

Chinese Buddhist Philanthropy

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Chapter 4

CHINESE BUDDHIST PHILANTHROPY

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ABSTRACT

Compassion and the imperative to be charitable to others are basic tenets of Buddhism. However, this does not mean that the act of giving was uniform throughout the Buddhist world or under all social and political conditions. As this chapter shows, the character of giving as well as who should give to whom varied according to the particular Buddhist school as well as the nature of the state or the *zeitgeist* of the era. In Theravāda Buddhism and in some Mahāyāna schools, charity went from laity to the Sangha. **Philanthropy** was much more common in the Ming than in prior dynasties or the Qing. And the nature of the state in the People's Republic of China restrains **charity** while it thrives in the humanistic Buddhism practiced across the waters in Taiwan.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines philanthropy in Chinese society and the role of Buddhism in inspiring and implementing it. It explores variations in aid to the needy and acts of public spiritedness from the dynastic period to the present. While the Buddhist imperative to give is without question, who should be the givers or receivers varies across different traditions. Moreover, a variety of factors including government policy, war, political instability, or the prevailing values of a particular *zeitgeist* affect the willingness and ability to give, the objects of giving, and the level of generosity. The paper limits the discussion of present-day Chinese society to the PRC and Taiwan¹ and excludes Hong Kong and Singapore because both experienced significant periods as British colonies and attendant acculturative forces in the recent past. The paper concludes with an analysis of the differences between China and Taiwan, two societies that would not have had any significant cultural distinctions in areas relevant to religion and philanthropy less than a century ago but are quite different now.

In specialist literature, charity and philanthropy are differentiated, charity being a response to an immediate need such as disaster relief, while philanthropy is a more strategic response to an ongoing problem, e.g., constructing a road or a bridge. However, as many of the examples below are a combination of the two, I will use the terms interchangeably. Also, although the paper's focus is Buddhist philanthropy, compassion in Chinese culture is not an exclusively Buddhist notion. Many who practiced it in dynastic China were well versed in Confucianism and Daoism as well as Buddhism, and some philanthropic projects had both government and Buddhist participation. Moreover, the motivation for rendering assistance is not always clear. Although officials were referred to as *fumu guan* (父母官), "father and mother officials," reflecting the attitudes they were supposed

¹ I am well aware that Taiwanese distinguish themselves from Chinese on the basis of history and values, and I have recognized this in other writings (Schak 2018). However, as Taiwan's Buddhism has direct links with China through Ven. Taixu, their common heritage is reason enough to, in this context, regard them both as reflecting variations of Chinese culture. I'm also well aware of the PRC's claim to Taiwan. I analyse them separately here because they are separate societies.

to have toward the people, they may also have acted out of fear that desperate people may riot or become violent (see, e.g., Hsiao 1960; Lin 2017).

2. CHARITY AS A BUDDHIST PRECEPT

Charity as a precept is commonly associated with Buddhism. It is, in fact, found in all major Indic religions. *Dāna*, a concept found in the Pali canon and the first of the ten *paramita*,² refers to the virtue of generosity through giving gifts or alms, the most precious of which is giving life to another, especially another human being. Those to whom life is given constitute a *beitian*, (悲田) a field of merit or compassion, and giving life is of especially great merit when the field of merit is other people. Giving is seen to purify and transform the minds of those who do so, helping them overcome attachments to material goods or desires that are barriers to achieving enlightenment. Master Dao Jian writes that as Chinese Buddhism developed compassion became its most important moral concept (2018).

Long Darui (2000: 55) argues that charity was a core Buddhist concept going back to the beginnings of Buddhism itself, but not all Buddhist schools or masters gave equal emphasis to it. The two major traditions of Buddhism, *Theravāda* and *Mahāyāna*, differ in their interpretations. Generally speaking, in *Theravāda* only those who have “left home” and become monastics can achieve enlightenment, and they accumulate the necessary merit to do so through religious cultivation and teaching others how to avoid rebirth. The laity can accumulate merit by providing material support to the sangha to enable them to carry out their own cultivation. Thus, with few exceptions, charity went from laity to monks. Only rarely would monks assist the general public; in fact, they tended to withdraw from society. For monks to give to the laity, while it would ameliorate the latter’s’ distress, it would not advance them toward enlightenment as that distress was caused by their karma from previous lives. Moreover, a common feeling in China was that the poor

² There are six *paramita* in the Buddhism practiced in Taiwan and China, but in the Pali canon there were ten.

were the responsibility of their families. This was to some extent countered by the bodhisattva ideal of helping all creatures, by the desire to earn merit, and by ordinary human sympathy (Welch 1968: 121; Chen 1973: 295). But charity undertaken by the sangha has only come about since the 19th century (Welch 1968: 123).

However, Long argues against withdrawal from society, stating that to Sakyamuni, the founder of Buddhism, Nirvana was not in the heavens but in the world. The Vimalakīrti Sutra states that the Buddha state is not in the heavens but on earth, among sentient beings. This is repeated in a verse of the sutra of Hui Neng (638-713), a Chan School patriarch, who differed from his predecessors' emphasis on reclusive practice: "Searching for enlightenment away from the world is like trying to find horns on a hare." Similar sentiments were expressed by various others in this period (Long 2000: 55).

The field of compassion notion was abstract in Indian Buddhism but it became more concrete in China where the Mahāyāna school adapted to China's institutions and value system and became the predominant form (Chen 1964: 176-79). *Dāna* became more significant in the Mahāyāna sutras, and in the Tang Dynasty, the fields of merit became actual fields, the proceeds of which were used for social relief (Chen 1973: 295, 297). Moreover, in Mahāyāna Buddhism, all, including lay people, can achieve enlightenment, even in a single lifetime. Gernet characterizes Theravāda Buddhists as having "no other aim than personal interest" which "ruins enlightenment in the practitioner." Mahāyāna Buddhism, however, "aims simultaneously at personal interest and the interest of all others. . . Of the ten virtues, charity is the first, of the four means of solicitation, liberality is the principal" (Gernet 1995: 214).

The *Foshuo zhude futian* sutra (佛說諸德福田經) lists seven activities constituting the field of merit, all but the first being directed at the public:

- Constructing stupas, monastic halls and pavilions
- Establishing fruit gardens, bathing tanks, and trees
- Dispensing medicine for the sick

- Constructing sturdy boats to ferry people
- Constructing bridges
- Digging wells along well travelled roads
- Constructing toilet facilities for public convenience (Chen 1973: 294-97).

3. PHILANTHROPIC BEHAVIOR IN DYNASTIC CHINA

Buddhism entered China during the first century CE. Although Confucianism was the orthodox philosophy for the elites, many became attracted to Buddhism as social and political instability increased from the latter Eastern Han (25-220) period. When Buddhist institutions began engaging in charitable activities is unknown; Smith notes that “documentation of Buddhist philanthropy predating the twelfth century is actually scant” (2009: 290). Moreover, it was in late Ming (1368-1644) that discussions of charity appear with some frequency in the historical record. Prior to that time, mention of charity was mainly references to injunctions to rulers and the wealthy to assist the weak (Smith 2009: 4). Reasons for the prior lack of mention include the quest for ‘hidden virtue’ (*yinde* 陰德) and the desire not to call attention to such deeds as they could be interpreted as evidence of political ambitions. However, as such acts became more public, their being recorded into various levels of local gazetteers became more common. (Smith 2009: 5-6).

Temples engaged in charitable activities from the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534 in the form of *fotuhu* (佛徒戶), in which criminals and slaves were sent to work in monasteries, enabling them to earn a living (Long 2000: 56). The first recorded instance³ of a Buddhist philanthropic project not linked to a monastery comes from the Southern Qi (479-502), when two princes with Buddhist leanings established China’s first philanthropic organization, the Liuji Guan, to assist the sick and the destitute (Lin 2017). Then in 521,

³ Only instances of relatively large-scale philanthropy entered the historical records.

Emperor Liang Wudi, a devout Buddhist, founded the Gudu Yuan (孤獨園) to assist orphans and the aged and to provide funerals for the poor (Lin 2017).

Buddhism flourished from the Sui (581-618) to the latter years of the Tang (618-907) dynasties. In the Tang monasteries provided hospitals, soup kitchens, orphanages, and old age homes, built roads and bridges, and widened river channels. There were also mutual-aid organizations centered on monasteries that helped people meet funeral expenses and merchants make long-distance trips (Simon 2013: 55-65). Also, in the Tang, lay Buddhist worship spotlighted festival planning, sutra recitation and preserving scripture (Pittman 2001: 30). Tang rulers also instituted the material *beitian*, actual lands set aside for charitable works, and *beitianfang* (悲田房), which provided homes and subsistence for widows and paupers (Long 2000: 55). Chen notes that rents from these lands enabled the monasteries to establish hospitals, dispensaries, feeding stations for the hungry, and shelters for the elderly and disabled. They also built bathhouses in their neighborhoods, rest shelters for pilgrims en route to visit shrines. These were administered by the monasteries except for the period around the Huichang suppression (843-846 PE), during which monastery lands were confiscated, earmarked for charity, and administered by the government. (Chen 1964: 295). However, the Wuzong emperor died soon afterward, and the new emperor, Xuanzong, returned the lands to the monasteries. Gernet lists other public works they engaged in: sanctuaries, leper houses, shelters for travelers, roads, bridges, river fords and ferries (1995: 224).

However, Gernet also notes that monasteries had another side. Although some monks passed on gifts from the wealthy to the poor, and although charity increased during the Tang as Mahāyāna became the predominant branch of Buddhism, the lion's share of donations were used to construct sanctuaries, cast bells and statues and hold festivals. Moreover, they held serfs and had loan funds. They loaned money or cloth to the rich, which was repaid with interest. They loaned grain to the peasantry to tide them over to the next harvest at interest rates of around 50%. "There was clearly

subjugation and extortion of the peasantry”; what the monasteries ran was a “parasitical economy” (Gernet 1995: 174-78, 218- 226).

As a result of the Huichang Suppression’s compulsory laicization of myriad monastics and confiscation of monastic wealth, and the rise Neo-Confucianism in the Song, Buddhism fell into decline, both ideologically and politically. By Northern Song (960-1127), the primary worship focus was communal recitation of the Buddha’s name, which was believed to transfer merits to the reciter and ensure their speedy rebirth in Western Paradise (Pittman 2001: 30). Members of the clergy lost the personal exemption from taxation, leaving them excused only from *corvée*. Moreover, growing commercialization increased the number of wealthy, some of whom took refuge in order to escape their *corvée* obligation, which weakened the clergy. There were mandated charities, however: poorhouses, foundling homes, lepers’ asylums, public cemeteries and old age homes. These were sometimes financed from estates of the heirless, topped up from interest earnings of the ever-normal granaries (Hsü 1956: 208).

Buddhism suffered a further decline in the Ming. While rebelling against Yuan rule, Ming founder, Zhu Yuanzhang (朱元璋), had been a commander of the Red Kerchief bandits, who followed White Lotus, a Maitreyan form of millenarian Buddhism, and it was through a White Lotus rebellion that he defeated the Mongols and became emperor. Zhu thus knew the potential danger millenarian religion could pose to a regime. So, after establishing his dynasty, he imposed restrictions on Buddhist monasteries, banishing monks to live in groups of 3-4 in high mountain areas, away from the masses (Long 2000: 56). Over the next centuries, this separation of monastics from lay Buddhists weakened Buddhism. Many monks were illiterate and were reduced to gaining a living by performing memorized funeral rituals, creating the situation that Taixu (太虛) was to strongly criticize.

In late Ming, Buddhism experienced a bit of a renaissance. First, the Neo-Confucianism hegemony established in the Song weakened, reviving the notion of *san jiao* (三教), Three Teachings (Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism). Many of the gentry, seeing no contradiction between Buddhist and

Confucian world views, became monastic patrons, attracted by Buddhism's emphasis on self-cultivation and accumulating merit. Second, the increased number of families made wealthy through commerce swelled the number of civil service examinations candidates but did not increase the number of official positions. This, even after passing, securing an official post was uncertain, and even if successful, assignments were for three years only in posts distant from home. Securing a further assignment was even more uncertain. A better option was to pass at the local *shengyuan* (生員) level, securing gentry status, then stay home, tend to the family land holdings and engage in lucrative commercial ventures. So being wealthy and wanting to validate their wealth and home area status, they engaged in local projects such as "building schools, raising dikes, dredging lakes and erecting arches" in honor of local identities (Brook 1993:19, Ch 1). Prior to this time, those making such contributions had not sought public recognition. However, in late Ming, as one motivation in doing so was to legitimate their wealth and status, they had no such qualms.

4. DETERIORATION: QING TO REPUBLIC THREATS TO BUDDHISM

The government was favorable to Buddhism in the early Qing (1644-1911). It promoted Tantric Buddhism in deference to relations with the Tibetans, while the court primarily practiced Linji Chan. It sponsored a new printing of the Buddhist canon in 1738, though financial stringencies limited further support. However, it also made attempts to limit the number of ordained monks, as each ordination meant one less productive farmer. However, worsening fiscal conditions saw patronage of monasteries decline fairly quickly (Brook 1993:324-26) as local magistrates, having to do more with no increase in funds, sponsored fewer public projects. Despite such problems, many gentry-managed, state-endorsed charitable organizations, some dating back to the Song, were severely affected by the Taiping Rebellion and other bandit-based or political uprisings, though institutions

for the homeless elderly and for foundlings were restored in the last four decades of Qing rule. Other charities included dispensaries, migrant hospices and provision of coffins (Leung 2016:579) as well as contributions from **redemptive societies** formed in late Qing and continued into Republican times.

However, conditions further deteriorated in the 19th century due to a decline in the quality of governance, Western imposed military defeats, floods, famines, and internal rebellions. The opening of China as a provision of the Treaty of Nanjing (1842) saw western missionaries pour into China. By 1906, there were over 70 different Protestant missionary groups in operation. A few missionaries, such as Timothy Richard, made efforts to understand Buddhism and even find good points in it, but most did not. Protestant missionaries in particular were aggressive in proselytizing, preaching from street corners and also established their presence through building schools, orphanages and hospitals. By the 1920s-1930s many Chinese “were experiencing new religious insecurities in light of Christian preaching that explicitly or implicitly devalued their own traditional patterns of spirituality as excessively syncretistic and otherworldly” (Pittman 2001: 53-54).

In areas occupied by the Taiping rebels, who saw themselves as Christians, Buddhist properties were confiscated and redistributed to poor peasants, monks were beheaded, and important Buddhist libraries destroyed. According to official and statesman Zeng Guofan (曾國藩), in areas the Taiping occupied, “there is no Buddhist, Daoist or city god temple that has not been burned and no idol that has not been destroyed” (Pittman 2001: 32-35). Following several military defeats to Western forces, pressure grew to reform education and adopt Western technology and the educational changes needed to produce it. In 1898, official and nation-builder Zhang Zhidong (張之洞) suggested that the government confiscate 70 per cent of Buddhist and Daoist property to finance modern schools (Pittman 2001: 30-31).

Confiscation loomed as an on again off again threat for the next forty years, proposed by a government then resisted by monks and laity. Buddhists argued that the Republic of China constitution guaranteed freedom of

religion, but the government continuously singled out Buddhism to expropriate temple property to fund education and charity. In one such late 1920s incident, some ruling Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) officials, having studied abroad and holding native religion in low regard, proposed that the government expropriate first the large then the smaller Buddhist properties to support education. In response, after an unsuccessful attempt to stop the proposal on his own, Master Yuanying (圓瑛) established the Jiangsu-Zhejiang Buddhist Association and lobbied successfully. However, confiscation of properties by local governments or warlords continued up to the Japanese invasion. It did serve as a motivating force for monastics, however (Xue 2016: 262-65).

In sum, Buddhism in the late Qing and early twentieth century was in a very depressed state. In the assessment of leading intellectuals such as Liang Qichao (梁啟超) and Tan Sitong (譚嗣同), officials such as Zhang Zhidong (張之洞), Christian missionaries, and various other Chinese commentators it was still admired as a philosophy and an important part of China's heritage by intellectuals, but institutionally it was stagnant. There were few masters of any ability, the clergy was largely uneducated, and some were of questionable religiosity, commitment and morality. Most ordinary monks engaged in performing rites for the dead to make their living (See Welch 1968: 227-37). Moreover, as Welch writes,

All its earlier enemies—Confucians, Christians, modernizers, predatory officials, and bandits (the categories are obviously not exclusive)—swarmed in to carry out what one source describes as “a wave of expulsion of monks and destruction of monasteries in many provinces” followed close behind by new enemies—warlords, Japanese, and Communists. (Welch 1968: 23)⁴

While harmful to Buddhism, the above events were a catalyst in its revitalization in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries

⁴ The following several pages rely heavily on Welch, regretfully but unavoidable because he is the only source I've found that discusses such material.

A major figure in this endeavor was **Yang Wenhui** (楊文會; 1837-1911). A collector of Buddhist scriptures in 1864 he established the Jinling Scriptural Press to make them available to destroyed library collections and to the public. He later edited a text to train Chinese monks to do missionary work abroad, and he established a school in his mansion where he taught a number of monks and lay people, including Taixu, who would play important roles in the years ahead (Welch 1968: 6-9). In addition there were significant rebuilding efforts to replace temples destroyed during the Taiping Rebellion such that in the 1920s and 1930s, in the southeast China-Yangzi area where the rebellion took place, “Buddhist monasteries were being actively repaired, rebuilt, and newly constructed.” Moreover, according to figures compiled by the Chinese Buddhist Association there were “more than twenty times more monks per capita” in that area than elsewhere in China (Pittman 2001: 46-47).

Early in the twentieth century, and moved by the state of Buddhism, monks were studying and debating. Some were also motivated by the state of China. Yang Wenhui associated with anti-Qing elements, as did others. Many began to read widely, well outside the Buddhist canon—the writings of domestic political reformers such as Tan Sitong and Liang Qichao, radical foreign reformers such as Marx, Kropotkin and Bakunin, and important western European thinkers. This stirred a good deal of debate about what Buddhism was and what it should become. Conservatives such as Yuanying wanted to restore Buddhism to what it ideally was in the past: study, chanting, meditation and worship. Radicals such as Taixu wanted it to take a modern turn, to engage with society socially and politically as the Christians did and to modernize monastic education (Welch 1968: 40-50).

Monks organized. “From 1912 to 1929 they launched no less than eighteen separate Chinese Buddhist associations, all of which evaporated, some at once, some after achieving a modicum of their goals (Welch 1968: 26). They lobbied the government to protect Buddhism; to promote their own visions of Buddhism’s future; to gain control of monastic properties and transform them into buildings for schools in order to pre-empt government seizure. They used their new educational facilities to convince lay Buddhists and the general public that Buddhism was an important part

of Chinese culture and to lobby on its behalf (Welch 1968: 27). However, some of these organizations appear to have been blatant attempts to offer control of the sangha to the state in exchange for the authority to run the association and control the sangha (Welch 1968: 39-40).

There were also seventy-plus seminaries established in the first half of the twentieth century, training about 7500 monks, about 2% of the total. Quality varied, but overall they confirmed the generally poor level of sangha education. Welch describes some of the seminaries as “‘sloppy’ (*ma-hu*) . . . the teachers knew little more than the students and the range of subjects was limited. Among the scores of alumni I have interviewed, less than half appeared to know written Chinese as well as the average graduate of a lay middle school.” Nor were any, even those who had lived abroad, able to speak a foreign language (Welch 1968: 116).

5. PHILANTHROPY IN REPUBLICAN CHINA

Laliberté writes that both Buddhists and Daoists were hampered in any sort of philanthropic activities during the period of Nationalist Party rule because of organizational weakness and poor financial conditions (Laliberté 2016: 617). However, he also notes by personal communication from Jan Kiely that Buddhist philanthropy was significant in China from 1910-1950, independent of Taixu (2016: 632). Whatever, despite the tremendous upheaval of Chinese society in the first half of the twentieth century, philanthropy was not entirely neglected.

Welch notes that lay Buddhist organizations in Shanghai, many Pure Land in orientation, carried out philanthropic activities in the 1920s, feeding the poor, providing free medical clinics and disaster relief. There was also a Buddhist radio station, XMHB. Hankou’s Right Faith Society was also active. Both its founder, Wang Senpu (王森浦), and his successor had taken refuge in Taixu. They donated much of their own money and also raised funds from worshippers. The Society’s activities included a clinic that treated the poor for free; a primary school to teach poor neighborhood

children; donations of coffins to poor families, funds to an institution for indigent widows, rice to poor families at Chinese New Year, and assistance to victims of floods or fires (Welch 1968: 76-79).

A standout example of monastic philanthropy was the Longquan Orphanage established at the Longquan Monastery (龍泉寺) in Beijing, an initiative of the resident monks to show compassion and provide education to young boys as well as medical care. Most funding came from the monastery itself, but several government departments and a Catholic nunnery also contributed, and when the orphanage was established, it had support from the Peking General Chamber of Commerce. Welch states, “I have found no statistics on the number of such institutions started by the Chinese sangha, but there must have been many,” citing monasteries at Jinshan, Ningbo, Changsha and Xiamen (1968: 126-27).

Sangha-provided social services had in the past bolstered Buddhism. When taking in orphans, they recruited them; they administered to the sick by “reciting penances to cancel the bad karma that was causing disease. They provided education by preaching the dharma” (Welch 1968:129). But post-1912, students educated at Buddhist schools were taught by lay teachers who were paid a salary as monks lacked training in the post-education reform subjects the student were studying. Monasteries did less in terms of medical care. Some had an herbalist come in a couple of times per week, but running a hospital was beyond their capacity. Welch writes that although the monks often felt an obligation to engage in social welfare, they were not always interested in doing it themselves. Their motives appear to be mixed: compassion; Christians were doing it; and by setting up schools they could avoid monastic property confiscation. A law passed in 1929 and amended in 1935 required monasteries to use a set portion of their income for charitable enterprises, though Welch implies the law was often ignored by the monks and unenforced by authorities (Welch 1968: 126-30).

When conscription was introduced in 1933, the 1929 Shanghai Chinese Buddhist Association petitioned the government to exempt the sangha from combat but let them serve as an ambulance corps, a request the government granted. Traditionally monks were not subject to military service. The other Buddhist social action was service in prisons, something Taixu initiated

when he saw Christians doing it, though Buddhists had for centuries reformed criminals and trained them as monks (Welch 1968: 129).

Other charitable activities in the Republican period came from *huidaomen* (會道門), “redemptive societies.” These were popular religious groups, often with roots in earlier folk religious organizations such as Maitreya or White Lotus. Like folk religion, they had elements of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism, and their professed aim was to get people to behave morally—accumulate goodness, cultivate virtue—lead better lives to have better lives. Their activities could include scripture study and recitation, meditation and charitable activities (Wang 2010: 127, Duara 2000). Redemptive societies such as Tongshanshe (同善社) and Daoyuan (道院) were important sources of philanthropy in the Beiyang period and later in China. Daoyuan established the Red Swastika Society, modelled after the Red Cross (Goossaert and Palmer 2011:101). The Kuomintang regarded these groups as superstitious and as “reactionary sects,” though it was unable to take concerted action against them. After 1949 they were suppressed by the communist government. One well known group, Yiguandao (一貫道), existed underground in Taiwan but was recognized by the government in 1987 and now has over 800,000 members (Ownby 2010).

6. TAIXU, ENGAGED BUDDHISM AND PHILANTHROPY

With all of the difficulties Buddhism faced early in late Qing-early Republic transition period, the need for reform was acute. Of the reformers, Taixu (1890) was the most influential, and his goal went beyond Buddhism itself, to “save Chinese society through social reform and Buddhism” (Goossaert and Palmer 2011: 80). He regarded the problems in Buddhism as a largely poorly educated, even illiterate clergy that supported itself by performing funeral rituals and a mindset that ignored advances in science and knowledge of the wider world. Buddhism would be revitalized “through institutional reorganization, modern education, compassionate social action,

and ecumenical cooperation in global mission” (Pittman 2001: 2). For his country the need was for a complete overhaul of its governing system and the philosophy behind it, and beyond that the world needed to eliminate war and exploitative capitalism. His solution was to create the Mahāyāna notion of a pure land on earth, to convert the world to Buddhism, which might then revive it in China. With an enlightened and stable government and a sangha dedicated to the true spirit of Mahāyāna, the bodhisattvas could create a *renjian fojiao* (人間佛教⁵), a Buddhism for the world (Pittman 2001: 222-26; Goossaert and Palmer 2011: 81).

To cure the ills of Buddhism, sangha education needed an upgrading and a complete overhaul. Up to that time, a lack of education had not been a handicap for an ordinary monk. He had no need to be familiar with the finer points of the Vinaya or the doctrine. All the laity expected was that he could chant the sutras (often memorized without understanding), conduct funerary rituals and abstain from meat. In the traditional monastic education, there was a strong emphasis on ‘doing,’ which meant circumambulation, meditation, recitation, etc. accompanied by ample corporeal punishment for mistakes or inadequate performances. Many of the seminaries specialized in a single sutra (Welch 1968: 106-16).

Taixu’s seminaries were quite different. He used ‘modern’ teaching methods such as blackboards (important for writing characters given the number of homonyms) and grades. The instructor lectured from the front, and students took notes and when asked questions were expected to answer in their own words rather than reciting back something they had memorized from the prior day’s class. The lessons went well beyond Buddhism and included foreign languages, history, geography and psychology. His experiences in education, schooling and observation brought him into the revolutionary *zeitgeist*. He declared the importance of an open mind rather than a mind that rigidly adhered to the old teachings; the world is changing, China is changing, and Buddhism must change or it will become obsolete (Pittman 2001: 68-71). He wanted monks not to be recluses but to be

⁵ His original term was 人乘佛教, later changed to 人生佛教. Yinshun later coined the term *renjian fojiao*.

involved in society where they could take part in social affairs and comment on issues of the day and those of interest to worshippers (Welch 1968: 110-20).

Taixu also felt that of the major world religions only Buddhism did not have conflicts with modern science and technology. He stated that “Everything that modern scientific research has discovered about the complexity and interdependent nature of reality by using both telescopes and microscopes has served only to confirm the religio-philosophical insights found in the Mahāyāna scriptures.” Buddhist truth, by contrast, is “unscientific,” not discoverable through experimental research though it is compatible with it. (Pittman 2001: 165-68).

He strongly emphasized action.

For those struggling along the bodhisattva’s path toward full enlightenment, Taixu emphasized that wisdom could not be attained apart from compassionate actions in the world. This was a truth, he asserted, that far too many Mahāyāna Buddhists practitioners, both monastic and lay, seemed to have forgotten, to their peril. . . in the course of stressing enlightenment through the doing of truth, Taixu also emphasized those ethical norms of Buddhist heritage especially related to social responsibility. (Pittman 2001: 8)

Taixu’s different approach can be partly explained by his own non-traditional Buddhist education in that his major teacher, **Huashan** (華山), had also believed that Buddhism needed to be modernized in parallel with a new, post-imperial China. This included political as well as social and religious reform. He introduced Taixu to the works of Zhang Taiyuan (張太炎), Yan Fu (嚴復) and other reformist writers. Taixu initially resisted Huashan’s persuasions, but after ten days of lively discussion between teacher and pupil, he was convinced. This turned him away from seeking “the Absolute” to engage with the world and humankind (Pittman 2001:67-68). Later, when Taixu took on headship of a monastery in Guangzhou, he mixed with anti-Qing elements and read revolutionary works by writers such as Marx, Proudhon, Kropotkin and Bakunin (Pittman 2001: 67-68, 72). He

was also influenced by Christians in his engaging with prisoners, in Christian social engagement in general, and in Christianity's "ability to organize and motivate individual adherents in normative modes of religious belief and practice" (Pittman 2001: 103-04, 249).

He began a journal, *Haichaoyin* (海潮音; The Sound of the Tide), the name taken from his period of sealed confinement at Putuo Island, which became the most widely read Buddhist publication in China in the 1920s. In one of its first articles, he discussed his plans to reshape Chinese Buddhism institutionally "with new model monasteries, benevolent organizations, and educational ventures." He called for higher levels of education for all monks and nuns and also "proposed productive physical labor by all able-bodied monastics so that the community could be self-supporting, eliminating the need for the decadent commercialism of masses for the dead" (Pittman 2001: 95).

Taixu's message of a new, revitalized Buddhism, went down very well with the public, and proselytizing ventures by Taixu himself or his followers were quite successful. His followers tended to be from the higher and better educated sector of the population (Pittman 2001:134). However, his relations with his contemporaries were strained. They regarded him with ambivalence, happy that a Buddhist could achieve such fame but distrusting his ideas and feeling that he was not what a monk ought to be. Taixu wanted to change Buddhism, to bring it up to speed with the contemporary world and involve it in that world, and to reorient worship toward engagement with the public and away from study, chanting, name recitation and meditation. They simply wanted to restore it to what it once was, not to make it into something new. "They feared that, if it were made into something new as Taixu seemed to be proposing, it would no longer be Buddhism" (Welch (1968: 71). Taixu's pushing his agenda caused struggles over the control of various monasteries as well as rifts with some of his early associates such as Yuanying (Pittman 2001: 130-33).

Welch's view of Taixu is mixed. He credits him with intelligence, charm and "endless enthusiasm," but he faults him for "a flair for manipulation and promotion— particularly self-promotion." For most of his life he was the leader of a "small, dissident faction. Until just before he died, his ideas and

activities had had little effect on the great majority of monks and devotees and the effect they might have had was excluded by the Communist victory.. . ." (Welch 1968:51). At the time Welch's book was published, **Tzu Chi** consisted only of **Cheng Yen** and a small number of women making baby clothes and saving small amounts of their daily grocery money. **Fo Kuang Shan**'s monastery had just been built. Welch could not have foreseen Taixu's legacy in Taiwan.

7. BUDDHIST PHILANTHROPY IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

A major factor in the practice of philanthropy in the People's Republic of China (PRC), Buddhist or otherwise, has been governance. When the PRC was established, despite official atheism, it adopted the same policy on religion as the earlier Republic of China (ROC) government had: it recognized five religions—Daoism, Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism—and regarded all other practices and beliefs as superstition. A few years later, it tightened control, creating supervisory bodies for each religion and an umbrella body for religion as a whole, the Religious Affairs Bureau. Their duty was to work with the United Front Works Department to guide religious believers and leaders to align themselves with the relevant supervisory body and support the new government. While this was problematic for some Catholics and Protestants, who suffered for their resistance, it was not for Buddhists and Daoists. During the Cultural Revolution, religion was outlawed altogether. Temples and churches were closed and icons smashed. Religion was re-legitimated under Deng Xiaoping's Reform and Opening Up. In 1980, the state began to return expropriated properties to religious groups and resume paying rent, including back rent on borrowed properties and make reparations on destroyed properties taken during the Cultural Revolution, though not to those taken prior to it (Xue 2016: 283).

Regarding philanthropy itself, in the 1950s the government disbanded Christian philanthropic groups as well as all those that received foreign

funding or were run by local gentry. It regarded those with Christian or other foreign links to be too closely connection to foreign powers, and it saw gentry charity as feudal, deeming it to be “sugar-coated bullets” aimed at hoodwinking the people. In April 1950, Politburo member Dong Biwu (董必武) stated that the people and the government would work together “to heal the scars of war” and reorganize society (Wang 2008:200). This signaled the demise of an independent status for philanthropic organizations and their closure or takeover by the central government with no place for popular initiatives. According to Wang, by 1954, pre-1949 philanthropic organizations had disappeared with the government reorganizing all formerly religious affiliated hospitals and schools and placing them under the Chinese Red Cross or the Chinese Welfare Foundation (*Zhongguo fuli jijinhui*, 中国福利基金会) (Wang 2008: 198-201). The Young Communist League and GONGOs such as the Chinese Red Cross and the Soong Ching Ling Foundation became the major dispensers of charity.

When Deng Xiaoping assumed power and initiated Reform and Opening Up, the government changed its view of religion, deciding that class struggle, continuous revolution and creating an atheist society were not as important as economic development. To make this successful, it had to abandon its confrontational method of governance. This new policy was formalized in Document 19, published in 1982. The government still assumed that religion would eventually wither away, but in the meantime it would protect freedom of religious belief. It also accepted that believing in religion was a private matter and that it would be counterproductive to attempt to coerce people to give up their beliefs, though it did forbid Party members from believing or participating in religious activities. Chinese leaders also publicly recognized religion for the benefits it could bring to society. Aside from offering comfort to those who found it difficult to adjust to the economic changes under “socialism with Chinese characteristics,” the government admitted that it did not have the resources to assist all who were in need and so revived private philanthropy, including that from religious groups.

Following the new government thinking, there was a spurt in Buddhist temple registration from 1978 to 1996, after which growth slowed (Laliberté 2012:105). However, individual donations to charity got off to a slower start because it took some time for citizens to adjust their thinking after being told for thirty years that looking after people was a government responsibility; moreover, most were just able to eke out a living for their families. The first instance of popular donations as a significant source of funds for relief was 1991, following severe flooding in eastern China; by that time ten years of economic development had raised incomes to a level where some felt they could help others in emergencies.

In 2001, the Ministry of Civil Affairs began supervising publication of the *China Philanthropy Times*, a newspaper promoting the concept of both individual and corporate philanthropy and bestowing philanthropy awards. In 2005 the National People's Congress passed a series of regulations: Article 34 granted religious organizations permission to operate social welfare services, and Article 35 allowed them to "receive donations from domestic and foreign organizations or individuals," though Article 4 stated that they could not be controlled by foreign organizations (Laliberté 2013:123). In 2007, while opening the 17th Chinese Communist Party National Congress, General Secretary Hu Jintao stated that government-provided social services should provide for basic needs and be supplemented by private charities. He also invited the private sector to operate schools and training centers (Carnegie Reporter 2009).

Then, in 2012, the government issued the Opinion on Encouraging and Standardizing the Involvement of the Religious Community in Not-For-Profit and Charitable Activities (关于鼓励和规范宗教界从事公益慈善活动的意见). The Opinion was a watershed, offering both encouragement to, hence legitimation of, and an attempt to standardize, the scope of Religious NGO (RNGO) activities and bring them into line with "China's socialist society" (SARA 2012). It stated that RNGO philanthropic activities should adhere to the principle of independence and not be controlled by outside forces or receive their financial or political assistance. RNGOs should also actively explore the creation a Chinese model of philanthropy (Zheng 2014)

The Opinion also specifically encourages RNGOs to provide disaster relief, support the disabled, assist the elderly and the young, relieve poverty, financially assist poor students in furthering their education, engage in environmental protection and build infrastructure. Six months after publication of the Opinion, various locales in the PRC held ‘Religious Philanthropy Weeks’ during which some or all of the recognized five religions held events to raise money for charity. An event in Baiyin, Gansu raised 12,000 yuan (Guangming Daily 2012) while efforts in Hubei, Zhejiang, Fujian, Jiangsu, Shanxi, Guangdong, Shaanxi, Hunan, Liaoning, and Shandong raised over 10 million yuan (Zheng 2014).

Thus, after the initial period of suppressing religion and eliminating society-based charity, RNGOs now have a legitimate role to play as charity and philanthropy providers. However, they share a number of problems with providers from the secular NGO sectors in attracting donations. Government charities and GONGOs have little problem in this regard because Party members and those whose work is linked to the government are compelled to donate to GONGO charities. Moreover, 81.3% of China’s volunteers, approximately 625.6 million, said they were required to donate by their unit leaders (APPC 2009). Private corporations are also under heavy pressure to donate. Those that declined to contribute following the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake were attacked in an internet campaign as “iron roosters” (from whom no feathers can be plucked⁶) (Maniken 2009).

While involuntary donations of money and time may increase the resources available for charitable purposes, they have negative effects on attitudes toward philanthropy. A Beijing interviewee said that, although he had donated at his workplace, he stood in line for several hours to contribute to a charity because he felt it important to do so of his own free will. This feeling is shared by others (see also, Fan 2008).

The ease with which GONGOs get funding contrasts with the difficulties smaller, less well-known secular and religion-based NGOs have. In 2010, they received only 1.3% of private donations while government-controlled charities got 58.3%. Many are able to carry out their work only with

⁶ This comes from the Chinese folk expression, *tiegongji, yi mao bu ba* (鐵公雞一毛不拔).

government support (Global 2012). Being small means they are not well known to the public, moreover, donors do not get tax breaks when donating to them as they do when giving to GONGOs (Browne and Mozur 2014), and while GONGOs can solicit funds directly from the public, NGOs cannot.

Despite their difficulties, RNGOs do contribute to charity and philanthropy. The exact amount is not known, as religious organizations are not a separate category in government statistics (see Yang and Ge 2009), but Zheng Xiaoyun, Deputy Head of the Institute of World Religions, CASS, states that, even according to incomplete statistics, in the past five years Buddhist groups had contributed 1.86 billion yuan, Daoists 0.24 b., Muslims 0.18 b, Catholics 0.25 b, and Protestants 0.35 b (2014).

A second funding problem is that donations from government bodies or corporations, are relatively steady from year to year and remain the primary source of donations, just over 47 billion yuan annually according to a China Charity and Donation Information Report (China Daily 2013). However, those from the public fluctuate according to whether there are major disasters. For example, in 2006 and 2007, individuals contributed less than a quarter of all donations. This increased to 54% in 2008 because of the Wenchuan earthquake and very heavy snowfalls in Hunan but dropped back to 30% in 2009 (Global Times 2011). In amounts, donations totaled 100 billion yuan in 2008 but dropped to 54.2 billion in 2009, when there were no disasters. In 2010 another disaster took place, the Yushu earthquake in Qinghai province, and donations again increased, to 103.2 billion yuan.

There are two, non-conflicting explanations for the public's giving habits. In 2014, Zhou Sen, the National People's Congress deputy for Henan and honorary vice-president of the China Charity Federation, identified the lack of a genuine philanthropic culture in China and said it was a challenge. Cui Yongyuan, a CCPPC delegate, celebrity talk show host and manager of the Cui Yongyuan Public Foundation agreed, saying that China lacked a culture of charity (Wu 2014). The PRC's low levels of philanthropic activity support these claims. In 2010, although donations reached 103.2 billion yuan, that was only 0.26% of GDP. In 2009 the percentage was only 0.01% according to the Social Science Research Institute or 0.16% according to the Chinese Charity and Donations Information Centre.

Li Liguo, then minister for Civil Affairs, commented that this was lower not only than the USA's 2.0% but also Brazil's 0.5% and India's 0.3% (MCA, 2012). China ranked 39th out of forty, mostly wealthy, countries according to an OECD report on pro-social behavior, defined as volunteering time, donating money or helping a stranger (OECD 2011). China's scores were 14%, 4% and 41% respectively (Anon 2011a). In the 2012 World Giving Index, China came 141st out of 146 countries, "a nation which does not give a lot to charity or philanthropy" (Yu 2014). It improved slightly in 2013 to 133rd. By comparison, Taiwan was 52nd and Hong Kong was 17th (WGI 2019), which indicates that the purported lack of a culture of philanthropy has more to do with PRC society than with deeper Chinese cultural principles. On a more positive note, the Hurun China Philanthropy List (of China's most generous) found 114 persons who had donated over 20 million Chinese *yuan* over the previous year (Hurun Research Institute).

The other explanation is a lack of trust in the charity/philanthropy sector. In 2011 the sector was rocked by two very prominent scandals, although Professor Jia Xijin, director of the Nongovernmental Organization Research Center, Tsinghua University, said that suspicion about the accountability of charities had existed for some time (Wong 2011). One involved the Chinese Red Cross. A young woman, Guo Meimei, claimed in her microblog to be a commercial general manager at the organization. She posted pictures of herself leaning on the hoods of a Maserati and an orange Lamborghini, claimed to have a closet full of Hermes handbags, and bragged of her jet-set life style. The Chinese Red Cross denied any links to her, but police reports tied her to an organizer of their charity drives, and news outlets claimed that she was his girlfriend (Wong 2011). The other involved the Soong Ching-ling Foundation, which was found to be using donations meant to improve children's welfare and alleviate poverty to make loans to companies and to construct luxury apartments (CNTV 2011). The effect of these scandals was immediate. Charitable donations in March through May, 2011, were 6.26 billion yuan; in June through August, they reached only 840 million yuan (Ifeng 2011) and donations in 2012 were 18.1% lower than in 2011 (China Daily 2013).

However, echoing Professor Jia, a woman interviewed in 2009 in Beijing said that her church group had raised a donation for Wenchuan earthquake victims. After first looking into donating through the Chinese Red Cross, “we decided to give it to the Hong Kong Red Cross.” And Jia Jia, 28, a Beijing-based magazine journalist, said it was his “basic duty” to donate in the wake of such a national tragedy, and he also encouraged his friends to give. But when it came time to donate his \$63, he also went to the website of the Hong Kong Red Cross. “I don’t trust Chinese NGOs, because there has been a lot of corruption in the past. If you want to help people, you will choose other channels. I have to be responsible with my money” (asia pacific philanthropy 2009).

The scandals obviously add to the low level of trust in the sector, but despite the exposed problems with government-linked charities, they are still more trusted than non-government ones. Zheng implies that RNGOs have even greater problems (2014, 2012),⁷ one being mistrust of religious groups (Laliberté 2009: 125-126). While this is quite probably true, officials have recently recognized that transparency is a problem in government linked charities as well (Sohu 2014).

A further problem for the secular and religion-based NGO sector is their small size. This means that they lack sufficient staff strength to provide the capability needed to carry out their missions, including the accounting expertise needed to provide a ‘glass pocket,’ i.e., a transparent account of receipts and expenditures (Zheng 2012). It also means that they are not well known to the public, which limits their ability to attract funding. A further problem, mentioned above, is that donations to NGOs and RNGOs do not attract tax concessions (Browne and Mozur 2014).

NGOs and RNGOs also face difficulties in registering, which limits their numbers. According to Zheng, prior to 2012 China had only 27 religious-based philanthropic organizations: 20 Buddhist, 4 Protestant, 1 Catholic, 1 Muslim, and one other. This is not very many when compared with the 5500 religious organizations (Zheng 2014). The 2009 *Blue Book of Philanthropy* lists the major philanthropic GONGO/NGOs. Of the 83 organizations listed,

⁷ RNGOs are prohibited by law to proselytize while dispensing charity (Hornemann 2012).

only one is linked to a religious body, the Ciji (Tzu Chi) Philanthropic Foundation (Yang & Ge 2009: 393-400), which is an auxiliary of the largest Buddhist group in Taiwan.

This small number has not prevented religious charities from contributing to society. They have been helpful in disaster relief and charity, providing medical care, and raising funds to support education. For example, following the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, monks and lay Buddhists on both sides of the Taiwan Straits donated RMB 9.93 million, and in 2006, the Shanghai religious community donated nearly RMB 20 million to the Shanghai City Philanthropic Foundation and the City Children's Foundation (Wang Junqiu 2008: 242-243).

Contrary to the situation in Taiwan where it is a major force, in my conversations with persons in Beijing and elsewhere in the PRC, no one associated Buddhism with philanthropy. The general views of Buddhism were that it was more a part of Chinese culture than a religion, that Buddhist temples were commercialized and that in some temples the "monks" were not monks at all but employees who dressed as such and had regular working hours, and that Buddhism was closely linked to officialdom to the extent that it was dangerous to criticize it because criticizing Buddhism was criticizing the state. The commercial reputation of Buddhism is demonstrated by a story that the Shaolin Temple was to float its travel company on the Hong Kong stock exchange (Li & Chen 2009). Although this was denied two weeks later by the abbot (*China Daily* 31 Dec 2009), that it made newspaper headlines for that period attests to its believability.

However, Buddhist temples, including the Shaolin Monastery, do engage in charity and philanthropy. Between 1994 and 2012, over 70 Buddhist philanthropic groups registered with the Civil Affairs Bureau, and between 2007 and 2012, they contributed 1.86 billion yuan to various causes (China Buddhist Association 2014). Table 1 gives an indication of Buddhist contributions to disaster relief.

Table 1. Important contributions from Buddhists

1991	Floods in Anhui, Jiangsu, and elsewhere	RMB 5 million
1996	disaster relief	RMB 2 million
1998	Flooding of the Yangzi, Nen and Songhua Rivers	RMB 40 million
2003	SARS prevention and cure	RMB 5 million
2004	Indian Ocean tsunami relief	RMB 13 million

(Adapted from Deng, et al. 2008: 103)

In fact it is now a requirement that Buddhist associations and temples establish ‘merit associations’ (功德會) or foundations to carry out philanthropic activities, and there is evidence that many have done so. According to Laliberté the major temples providing social services are Yufo (玉佛寺) and Jing’an (靜安寺) in Shanghai, Nanputuo Shan (南普陀山寺) in Xiamen, and Bolin (柏林寺) in Hebei. In 1993, the Chongqing Buddhist Association established a Project Hope program to help young boys from poor families stay in school (2013). There are six Buddhist philanthropic organizations in Guangdong which provide an old folks home and an orphanage for abandoned children. In 2000, Hunan Buddhists set up a provincial Buddhist foundation, and in Shanxi Buddhists established the Wutai Mountain Philanthropic Merit Association (Deng et al. 2008: 107-108). The Wuxi Lingshan Philanthropic Foundation, founded in 2004, has spent over RMB 25 million on charity projects. Even the Shaolin Temple, despite its commercialization, has a welfare foundation and a program assisting AIDS victims (Wei 2008: 310-311, 314).

The most prominent example of Buddhist philanthropy is Xiamen’s Nan Putuoshan Temple Philanthropic Foundation established in 1994. Much of its income comes from its 45,000 members, who each donate about US\$1.50 per month. Over the past 16 years, Nanputuo’s foundation has given out a total of about \$7 million in aid. That adds up to free medical aid for 210,000 people, 25 new schools and repairs for 67 other schools.” According to its own report, every year it assists 100 talented teachers, 100 school dropouts, 100 orphans, 100 poverty cases, 100 single elderly, and 100 disabled persons. In the ten years of this program, it expended almost 27.5 million yuan, over nine million yuan towards education, ten million for social relief and one

million for medical treatment and medicines. Over 150,000 medical practitioners have performed *pro bono* in its name (Nan Putuoshan 2009). Another beneficiary of the Nanputuo Temple Foundation largesse is a small leper hospital on the outskirts of Xiamen. The hospital receives around US\$3000 annually, not a large amount but enough for the essential furnishings in patient rooms (L. Lim 2010). It is perhaps no coincidence that the founder of Humanistic Buddhism, Taixu, spent a good deal of time there. His picture hangs prominently on a temple wall.

However, the fund is not independent in its decisions to sponsor projects. One of its administrators said that local government officials choose which projects receive the money. “Each project requires a survey, and we depend on [local officials from the] State Administration for Religious Affairs for that. They’ll look at how much a place is suffering or the cost of medical equipment or whatever. . . . Each project we’ve done in our 16-year history has been inextricably linked with the local government” (L. Lim 2010).

The **Ren’ai Philanthropic Foundation** (仁爱慈善基金会) is a recently established (2006) Beijing Buddhist organization whose overall aim is to encourage people to think charitably and engage in philanthropy. Its ongoing projects provide donated clothing to those in poor or disaster areas, construct schools in Wenchuan, subsidize students to continue beyond grade nine, assist the elderly, staff a hotline for troubled people to call, and provide free ‘love congee,’ every morning at three locations in Beijing. It also works in disaster situations providing backup for government relief teams.

Buddhists and other religious groups have built local level medical clinics and orphanages, assisted the poor and even helped fund public infrastructure projects, contributions that are welcomed by local governments that face difficulties in funding them from their own tight budgets. Ren’ai has won awards and praise in Beijing (Zheng 2014), but Nan Putuoshan’s contributions are ignored in official literature (Laliberté 2012: 107).⁸ Laliberté notes that officials are reluctant to give credit for this assistance as it reflects negatively on government legitimacy (cited in L. Lim 2010).

⁸The Chinese government does not like to share kudos with others; see, e.g., Lim 2008.

Also noteworthy in the PRC is the presence of Taiwanese Buddhist organizations, especially Tzu Chi.⁹ It is the largest such organization in Taiwan and, although strongly Buddhist, it is registered as a philanthropic rather than a religious organization. Its other salient characteristic is that it is sufficiently apolitical that the PRC government trusts it. The Ministry of Civil Affairs invited Tzu Chi into the PRC after the 1991 floods, and since then it has completed projects everywhere except Jilin, Chongqing and Shanxi (Laliberté 2013:89). It has donated relief supplies (food, clothing comforters) to disaster victims, built schools, clinics, senior citizens homes, a children's welfare home in Wuhan, and water reservoirs in Gansu, provided scholarships and medical supplies, and carried out bone marrow transplants and cataract operations. It provides a variety of relief goods and services quickly and efficiently, also ensuring that they do not pass through a third party but go directly to those at whom they are targeted. It also provides philanthropy without religion (Laliberté 2013:86), i.e., it does not proselytize, though its volunteers will answer questions they are asked.

The Suzhou municipal government granted land for it to build a headquarters, Suzhou being the location of one of the two largest concentrations of Taiwanese entrepreneurs, a major source of donations to Tzu Chi in the PRC. It is a model organization and is emulated by domestic Buddhist organizations there. The Chinese government encourages it and other Buddhist organizations as a counter to Christianity, which is growing rapidly, especially its unregistered churches. It has maintained and even expanded in China despite snags in the Taiwan-China relationship and has even obtained the assistance of the People's Liberation Army in distributing its aid goods (Laliberté 2013).

Taiwan's Fo Kuang Shan (Foguangshan) also has a presence in China. **Hsing Yun**'s (Xingyun) initial attempt to establish Fo Kuang Shan in China failed after a Chinese official took refuge in its Los Angeles temple post-Tiananmen. He was finally allowed to bring Fo Kuang Shan into China in 2012, when he built a temple in Yixing. He had previously sent books to

⁹ Buddhist **Compassion** Relief Tzu Chi Foundation (慈濟功德基金會). NB: Names in Taiwanese Buddhism are rendered in Wade-Giles Romanization; the way they are spelled in Taiwan.

President Xi, who “started a campaign to promote traditional Chinese faiths, especially Buddhism, as part of his program for ‘the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation’.” Xi has met with Hsing Yun four times since 2012 and told him at one meeting, “I’ve read all the books that master sent me” (Johnson 2017). Fo Kuang Shan has established cultural centers, libraries, and temples but has not engaged in philanthropy. It has provided religious inspiration and instruction to individuals, however, and provided an example of what a proper Buddhist temple should be (Johnson 2017).

8. BUDDHIST PHILANTHROPY IN TAIWAN¹⁰

The level of Buddhist philanthropy in Taiwan is very different from that in China, though one probably would not have predicted it would be in 1950. Despite the deterioration of Buddhism during the Ming and Qing, China still had major temples and strong support from a proportion of the public. In Taiwan, by contrast, the major form of anything resembling Buddhism were various sects of *zhajiao* (齋教), a syncretic lay tradition that combines Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism and folk religion, traces its origins to Luo Qing (羅清; 1442-1527), worships Wusheng Laomu (無生老母), the Eternal Venerable Mother, and is linked to White Lotus Buddhism. In the Qing, monastics were poorly educated, and there were no island wide seminaries or money to fund travel to Fuzhou where would-be monks could be formally ordained. Thus there were few qualified monastics. There was no standard monastic dress, and monks and nuns often lived together in many temples (Jones 1999: 113-14). The Japanese made efforts to bring them under Japanese forms of Buddhism, but according to Jones, the Japanese impact on Taiwanese religion was small (1999:93-94). He also writes that when Buddhist monks came from China in the early post-war period, they were shocked at the state of Buddhism, which was adulterated by non-Buddhist beliefs and scriptures.

¹⁰ Much of the material on Taiwan Buddhist groups comes from field research I have conducted beginning in 2004.

Today, however, Taiwan has the world's largest Buddhist charity, the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation (佛教慈濟基金會), and has several other Buddhist groups that participate in some form of philanthropy or social relief. Germane differences between Taiwan and China are 1) the government in Taiwan allowed freedom of religion and placed no restrictions on grassroots philanthropy, and 2) a number of monks came to Taiwan as refugees who had been influenced by Taixu's vision of a Buddhism engaged in society: Yin Shun (Yinshun 印順法師), Hsing Yun (Xingyun 星雲法師), Tung Chu (Dongchu 東初法師), and Sheng Yen (Shengyan 聖嚴法師).

The earliest to gain prominence was Hsing Yun. Born in 1927 as Li Guoshen (李國深) in Yangzhou, Jiangsu, he entered a monastery at age 12. He heard about modern Buddhism while studying at Jiaoshan Buddhist College. A year later he heard Taixu lecture and was strongly impressed by the importance in Buddhism of being in the world, in society, rather than merely saying masses for the dead. He arrived in Taiwan in 1949, and soon after arriving went to Yilan, where he began to preach and develop his ideas and his preaching style and techniques. After developing a following, he bought land near Gaoxiong where he built a large monastery, Fo Kuang Shan (佛光山寺), which was completed in 1967. In some ways it resembles a theme park. It attracts a lot of tourists and has brought a good deal of attention to Buddhism. However, it is a very serious monastery, training both monks and nuns and housing an extensive library, a publishing house, an art museum, conference halls and facilities for worshippers and guests.

Fo Kuang Shan is strongly engaged in society and active in philanthropy. It runs a free clinic for Fo Kuang Shan residents and the poor in its environs, and the 'Cloud and Water Mobile Clinic which delivers regular medical care to those living in remote areas. Its Winter Poor Relief Committee makes Chinese New Year donations to poor families. It provides emergency aid to persons with urgent problems. Its Friendship and Love Service Team solicits organ donations. It also runs orphanages and homes

for the elderly, drug rehabilitation clinics, participates in international disaster relief efforts and supports a cemetery where bones of the lone poor can be housed. It is also active in education, running three universities, a Buddhist middle school and adult extension education classes. In addition it runs a newspaper, the Merit Times (*renjian fubao* 人間福報) which avoids coverage of violence and scandal.

Although Fo Kuang Shan was for many years the most prominent group in Taiwan, it was not the first. That honor belongs to Tzu Chi. It was founded in 1966 by a young Taiwanese nun, Cheng Yen (Zhengyan 證嚴法師;), and 30 women who sewed baby clothes and saved a small portion of their daily grocery money to fund its activity, which at the time was funding medical treatment for one needy person.

Cheng Yen then 29, had been tonsured three years earlier by Yin Shun, a student of Taixu. She registered Tzu Chi not as a Buddhist group but as a social welfare organization. Far more than any other group, it epitomizes action over more conventional Buddhist devotional actions.¹¹ Tzu Chi is heavily involved in disaster relief, both in Taiwan and elsewhere, its overseas activities funded by members who live in the aid project country. It operates in at least 47 different nations (Montlake 2010). When rendering aid it strictly eschews proselytization, and it assists anyone; I was told by an officer in the headquarters that when it rendered aid to earthquake victims in Turkey, it rebuilt a village mosque.

It built its first hospital in Hualian, where its headquarters are located, funded by public subscription. This was the first hospital in Taiwan that did not charge a registration fee; Cheng Yan was insistent that no one should be turned away from medical care because they were poor. The hospital has one of the largest bone marrow banks in Asia, and alongside it Tzu Chi built a medical school, which is now a regular university, and a nursing college to train locals in the hope that, since the Hualian area was home they would not be tempted away by the big city life on the other coast of Taiwan. It has since built several hospitals in Taiwan and one in Jakarta. Its other main area

¹¹ A woman I interviewed had left Tzu Chi for Fa Gu Shan because, she said, she was so busy doing that she had no time to study.

of service is the environment. It sponsors environmental collections, i.e., picking up rubbish from the roads, and is heavily engaged in recycling, making useful products from the likes of recycled cassette tapes. It also encourages members and visitors to carry their own chopsticks and plastic cup and bowl to reduce single-use products. Finally, it runs Da'ai TV station and telecasts scandal and violence-free news and uplifting dramas.

Both Tzu Chi and Fo Kuang Shan were founded while Taiwan's government practiced state corporatism and it was difficult to register grassroots organizations. In the 1980s, as Nationalist Party authoritarianism was weakening some other *renjian* groups were formed. The largest of these is **Fa Gu Shan**/Dharma Drum (法鼓山) founded in 1989 by Sheng Yen. Sheng Yen had been a disciple of Tung Chu who had studied under Taixu. Fa Gu Shan presents itself as a *renjian* Buddhist group, and it carries out some philanthropic work, though less than Tzu Chi or Fo Kuang Shan. It was active in the relief international relief effort following the 2004 Asia tsunami. It has also carried out disaster relief in Iran, Afghanistan, US, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Peru, Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, China, Japan, and the Philippines. It donates to orphanages, is involved in old age care, and spends about NT\$200 million per year (about US\$6 million) assisting families that are just above the poverty line and thus ineligible for government assistance. It also has a Benevolence Foundation through which it donates money to other charity organization, and it makes direct charitable donations to the poor on the three special holidays, the Dragon Boat Festival, the Mid-Autumn Festival, and Chinese New Year.

The other group that describes itself as *renjian* is **Ling Jiou Shan** (Lingjioushan; 靈鷲山), founded in 1983. Its founder, Hsin Dao (Xindao 心道法師), was born in Myanmar in 1948 and raised by an uncle after his parents died. From age 9 he joined a guerrilla unit where he could go to school. The horrible things he saw with the guerrillas caused him to think about life and death. At age 13, he was evacuated to Taiwan where he first looked into Yi Guan Dao and then entered Fo Kuang Shan, where he was ordained a novice monk by Hsing Yun in 1973. He then spent various

periods, some in sealed confinement, as an itinerant he before founding the Ling Jiou Shan No Rebirth Monastery (靈鷲山無生道場) in 1984, building a monastery on a mountain top in Fulong, northern Taiwan. He claims to represent the three vehicles of Buddhism—Therāvāda, Mahāyāna, and Tibetan.

Ling Jiou Shan's social engagement includes a social welfare foundation serving the environs of the monastery which provides free medical care, relief aid for the elderly and scholarships and other aid including counselling to children from single-parent families. It also sponsors a seaside environmental clean-up in the surrounding area. A third activity is to Taiwan's Life Education project, contributing a series of children's textbooks.¹² More recently it has been working in Myanmar, providing education for youths from poor families. It is best known in Taiwan for its Museum of World Religions, which has an educational function as well as symbolizing Xin Dao's commitment to ecumenism and his desire to realize the unity of world religions.

The final group is **Fu Chih** (福智文教基金會), founded by **Jih Chang** (Richang, 日常法師) in 1987. Although Jih Chang was raised as a Confucian and studied Buddhism in Taiwan for a period with Yin Shun, he drifted toward Tibetan Buddhism, which he regarded as the most advanced form. This is strongly reflected in the materials available in Fu Chih's Liren (里仁) Bookshop, works by the Dalai Lama but also by Western non-Buddhist thinkers. One reason for the breadth of items in its bookshop is that Fu Chih's membership is small, and it does not actively proselytize, instead relying on people to seeking it out on their own.

Its social engagements are limited. It provides funds for other charities, but it does not engage in relief projects on its own. It contributes to Life Education material and also holds seminars for teachers and principals on Buddhist morality. Its major contribution is to the environment. In cooperation with the Farmers' Association, it encourages farmers to grow

¹² Life Education replaces the previous New Life Movement-style moral education lessons in primary school texts with lessons from religious or other grassroots groups.

organic crops¹³ in order to protect the earth and those life forms killed by the use of agricultural chemicals, and to safeguard human health, the farmers growing the crops and consumers. It provides those farmers who comply with a market for their produce through its Liren food shops that sell only chemical additive-free food products. To compliment this it holds classes on cooking and food.

Although I cannot draw a line of causation, the strength of *renjian* Buddhism in Taiwan is arguably a reason why Taiwanese are as munificent and charitable as they are. A 2010 MasterCard survey found them to be the most generous donors in the greater China area, two-thirds being prepared to buy products online from companies that donate to charities and half intending to donate or participate in a charitable event in the next six months (Yang 2010). They donated more per capita following the Taiwan's 1999 earthquake than Japanese did after their own 1995 Kobe earthquake (Moon 2013), and Taiwan's business community donated much more per capita than did Chinese businesses to the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake (Lin 2011). Moreover, Taiwanese donations for the Fukushima disaster relief was sustained, had a high participation rate, and provided the highest total contribution, over 20 billion Japanese yen (NT\$68.4 billion; Moon 2013).

Finally, two observations on Buddhist philanthropy in Taiwan. First, I have left out one area of social engagement they claim, what they call culture. Although Fo Kuang Shan provides art museums—Venerable Hsing Yun believing that art turns the mind to thinking that is very congenial to Buddhist thought—culture generally refers to providing literature, mostly from their own organizations, to the public. Their reasoning is that this will bring people's minds around to thinking about transforming the earth into the Pure Land, which it may. However, it is arguably what these groups need to do to fulfil their own missions, and it is not as tangible as the contributions noted above. Second, in modern times, Buddhists have certainly made outstanding contributions to social welfare in Taiwan and elsewhere. However, Taiwan Buddhist philanthropy targets conventional social welfare recipients: medical facilities, the poor, orphans, and the elderly. Buddhist

¹³ Taiwan's pesticide use is higher than that of most other countries (Focus Taiwan, 2017) <https://focustaiwan.tw/society/201709150025>.

groups have not reached out to more unconventional but needy groups such as migrant workers, HIVAIDs sufferers, single mothers, or victims of domestic violence. Caritas and the Presbyterians have. Buddhism scholar Professor Cheng Chen-huang (鄭振煌), acknowledged this and felt that the Buddhist groups needed to broaden their scope of activities.

9. TAIWAN-CHINA DIFFERENCES

It is obvious from the above that although they share a cultural heritage and were both under authoritarian governance until at least 1988, Taiwan and China show significant differences in philanthropic behavior. Table 2, from the World Giving Index, Charities Aid Foundation, makes this clear.¹⁴ It shows the world ranking and percentage scores of the PRC and Taiwan over the ten years, 2009-2018, and for comparative purposes Singapore.

People from the PRC or from Taiwan are similar in that both respond positively and with immediacy to domestic disasters. However, they differ in level of per capita donations, percentage donating, giving on a regular basis rather than only in times of disaster, and giving to “general humanity” causes such as events that happen abroad.¹⁵ What accounts for the differences?

Table 2. World Giving Index Scores, 2009-2018: PRC, Taiwan, Singapore

	PRC	Taiwan	Singapore
Overall rank (N = 126)	126	48	46
Overall score	16%	35%	36%
Helping rank	119	59	96

¹⁴ CAF measures participation based on Gallup World Poll data on the number/percentage of people who, in the past month, have given money to a charity, volunteered time to an organization, or helped a stranger. Rankings are based on a 5 year average, 3 or more calendar year scores.

¹⁵ For example, Tzu Chi members in Australia funded a mobile dental clinic to treat residents of outback areas that are under-served by dentists.

Helping score	31%	48%	39%
Donate rank	119	32	21
Donate score	11%	38%	48%
Volunteer rank	125	66	59
Volunteer Score	5%	18%	19%

Source: World Giving Index 2019

One possible factor is comparative wealth. On a per capita basis, Taiwan is easily the wealthier of the two societies, its nominal GDP per capita of US\$24,827, over double that of the PRC figure of US\$10,098 (IMF 2019). However, Taiwanese donated, e.g., to the Tzu Chi hospital when they were much poorer, as did Chinese after the 1991 floods. Wealth is relative in this context except, perhaps, for those barely eking out a living.

A major factor must be the presence of the *renjian* Buddhist groups in Taiwan, their success in teaching compassion and giving and their being umbrella organizations under which large-scale philanthropy projects can be organized. Large as, e.g., the Shaolin or Nan Putuoshan monasteries are, they are stand-alone institutions, and they are small compared to the Taiwan *renjian* groups.¹⁶ Moreover, their example contributed to Taiwan's philanthropy sector overall. The construction of the first Tzu Chi hospital was a major force in this as it was a very public campaign and appealed to many who were not affiliated with Buddhism, merely interested in improving medical services for an underserved sector of the community. Shortly after the hospital was completed, Taiwan democratized, and a year later the government revised the laws to free up the established of grassroots bodies. This led to a proliferation of civil society organizations, some of which had philanthropic aims.

Another factor is the level of trust. Although evidence is only indirect, trust in philanthropic organizations and generally is arguably higher in Taiwan than in China. There is ample evidence of a general trust crisis in China (Ci 2014, Zhu 2010, 2011). More specifically, important charity groups have been involved in scandals involving misuse of funds. Indeed, the PRC government has taken direct actions to make charity finances more

¹⁶ Nor, I believe, would the PRC government want them to be as large and influential.

transparent and ensure their trustworthiness (He 2013, Dzodin 2014, Chin 2017). Studies of general trust in Taiwan, by contrast, are scant, which would not be the case if it were regarded as a problem there, and there are no reports of scandals involving philanthropic organizations. Civility is strongly linked to trust, and as I show elsewhere, the level of general civility is higher in Taiwan (Schak 2018). Thus, people can give to philanthropic organizations with assurance that their donations will be used as intended.

A third factor is government policies toward religion, which admonishes people to help the unfortunate, and the civil society sector, where organizations identify causes and collect funds to alleviate social adversity, have obstructed the growth of philanthropy in China. Although state-sanctioned religious groups have been tolerated since 1980, and civil society organizations are allowed, religion is denigrated, and the civil society groups are hampered in carrying out their missions. This is the outcome of ideology and a proclivity for control which results, *inter alia*, in an unwillingness to share credit with non-government entities. Together these stunt the growth of China's philanthropy sector. Civil society groups, being small and not well known and having to compete with large, well-known GONGOs, already struggle to collect donations or achieve a size where they will be able to attract the kinds of talents and skills to operate efficiently and professionally.

As for the claims that China lacks a culture of philanthropy or that some still think that, following the government's monopolization of philanthropy in the 1950s, the public no longer has a moral obligation to help those who need help, judging from the outstanding responses to disasters—the Wenchuan and Yushu earthquakes, the 2012 flash floods in Beijing (Wu 2012) and the chemical plant explosion in Tianjin (Liu 2015)—there certainly is a segment of the Chinese population who do not think that way, for whom philanthropy is important. Nonetheless, the like segment in Taiwan is larger.

PRC society is missing out because the Party values its supreme position in China above all else. It demands complete control, so it limits those grass-roots organizations it permits and quashes others. Moreover, despite claims about socialist morality, it shows little faith in the good heartedness of its

people. The Henan blood scandal occurred because the Party/State, fearful that the citizenry would be unwilling to give blood voluntarily, allowed blood merchants to ensure supply by buying blood. Donors were literally held upside down in order to drain more blood from them, and the mixing of blood from many donors resulted in the Henan HIV tainted blood scandal. The government finally introduced a program for voluntary donations after the Henan disaster occurred, and China now has a sufficiency of blood (Jing 2011), demonstrating that compassion and charity are still a characteristic of Chinese society.

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