply picking a successor who can glide in Zhengyan's shoes. It will also have to re-evaluate this approach. Four decades after Ciji's founding, Taiwan society is now fully modernized, and it may well be that no-one requires this transitioning strategy anymore. Will Ciji hold on to the methods of its founder, or will it have to find new ways to articulate and carry out its mission to a generation whose diminished attachment to tradition no longer impedes the pursuit of modernist goals? Will it still inspire conversions that bring people into a Gemeinschaft, or will it devolve into a Gesellschaft that organizes effort without recasting identities?

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Notes

1. This story is entrenched as a standard part of Ciji's history, but its veracity has been challenged. When the name of the doctor in charge of the clinic at that time was made public in 2001, his family sued

Ciji for defamation. Ciji lost the suit, and Zhengyan declined to appeal the ruling and paid a large indemnity to the doctor's family. See Huang, 2006: 17-18.

2. I have noted that in other Ciji literature, these are all listed together as the "eight footprints," see Laliberté, 1999: 110.

3. For a brief comparison of Chinese Taiwanese nuns and mainland nuns, please see Yuan Yuan's conclusion.

4. I do not intend to use the word "hagiography" in a technical sense here, but I do want to use it in distinction to the word "biography," which I take to indicate an account of an individual's life intended to be critical and objective. I use "hagiography" to denote an account of the life of a figure revered within a religious tradition used to strengthen members' faith and commitment and to present an idealized image of the figure to outsiders. East Asian Buddhist hagiographies typically devolve into standard accounts of their subjects' lives that include a certain set of episodes. Within Ciji, the works to which I refer here would include Huang, 1996 in Chinese and Ching, 2002 in English.

5. Foguang Shan (佛光山) and Dharma Drum Mountain (Fagu Shan 法鼓) are the other two largest Buddhist organizations in Taiwan today, and each has an extensive commitment to Buddhist education and publishes scholarly studies as well as popular books.

6. A picture of the gleaming skyscraper that serves as the company's headquarters in Jakarta appears on page 65.

7. The edition of William Law's *Serious Call* that I used for this research came out in 1906, when such concerns were most new and salient. Perhaps in response to the climate of opinion prevalent at that time, the editors added an endnote after Law's call for indiscriminate almsgiving: "Law acted on these principles himself; and the effect on the poor of King's Cliffe was the reverse of satisfactory" See Law, 1906: 355, n. 17.

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