

Final Project Proposal (F74127014 鄭永順)

Title: Putting Compassion into Practice: How the Tzu Chi Foundation Combines Buddhist Faith and Charitable Work in Today's World

Focus Question: How does the Tzu Chi Foundation's approach to charity and donation illustrate the relationship between religious belief, ritual giving, and contemporary economic life?

Case:

The Tzu Chi Foundation was established in Taiwan in 1966 by Dharma Master Cheng Yen, a Buddhist nun who was deeply moved after seeing people suffering around her. Starting as a small group of 30 housewives collecting money every day to help the poor, Tzu Chi Foundation has since grown into a well-established international foundation well-known for its global humanitarian missions, community aid, disaster relief, and medical charity. Over time, The foundation grew from doing charitable donations to establishing free aid support, hospitals, and large volunteer work. Its innovative approach blends core Buddhist values like compassion, merit-making, and personal spiritual growth with modern organizational discipline, such as transparent financial management and global humanitarian engagement. This study will take a close look at how the Tzu Chi Foundation works by exploring its own writings and its academic portrayal to understand how its religious beliefs shape and change the way charity and economic activities are carried out in today's world on a global level.

Why it matters:

Tzu Chi is a great example for studying how religious values shape both the methods and meanings of wealth management and material exchange. The foundation's disciplined donating practices, wealth management, innovative form of merit-making blur the line between secular charity and religious giving. It raises even bigger questions about how a religious movement can adapt to modern pressures, such as commercialization, bureaucracy, and global development. Studying Tzu Chi helps us see how modern religious movements reshape the religious economies of modern societies.

Preliminary Sources:

Course Reading: Modern China , Jul., 1987, Vol. 13, No. 3, Symposium on Hegemony and Chinese Folk Ideologies, Part II (Jul., 1987), pp. 259-277

Outside Reading:

1. Huang, C. Julia. *Charity and Religion in Global Perspective: The Case of Tzu Chi Foundation*. Routledge, 2009.
2. Madsen, Richard. "The Globalization of Tzu Chi: Reframing Buddhist Piety and Social Welfare in Taiwan and Beyond." *The China Quarterly*, no. 174, 2003, pp. 373-394.
3. Laliberté, André. "Religion and Social Welfare in East Asia: The Tzu Chi Foundation in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Malaysia." *Social Compass* 51(4), 2004, pp. 465-476.
4. "Cosmopolitan Compassion: Tzu Chi's Transnational Engagement and Cultural Adaptation in Europe" by Stefan Kukowka.