

A Typological Discussion of Civil Engagement: The Case of the Buddhist Tzu-Chi Association in Taiwan

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1. Introduction

A Brief Introduction to the Tzu-Chi Association

The Fojiao ci ji gongde hui (佛教慈濟功德會), is translated into English by its agencies as the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu-Chi Foundation (later it will simply be called the Tzu-Chi). *Ci ji gongde hui* literally means compassion (*ci*), relief (*ji*), merit (*gongde*) association (*hui*).

Tzu-Chi in Taiwan is a volunteer charitable organization that has been expanding rapidly since the lifting of martial law in Taiwan in 1987. It was founded by the Buddhist nun Zhengyan (證嚴) in 1966. Tzu-Chi now has one hundred nuns, more than five thousand commissioners (core members), and around four million members (regular money donors).

Begun as an organization predominantly composed of middle-age women, today Tzu-Chi recruits participants from all walks of Taiwanese society. Now, the Tzu-Chi association is the foremost nonprofit charity organization in Taiwan. It has constructed a general hospital with modern medical equipment on the relatively undeveloped east coast of Taiwan. Also, Tzu-Chi established a nursing college in 1988, and a medical college in 1993 which later became a university. Besides publishing books and a monthly magazine, Tzu-Chi even has its own TV channel and station. Each year since 1993, Tzu-Chi has received in donations more than USD 130 million (Huang 2001, 2003; Huang and Weller 1998; Ting 1997).

Now, Tzu-Chi is also an international enterprise that has branches across five continents. The "one footstep with eight footprints of Tzu-Chi"----charity, medicine, education, culture, bone marrow donation, international relief, environmental protection, and

community volunteersism---represents the various programs that the Tzu-Chi association has tried to implement in society. During devastating disasters in Taiwan, such as the 921 Earthquake (7.2 degree on the Richter scale) in 1999 and the SARS epidemic in 2003, Tzu-Chi had played a crucial role in disaster relief.

Tzu-Chi originated as a breakaway from traditional Taiwanese Buddhist groups, in the sense that it has engaged in social practice more actively than the other groups. Tzu-Chi was the personal ideal and dream of a Buddhist nun, Zhengyan. As she characterized the image of the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy, Kuan-yin, who was said to have one thousand eyes and one thousand hands that could help others, "one eye observing as one thousand eyes, and one hand functioning as one thousand hands," Zhengyan thus called on people to cooperate to help the needy. "If five hundred people commit to help together, therefore, we can offer help to the needy with great efficiency. It is just like the thousand hands and thousand eyes of Kuan Yin Bodhisattva" (see Tzu-Chi 1992, 3-4).

On July 16, 1991, Zhengyan was awarded the Community Leadership Award of the Magsaysay Award of the Philippines (the so-called Asian Nobel Peace Prize) for "awakening Taiwan's modern people to the ancient Buddhist teachings of compassion and charity". In 1993, Zhengyan was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by the Taiwanese government for her contribution in rescuing people and awakening people to help those in need. In 1994, Zhengyan was awarded the Eisenhower Medallion, because "Tzu-Chi's far-reaching charity work has improved world peace" (*Tzu-Chi Dharma-Friend Semimonthly* issue 211 1994). After Mother Teresa, she is the second Asian to win this award. In 1995, Zhengyan was elected an "Outstanding Woman of Asia" (there were twenty) by *Asiaweek* since her work and influence have become a driving force in Taiwanese society (*Tzu-Chi World Journal* issue 53 1995).

The Civil Implication of Tzu-Chi's Rapid Growth

From 1949 until 1987, the island of Taiwan was perpetually under martial law, and there was almost no opportunity for Taiwanese people to develop civil society. Yet under this hardship, in terms of Buddhist charity, Tzu-Chi grew up gradually. Since 1987, Tzu-Chi has been increasing its membership dramatically, about double each year. A comparison of several figures shows how rapidly the Tzu-Chi association has been

expanding in the last twenty years: in 1985, Tzu-Chi had only 433 commissioners and 60,000 members; in 1990, it had 1,853 commissioners and 1,050,000 members; now, it has more than 5,000 commissioners and more than 4 million members (Shiao 1993, 30; K'ang and Chien 1995, 87-99).

Since Tzu-Chi is the largest bottom-up voluntary nonprofit organization in modern Taiwan, intellectuals have a high expectation of Tzu-Chi's possible contribution to promoting a true bottom-up civil society in Taiwan.

However, to some extent, at least in one crucial point, it disappoints intellectuals' expectations a lot, as Tzu-Chi insists on a policy of "no involvement in politics." For example, Tzu-Chi's core members, commissioners, must observe the Tzu-Chi Ten Commandments. These ten commandments are:

1. Abstention not only from killing but also from harming in any way.
2. Abstention from taking the not-given.
3. Abstention from sexual misconduct.
4. Abstention from false speech.
5. Abstention from drink and drugs, the taking of which results in loss of awareness.
6. Abstention from smoking and chewing betel nut.
7. Abstention from gambling.
8. Keeping in good temper and expressing filial piety towards parents.
9. Abstention from transgression, obeying the traffic laws, and wearing a helmet when driving a motorcycle.
10. *Concern about politics but not involvement.*

Therefore, any commissioner who wants to participate in any kind of political campaign then he or she must disclaim Tzu-chi membership.

However, a famous historian, Lin Yu-sheng (林毓生), argued in 1996 that we could expect a transformation in Tzu-Chi's social action to occur, thus its charitable social services may transform into a force that could foster a real civil society in Taiwan. Lin said:

Tzu-Chi displays many traditional Chinese characteristics, few of which belong to

modern civil society. Indeed, its financial management is transparent and open to the public, yet it has not been involved in discussion of public policy or political improvement. ...Nevertheless, to enhance the effectiveness of their charitable services, Tzu-Chi people may reflect on the barrier of their services, that is, some unjust social policy, thus Tzu-Chi can be involved in discussion of public policy. Even more, it can develop into lobbying, sitting-in, protesting, building connections with other social movements, and so forth. Therefore, traditional charitable services may transform into a creative force for enhancing civil society. (1996:193-94)

Lin concluded in a quite optimistic tone, in his own English abstract of this Chinese article:

Using Tzu-Chi as example, a concrete process is shown as to how traditional Chinese “civil society” can be creatively transformed into modern, Western-style civil society (which is not only independent of the state but also has access to political process) through unfolding its publicness in a new (hitherto unavailable) space for development. On the strength of the emergence of this new civil society, a society of citizens with civic virtue and civic culture, which is the classical definition of civil society, may also arise in Taiwan. This twofold development of civil society will substantively contribute toward the realization of liberal democracy. Here, the traditional civic organizations, such as Tzu-Chi, to develop themselves through “creative transformation” into modern civil society are predicated on their inner logic; such a development does not need to get involved in power politics.

However, after Lin’s comments on Tzu-Chi, ten years passed, and this creative transformation of Tzu-Chi’s civil engagement never happened. The Tenth Commandment of Tzu-Chi still holds unwaveringly. During every campaign season, Tzu-Chi routinely re-emphasizes its stance of noninvolvement in political affairs. For example, during Taiwan’s 2004 president campaign, Tzu-Chi gave a public statement as follows:

Confronting various kinds of election, Tzu-Chi insists on its stance of

non-involvement. No campaigning, no recommendation of a candidate, and no vote soliciting. This stance has never changed in the past thirty-eight years of Tzu-Chi. Now again in this presidential election season, Tzu-Chi would like to reemphasize this basic position.

Based upon the ideas of “respecting life. And asserting human’s goodness,” Tzu-Chi has engaged in the enterprise of charity, medicine, education, and culture for thirty-eight years. The purpose is for “purifying human nature, harmonizing society, and erasing human disaster.” For maintaining a peaceful and clean human realm, Tzu-Chi insists on noninvolvement in politics and wants to remain politically neutral. All Tzu-Chi members hold this principle. During the campaign season, we won’t solicit votes for any parties or candidates.

Master Zhengyan argues that each election is an opportunity for education, in the sense that candidates express their ideas, and voters think about the opportunity to choose virtuous and capable people. Our society then can become harmonious and peaceful, thus we can grasp future happiness. (*Tzu-Chi Dharma-Friend Semimonthly* issue 423 2003).

As this kind of statement has been repeated, it seems that intellectuals’ expectation of Tzu-Chi’s transformation into a force of civil society not only hasn’t been achieved, but also we see that Tzu-Chi’s tenacity in holding onto its own nonpolitical position is even stronger than before.

How do we understand Tzu-Chi’s bottom-up social engagements without political involvement? Are Tzu-Chi members reluctant to become involved in political affairs? Is it that Tzu-Chi’s public social services may actually simultaneously be a barrier to the sprout of civil society in Taiwan? That is to say, Tzu-Chi’s public services may reinforce the government’s legitimacy as it does only piecemeal social services without challenging the injustice of social policy. Is Tzu-Chi’s civil engagement compatible with Western-style of civil society? How much can we expect Tzu-Chi’s influence to foster a Western-type civil society?

The relevant information we collected on the case of the Tzu-Chi association may help us to shed light on these issues.

2. Civil Society, the Public Sphere, and the Alternative “Public Sphere”

We may consider civil society those aspects of society “standing between the market and the state, embodying neither the self-interest of the one nor the coercive authority of the other ... a place of transition from the realm of particularism to that of the universal.” (Wolfe 1989, 16) Furthermore, the components of civil society include “families, communities, friendship networks, solidaristic workplace ties, voluntarism, spontaneous groups and movements.” (Wolfe 1989, 16). Civil society emerges from a specific time and place, then becomes a normative concept in which it reflects the value of self-governing, and it may prevent the central authority from the abuse of power.

This self-governing principle of civil society is deeply embedded in the Enlightenment narrative of emancipation (Duara 1995, 147). Duara reminds us that the notion of “civil society” should not be thought as an objectivist term: rather, it is a narrative following the paradigm of Western Enlightenment. If this is true, therefore, with regard to the popularity of this narrativization in non-Western countries, our questions will be: When and how has this narrative or representation of the ideas of “civil society” been taken by non-Western historical actors, who then sought to propel history performatively in a particular direction (Duara 1995:147). Logically, thus we may see that civil society’ pivotal role in building a modern country is not a historical inevitability, rather, we can see the achievements of the concept of civil society as the triumph of the discourse of the global system of nation-states in non-Western countries (Duara 1995:148).

For example, in a critique of Habermas’s ideas of a “public sphere,”¹ which only consists of a bourgeois sphere tied to the expansion of capitalism and the emergence of a private realm, Duara reminds us there are many alternatives to “public sphere,” such as “women’s sphere,” “plebeian public sphere,” and also “the periodically recurring violent revolt of a counter project to the hierarchical world of domination” (1995, 148-149). Therefore, “we too may find elements of a civil society and even of a public sphere in both rural and urban China.” (p.149)

¹ According to Habermas (1989:25-26), the “public sphere” has been a “a sphere of public authority, but was now casting itself loose as a forum in which the private people, come together to form a public, readied

3. Public Religion and the idea of Public in China's historical contexts

Public Religion

The Western idea of “civil society” presumes a secular, bourgeois, liberal democracy, in which religion has been privatized, that is, marginalized from the public sphere. However, as Casanova (1994:7) has pointed out, even if the differentiation of the religious and secular spheres does occur, it does not necessarily hold that religion is marginalized and privatized, nor does its logical counterpart that public religion necessarily endangers the differentiated structures of modernity hold.

Casanova moves further and constructs a tripartite typology of public religion, in which public religion may exist at the levels of the state, political society, and civil society. Whereas the first two types of public religion may be incompatible with the structures of modern liberal democracy, the third type of public religion, “the public intervention of religion in the undifferentiated public sphere of civil society,” may function well in current Western liberal democracy. (p.217).

Casanova's idea of civil society is not equal to Habermas's. As Casnova postulates a more open and undifferentiating kind of civil sphere allowing religions' involvement, in contrast Habermas, with his idea of “public sphere,” establishes overly rigid boundaries between “public issues of justice” and “private conceptions of the good life,” “public interests” and “private needs,” “public matters of norms” and “private matters of values,” and so forth (Benhabib.1991:88-89). Habermas's ideas of public sphere look more like Casanova's ideas of public sphere at the level of polity society rather than at the level of civil society. Moreover, Casanova's ideas of “public sphere at civil society level” asks for a more reflexive and open-ended discourse, that is, recognizing what the boundaries between public and private are and the need to be open to contestation, redefinition, renegotiation, and discursive legitimization. In Casanova's revised model of civil society, whether normatively or practically, we see that religion could play a crucial role in the social institute of modern liberal democracy.

The Idea of Public in China's Historical Contexts.

themselves to compel public authority to legitimate itself before public opinion.”

Tzu-Chi has been intensively engaging itself in public service even under the severe criticism that Tzu-Chi fails to foster the value of civil society in Taiwan. Here, how can we understand this discrepancy between Tzu-Chi's self-designated public orientation and others', especially intellectuals', perception of Tzu-Chi as being counteractive to the development of modern civil society?

To understand Tzu-Chi, we may link it to its cultural backdrop, the ideas surrounding *gong* (公) in traditional China, in which the word *gong* literally means "public," "mutual sharing," "impartial," and so forth. As the term "civil society" has been translated into Chinese as *gong-ming-she-hui* (公民社會), "public sphere" as *gong-gong-lingyu* (公共領域), China's traditional concept of *gong* certainly plays a role in orienting people's understanding of those modern imported Western terms.

Western ideas of public sphere, since the Enlightenment, have a bourgeois base in private properties. The public sphere thus is constituted by the sociability and rational-critical discourse of private individuals, who sought to defend their privacy in the public sphere from the domination of the state (Duara 1995:148). To protect private freedom, there is the necessity of the "separation of church and state," that is, allowing people to choose their own religious faith without the state's intervention. To some extent, under a specific historical contingency, this public sphere becomes a neutral, secular, and procedural type of sphere.

Unlike in the Western context, in China's social and cultural context, there was never anything like the Western-style "public sphere." However, as the traditional idea of *gong* does parallel the Western concept of "public," we may need a further examination of how in the past Chinese society could have fostered public engagement through the idea of *gong*.

Mizoguchi (溝口雄三 1995, 46-62; also see Jin 1995 and Rankin 1990) has systematically examined the implications and alterations of the word *gong* (公) in Chinese history. First, etymologically, *si* (私), "private," and *gong*, "publicness," share the same word-part, 厶. This word-part 厶 symbolizes a person's hiding something for himself or herself. The word *si* combines 禾, "crop," and 厶, thus meaning hiding crops for oneself.

In contrast to *si*, the character *gong* (公) combines the upper part 八 with the bottom part 厶, and it means circumscribing or curtailing one's self-concern and personal interests. Therefore, already etymologically, in Chinese *gong* and *si* are antonyms, in which *si* means selfish, personal desire and a wicked idea or evil intention, and *gong* is the negation of *si*, meaning unselfish, beyond personal concern, and so forth.

This anti-private implication of the word *gong*, since the Han dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) has accrued various designations, such as it may signify offices, the government, imperial court, commonwealth, state, and so forth. The literal meaning of *gong* gradually came to include "impartial," "reasonable," "beyond one's personal interests," and so forth.

The ideas of *gong* later conjoined with the ideas of heaven, *tian* (天). It has been thought that *tian*, as the natural realm, which is impartial to everyone and never asks feedback from people, thus represents the mechanism of *gong* sufficiently (Mizoguchi 1995, 48). The proverb *tian xia wei gong* (天下為公), "the world belongs to everybody," or "no one can monopoly the world," certainly displays this conjunction of the concepts of *gong* (public) and *tian* (heaven).

This idea of *tian xia wei gong* presumes an intention and purpose of the heaven, thus restraining emperors, the "sons of heaven," *tianzi* (天子). As *tian* always is absolutely fair and impartial, the agent of *tian*, the son of heaven should be one who transcends his own personal or his family's interests. However, since the emperor is only a person, sometimes he privatizes the world and indulges too much in his own interests. When this happens, according to the Chinese classical texts, it is totally legitimate for the populace to revolt against the dynasty. According to *The Annals of Lu* (呂氏春秋):

In the past, when the ancient sage-kings governed the world, they invariably made impartiality [*gong*] their first priority, because if they acted impartially, the world would be at peace. This peace was attained by acting with impartiality [*gong*]. ... The world does not belong to one person; it belongs to the whole world. The harmony of the Yin and Yang forces does not favor growth in only one species of

thing, the sweet dews and seasonable rains are not partial [*si*] to one thing, and so the ruler of the myriad people does not show favoritism toward a single individual....

The myriad things all receive their blessings and obtain their benefits, but no one knows whence they first arose. (Knoblock and riegel, trans. 2000, 70-71)

Chinese believe that public and private are totally antagonistic. The accomplishing of public (*gong*) requires limiting the development of each person's desire. Therefore, as the Western idea of civil society presumes a contractual public sphere, based upon a legal right of personal property, this kind of idea is actually against traditional Chinese ideas of *gong*. That is to say, in China, *si* (private) has always had a negative implication. The personal right of property has never been supported in China. After the late Ming dynasty (1368-1644), to some extent, personal desires and interests were recognized by philosophers and intellectuals, yet, according to Mizoguchi (1995:33-34), these factors still were taken as disturbing to public interests, thus needing to be regulated (p.33-34).

As *gong* signified the characteristics of heaven, from the Song dynasty (960-1279), it began to become associated the category of *li* (理), "the ordering principles of all that exists". The phrase *kuo ra da gong* (廓然大公) means a "widely and transparently grand mind of openness," that is, that one can follow heaven's or nature's ordering principles without any personal delusion or desires. (Mizoguchi 1995, 57). Therefore, *gong* becomes the principle for self-cultivation, a manifestation of a non-selfish virtue. This principle has not only been applied to officials, but it also has been used by common people for their moral promotion and spiritual cultivation.

In short, in China, *gong* is the golden rule for political management, the axiom of natural law, and the core principle for self-cultivation and moral engagement. Here, politics, natural law, and moral principle are related and mutually interchangeable. Politics is morality; to maintain social hierarchy and public morality is to maintain the natural law; self-cultivation equals the most effective way of political management.

Whereas "public" in the modern West means a contractually open sphere in which personal properties and rights are protected, in China, *gong* means a postulated category of non-selfishness that is beyond any individual's personal interests and constitutes an

objective natural law in which both politics and moral practices are relied upon.

The Conjunction between Buddhism and Chinese Idea of Gong

Because Buddhism is a religion imported into China, at first glance it is hard to imagine how Buddhism may relate to China's indigenous category of *gong*. Indeed, at its very beginning in China, Buddhism seems to have belonged only to a limited circle of private spiritual practices. However, soon Buddhism became integrated into various levels of the community, and it began to be highly related to the practices of public welfare and social harmonization.

In China, historically, at least in four dimensions, Buddhism conjoins with the local consciousness and practices of publicness (*gong*).

First, cosmologically, Chinese postulated the idea of souls' eternality, meaning that there are always some spiritual beings around, and so how to solve the problems of spiritual beings' disturbance of this world becomes crucial. For the typical three categories of spiritual beings----ancestors, gods, and ghosts----ancestors are worshipped by family member and gods by the community, yet the wondering ghosts remain rootless. As the disturbing spiritual beings have the quality of *yin* (polluted, negative), it is necessary to restrict or banish this *yin* quality that is found in the world. One common way to minimize the *yin* is through maximizing the *yang* (positive) power, by the "rite of cosmic renewal"(Saso 1972), *jiao* (醮), in which through ritual exercise Taoist clergy may symbolically restore a cosmological order predominated by gods and *yang* (Sangren 1987:170-176). However, the imported religion, Buddhism, as an agent beyond and transcending the local cosmological components of *yin* and *yang*, could and actually did play an effective role in conquering the spiritual disturbance in Han Chinese cosmology, and then bringing the cosmological order back. For example, we have seen that since the Tang dynasty (618-907) Buddhist pagodas have become the permanent storehouses of the bones of the deceased and their spiritual tablets, both for wandering ghosts and for people's ancestors; Buddhist clergy, who are believed to be invulnerable to *yin*'s influences, become the ritual specialists who can conduct the rituals regarding deceased people and wandering spirits. That is to say, Buddhism and Buddhist clergy have performed a necessary function for Chinese society as a whole. In Chinese society with

its incremental levels of differentiation, both “staying in the family” and “leaving home” are necessary for societal functions. These two cooperate in reestablishing harmony and creating a greater good, in that “monks receive food...which allows them to survive in economic terms, while fertility and glory—more descendants and greater ancestors—accrue to the kinship group.”(Teiser 1988:209)..

Second, in terms of social function, as “leaving home” is a normative requirement for Buddhist priests, they are therefore out of the lineage system and family connections and thus could be identified by the public as having characters that can go beyond private desires and personal interests. This surpassing position of the Buddhist clergy historically makes it quite popular for local charitable associations to be entrusted to the management of a Buddhist monk or nun (Baity 1975:244)

Third, .with regard to the moral principle of *gong*, since Buddhist philosophy and epistemology postulate an ideas of “no self,” or “emptiness of essence,” Buddhist ethics may easily be linked to the ideas of selflessness and the virtue of giving. The Buddhist moral principle thus can be transformed into a base for public participation and community service. Whereas public participation in this way is a manifestation of a non-selfish virtue, it thus can be either a civil engagement, a method for self-cultivation, or a way to accumulate both personal and family merit.

Fourth, in a rather indirect way, yet Buddhism may play a more crucial role in boosting local people’s public engagement. That is, Confucianism affirms that everyone has the potential to be perfectly good, and one should proceed with his (or her) moral duties regardless of success or failure in his (or her) own lifetime (Yang 1961:287). Practically, however, this highbrow moral standard needs an additional religious or motivational base. To this extent, the Buddhist assumption of karma and the karmic cycle is crucial. One who does good receives good, and one who does evil receives evil, not only in this life but in the existence of the future. Thus, there is room for improvement through religious practice or moral effort. Without the Buddhist concept of the karmic cycle, it is hard to imagine how the highbrow concept of *gong* could actually be implemented at the popular level.

To sum up, under Chinese social and cultural contexts, at the popular level, Buddhism could be a medium and bridge to link private spiritual cultivation and public

social engagement. To some extent, the Buddhist linkage may even root the original Confucian idea of *gong* in a much broader and elaborated social psychological base. Behind Tzu-Chi's modern face as a nonprofit organization, we can find the traditional social role of Buddhism in play. To the society as a whole, it is the *gong* function of Tzu-Chi that has successfully mobilized many social resources and recruited people from all walks of Taiwanese society.

4. A Further examination of Tzu-Chi

With regard to Tzu-Chi's civil engagement, it does not only appear in a sharply different context from that of Western civil society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but it is also in sharp contrast with the so-called public religion that appeared after beginning in the 1970s in the current world arena. This is because Tzu-Chi's civil engagement neither antagonizes the state nor asks for religions' regaining its political power within the framework of the national-state.

Comparing the emergence of the Tzu-chi association with the emergence of "public religion" in other countries since the 1970s, where religions began to react to an over secularized society, and asking for a de-marginalizing religion within the public sphere, Tzu-Chi's emergence in Taiwan, indeed, paralleled this global ferment, yet it still appears in a quite different pace and approach.

Historically, dominated by the diffused form of religion (Yang 1961:294-300), institutional religion rarely occupies the mainstreams in China. In this sense, in China's sociocultural context, the issue of secularization is not about the marginalization of institutional religion; rather, it is about the marginalization of the diffused form of religious consciousness, that is, the publicly recognized morality and normative expectation on behavior. Or, say, if we put the focus on Taiwan, the process of secularization there, whether it happened or not, was not about religions' privatization, since institutional religions already were and always are only part of private people's personal choice. Rather, the issue was about the gradual loss of the moral base underneath current public institutions in Taiwan.

In this sense, we may say that in Taiwan, those people who are accustomed with traditional consciousness now do call for de-marginalization; however, the target for this

de-marginalization is morality not religion. In Taiwan, the appeal of morality is different from the appeal of religion, and the former is much closer to a sense of “publicness” than the latter, thus people will resonate much more easily with the former.

Furthermore, for local people, with regard to the issue of de-marginalization of traditional morality, the introduction of Western civil society into Taiwan has not only been invalid in helping people to revitalize conventional public morality, but also it has been recognized as the very direct cause of the decline of society’s moral foundation.

All these thoughts can be easily found in Tzu-Chi’s public statements. We will next examine some of them. For example:

We see that Tzu-Chi does postulate a very conventional Chinese view of the ideas of public/private, in which public and private are completely antagonistic. The Tzu-Chi leader Zhengyan, in an article entitled “Public Concern May Get Benefits, Private concern Causes Loss” (公益與私損) expresses this antagonism vividly:

The reverse side of public interest is private. We may have either public or private, but they cannot appear together. The reverse side of benefit is damage; we may have either benefit or damage, yet they cannot appear together. ...

If we want to purify the human realm, first we need to get rid of the private self, the mind of the personal self. Only when we get rid of the private self can we accomplish the larger self, then it is possible to be righteous and beneficial. Why is current society in such chaos? It is because we are selfish. The personal self is too selfish thus causes the human mind to fall ill. (1996, 35)

We need to transform our little self and move into a larger sphere, thus we can behave in a “public” way. If we neglect the righteous and public, actually we restrain ourselves (1996, 49).

The passages above clearly shows that Tzu-Chi holds a very conventional sense of the idea of private/public, allowing little space for the development of private rights, which may constitute a base for Western-style of civil society.

Tzu-chi continually assumes that too much private concern may cause problems: in

diagnosing current social problems in Taiwan, Tzu-Chi leader Zhengyan now attributes Taiwan's social problems with being the result of too much "Westernization." According to Zhengyan, this Westernization process endangers Taiwan's good traditions and disrupts the previous social order in which selfish desires were held down within a safer boundary. She said:

Over the recent several decades, our life and culture have been changed a lot by Western culture. Western culture disturbs the traditional Eastern spiritual culture. Now this generation has a big gap with the last generation. Family relationships have been alienated. Family has become disorganized. Society is in disorganization. Social rules have lost control. At this time this society needs Tzu-Chi. In order to change this society, this society needs us to spread the purified love. (Zhengyan 1995b, 15)

In another paragraph, she described that:

Times are changing. China has become modernized. Taiwan is Westernized in almost every way, and the old family ties are weakening. During the time of Confucius, when there were four generations living under the same roof, this family was the envy of its neighborhood. But now many of the old are nothing more than burdens to the young, and are unwelcome in young couples' homes. (qtd. in Yu-ing, 1995, 109)

Briefly speaking, this is how "Taiwanese society has got diseases" (Zhengyan, 1992:24). Traditional family ties especially have been broken down by modern Western material culture. Taiwan society has now lost its order.

Nevertheless, the assumptions coming from Buddhism lead a Buddhist association to conclude that current social problems in Taiwan are caused by people's inner blindness, that is, greed and selfishness. As Zhengyan has said:

Why is current society so in chaos? It is because we are selfish. The personal self is too selfish and thus makes human minds develop illness. (1991, 33)

In modern society, no matter how bad the social order is, and how

degenerated the social morality is, all these problems are coming from our inner heart. All problems come from our minds. (1991,39)

To summarize, we see that according to Tzu-Chi, as articulated by its leader Zhengyan, Taiwanese society is falling into a chaos in which the stable social order and the ethical relationships between people have become lost, the contemporary reasons for this chaos are modernization and Westernization, and the more fundamental sources of this chaos, however, are the greediness and selfishness of human beings.

Based upon the above diagnosis, then, the cure to uplift Taiwan society is not through political discourses in public sphere but rather is through one's taking his or her social responsibility immediately. That is, through "doing," rather than through "discussing and talking". For example, once a Tzu-Chi member asked Zhengyan: "When young people see social injustice and unrighteousness, they want to be champions of justice. Is this kind of thinking and action appropriate?" Zhengyan replied:

They must first have the wisdom of quiet contemplation. Being champions of justice, they shout and make situations even more complicated and confused. The correction of injustice is not as easy as it looks, therefore do not be too eager for success or be too hasty. With just an instant of stimulus, they shout and champion for justice, adding on the risk of having everything backfire. This would only deepen the injustice. We should think of what we have done and what we are able to do. Everyone should try to do their utmost in their duties and in their sense of responsibility, their sense of justice. If everyone acts thusly, then there is a possibility that society will be even more fair and just. (1994, 149-150)

Further, Zhengyan compares religious figures with political figures:

Both religious and political figures think that their own ideas are the best in bringing happiness to all living beings. Is there a difference in their views? ...The true religious person has surpassed the desire for gaining merits and benefits. The political person wants to have merits and benefits. Of course there is a difference.

And furthermore, the difference is very great. (1994, 169)

This “doing” rather than “talking” philosophy, as it is put into a larger social context, does not refer to the building of a modern liberal democratic arena; rather, it refers to the endeavors that may bring traditional moral concern and interpersonal love back to various kinds of established institutions. An editorial in Tzu-Chi’s monthly magazine states:

Politics is not the whole for society and human relations. One’s accomplishment and contribution of altruism is far beyond realistic politics, which is occupied only by those greedy for power. That is to say, we need go back to the roots of chaos, people’s minds, to get self-reflection and adjustment. Buddhism holds that there is no external dharma, that goods and evils all are inside the human mind. Happiness and peace must be gotten from inside. If more people can lessen their private desire, substitute love for hatred and gratefulness for blaming, to appreciate all sentient beings, then there would be a purifying force that can turn over all negative things, promote people to be virtuous and upright. (*Tzu-Chi Monthly* issue 353 1996)

Or, phrasing this sentiment in it in rather pragmatic terms, a male cadre of Tzu-Chi told me:

There is a positive cycle and a negative one for social participation. We have only limited resources. We should put them in a positive cycle. There is always shortcoming in the human world. We should look at the brighter side of the human world rather than criticize others. Then, there might result a positive cycle. Society might become better and better. This is the way we Tzu-Chi people choose.

To sum up, according to Tzu-Chi, the Western model of civil society is neither a desirable goal for Taiwanese society to pursue, nor is it compatible to the practice of a conventional kind of public engagement.

5. Typological Analyses of Different Types of Civil Engagement

A presentation of Tzu-Chi's statements has shown us clearly that there does exist different ideological bases and imperatives for action between civil engagements of Western civil society and those of the of Tzu-Chi association.

Analytically, I would like to demonstrate these differences through two dimensions: (1) spaces of control, which can be conceptualized in terms of micro-spatial control and macro-spatial control, referring to the obedience to authority at either the local community level or beyond it, and (2) sources of control, which can be conceptualized in terms of whether internal or external, in which internal control means a self-monitoring way of behavioral adjustment, and external control means one's behavior is regulated by various external sources, such as coercion, law enforcement, or contractual performing. The cross-classification of these two dimensions thus suggests four general avenues of order-maintaining mechanisms for a society (see table 1).

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Table 1 about here

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Every society is predominately controlled or regulated by a specific mode, in which the control prevailing happens in certain spatial levels and sources. Also, there may exist differences between an idealized social order and its factual manifestation.

Several subtypes can be identified, whether referring to a case in the real world or in an idealized blueprint.

Type 1. Idealized moral engagement in traditional Chinese society. In this subtype, the populace has a stronger acceptance of and faith in internal control than external control. Traditional Chinese believe that personal inner moral control should be the foundation for both micro-spatial and macro-spatial control. That is, we may say that there is a broadening process starting from one's personal self-control and ending with a governed state. This process is central to the Chinese project of moral politics (Tu 1993:143-144), as the Confucian classic the *Great Learning* (*Da-xue* 大學) has presented it perfectly well. Looking at table 1, an idealized Chinese social order emphasizes that controls should be located predominately in cells A1 and A2. It is believed that if A1 and A2 are in good order, order within cells A3 and A4 would automatically attain. However,

the opposite does not hold; people generally do not believe that external control will lead to an internal control. Tu comments, “the Confucian aversion against impersonal social control through law continues to influence East Asian societies to this date” (1993, 151).

However, this type is only an idealized social order that has been postulated in traditional China. In China we see various factual manifestations different from type 1. For example, we have:

Type 2.1 A dual political structure in traditional China. Due to a lack of modern capacities, in imperial China, even though the central government claimed its authority and legitimacy over a broad geographical scope, it was still impossible for this government to penetrate its power into every corner of the society. From table 1, we can thus say that this government does control the macro-space, cell A4 (with a claim of government’s containing a moral integrity within cell A2), yet cell A3 is only loosely controlled. Besides, both cells A1 and A3 have been left for local community’s self-governing, in which usually the local associations, such as Freemasons, surname groups, community cults, and deity-worship groups, are in charge (Dean 2000; Weller 1999). Although underlying cell A3, as it maintains a self-regulated order or mutually contractual agreement, in traditional China the real foundation for cell A3’s function predominately comes from cell A1, that is, some inherent ethical premises previously postulated regarding social cooperation and interaction.

We can see here that the whole society is governed by dual yet mutually harmonious and interpenetrable tracks. The macro-space is governed by the empire’s central government, and the micro-space by local self-governing. Nevertheless, there is still a continuance and a link between these two, because the Confucian projects of politics and self-cultivation are the same, both presuming a broadening process from rectifying one’s heart to attaining peace throughout all under heaven.

Type 2.2. Modern Communist China with a totalistic political regime. In reactions to imperial invasion and global competition, since the Opium War (1840) China has been stimulated into a project of pursuing a modern national state. A modern national state is at the same time an expansion of the reflexive monitoring of governmental activity. Through various kind of monitoring technologies and militant facilities, the modern

national state does have the capacity to penetrate the day-to-day activities of its subjects (Giddens 1985, 210). In communist China, with an ideological base of the traditional concept of *gong*, in which there is no space for considering private rights, once the masses are mobilized, there soon results in an unprecedented totalitarian regime, as we have already seen. In communist China, the government can extend its control into both macro- and micro-space. And as these external controls have a legitimate base coming from internal moral codes (such as *gong*), the whole society can be mobilized without leaving any space for individuals' personal rights and property.

Type 3. Western civil society. This subtype holds the principle of “separation of church and state.” Individuals are regulated by themselves in their own local domains and thus enjoy personal freedom in their own micro-space. There is no need for external control within people's micro-space. However in macro-space since people are regulated by external law and contractual code rather than by the principle of morality, even these laws and contracts may actually have an implicit moral base. In short, Western society is governed by control in cells A1 and A4, which leaves cells A2 and A3 in a rather lenient condition without too many restrictions.

Type 4. An “in-between-kind” model, the case of contemporary Taiwan. This subtype occupies a transitional position between either an idealized type 1 society or local communities' self-governing within type 2.1 society (a dual political structure in traditional China), and an imported type 3 society. Type 4 can be related to contemporary Taiwan, the society Tzu-Chi's statement is addressing. As Taiwan transitions from tradition to modernity, formally, public life is now modeled on the Western style, that is, it is conditioned by legal procedure or contract. The function of cell A4 now prevails. However, as the Western model has been applied in Chinese society the imported external legal codes could not have any implicit internal base for the local people. Even worse, local Chinese rarely accept any externalized kind of regulation. In Taiwan, Western civil society is doubly external, either imported from outside or relying upon external codes to regulate people.

During the social transition, with regard to macro-spatial control, the replacing of

internal control (A2) for external control (A4), the enforced imposition of a new social order may disable the previously hypothetical function of cell A2. Furthermore, since in traditional China a broadening project of self-cultivation has linked cells A1 and A2, a retreat of A2's function could possibly lead to a disruption of cell A1's operation.

From a local perspective then, by importing Western civil society, modern Taiwan has only built a weakly macro-spatial order, yet it has lost all its traditional morality that could really hold the social order by control of the local people themselves. It seems that the imported civil society is not only not enough to hold up a social order, it undermines the real base of Taiwan's community and society.

For a typological discussion, we may stop here. However, for heuristic purposes. I want to go a step further. Next we may do an additional analytical job, to differentiate the binary classification into a tripartite classification, in order to produce a new classification model (table 2).

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Table 2 about here

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Now we insert a new component in each dimension. For spaces of control, the new component "intermediate level" is differentiated from a micro-spatial level: it refers to control at the community level. For sources of control, the new component "contractual" is differentiated from external control and refers to a special kind of external control based upon a mutually agreement.

From table 2 we can see that in traditional China, an ideal social order is presumed to be predominately functioned by consisting of the functions in cells B1, B2, and B3, with a broad category of horizontal institution B5 based upon mutual sharing and equal cooperation. That is, in traditional China, on the one hand there is an appeal for internal moral control and self-discipline in every social context, on the other hand, for practical purposes, members of a folk society could associate themselves effectively by some specific mutually agreeable principle.

For analytical purposes, we do not need to go further into other types of society that can be derived from table 2. It is enough for us to notice that since there was the

contractual type of horizontal association in traditional China, we may expect that these associations to be hotbeds and to evolve into common-interest groups and then foster values and actual functions of Western civil society (see Weller 1999). .

However, we can see that the contractual relationship within cell B5 in China relies upon a different foundation from the one in Western society. In China, it bases upon two mechanisms, and both are particularistically oriented. One is the internalized moral criteria *yi* (義), righteousness or mutual personal loyalty. The prototype of this moral virtue can be seen in China's most famous novel, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (三國演義), where the three main characters "swear brotherhood in the peach garden" (桃園三結義). The other base is the presumed intimate relationship within a family. Therefore, any social associations can be understood as an extension of an idealized family in the Chinese cultural context. The result then is that even though there exist contractual relationships in Chinese folk society, these relationships are bounded in specific domains without intentions to stretch to a more macro-spatial level and therefore cannot link to anything functioning at the constitutional level. We can see this very clearly in the case of Tzu-Chi, such as its insisting on political non-involvement and emphasizing a too much in-group family-like interdependent relationship.

6. Summary and Conclusion

Being that Tzu-Chi is a large-scale grassroots, nonprofit organization, its rapid growth in post-martial Taiwan may represent an enhancement of the value and practice of democracy and civil society. However, across time, as the core precept of Tzu-Chi unwaveringly postulates a position of "no political involvement," it not only lets intellectuals' expectations down, but it also raises the question of how we can perceive Tzu-Chi's highly enthusiastic public engagement along with its insistence on noninvolvement in politics.

In the present paper, before a detailed examination of Tzu-Chi, I asked for a reevaluation of the narrative of civil society. The narrativization of the self-governing principle of civil society is itself a product of Western Enlightenment. Western-style civil society is not a historical inevitability. Besides, the bourgeois-based "public sphere" is

only one type of public engagement among many. Each kind of public engagement is embedded in a specific historical and social context.

Western civil society is ingrained with a bourgeois-based secular and liberal ideology, however, as Casanova pointed out, without being incongruent with the structures of modern liberal democracy, religion still could play an important role in this democratic system. Nevertheless, for the chance to arise there must be a more open and undifferentiating kind of civil sphere within the system.

Either due to a crisis of the legitimacy of secular liberal democracy or to the central government's abuse of power, religious groups may revitalize their social responsibility and public concern and appeal for a de-marginalizing position within the society, in order to bring back social justice and public moral concern.

In this sense, Tzu-Chi's rapid growth does parallel this new global development of the emergence of public religion. However, both are alternative kinds of "public sphere"; in contrast to the Western bourgeois-based "public sphere," Tzu-Chi's ideas of "publicness" (*gong*) are still different from Casanova's ideas of "public religion" in some crucial areas.

Briefly speaking, "public religion," through engaging in public debate and discourse, asks for a reevaluation of fundamental human values behind current political and economic structures. However, Tzu-Chi's *gong* engagement, even though it must pass out its messages through language, emphasizes a conduct dimension rather than a discourse one. Tzu-Chi does not engage in public discourse and debate; rather, it emphasizes a feeling-touching function mediated by its leader's compassionate role and its various kinds of social propaganda projects. Tzu-Chi's model of "public" is attained through personal "somatic realization" of moral value, which may result in a cooperative and peaceful society. We may label it a "Somatic Model" of civil engagement, in contrast to other "Discursive Models" of civil engagement, such as the Western "public sphere" and Casanova's idea of "public religion."

This Somatic Model of civil engagement is embedded in a rather homogenous ethnic composition of Han Chinese and a cultural consensus on the idea of *gong* within the general populace in Taiwan. Discourse is discouraged, and only realized mutual helping or humanistic-oriented acts count. This means that now Buddhism has lost its classical

tenet and has become re-embedded into Taiwanese society through playing the *gong* function within the whole of society. Tzu-Chi is a realistic embodiment of the long-standing Chinese “public” tradition on a whole-society scale and even a global scale, for the first time going beyond the past’s lone community level.

Here we do see a broader category of publicness arising in current Taiwan: Tzu-Chi’s public engagements firmly document this. However, this “publicness”, with idealized expressions, only represents a meaning of an adjective rather a noun. It is thus a utopian category idealized by local people. Because it is idealized, it is only a purified category and does not admit individuals. Historically, this category has been used to condition the political elite’s abuse of power, and to protect the minimum subsistence of the general public, the peasants. However, this is due to the gulf between the peasant populace and the political elite, whether in regard to the measure of knowledge or of resources. And it is also due to the Confucian overemphasizing of the elite’s role in educating people, which may reinforce the gap between the elite and the populace. The result is that without practical mechanisms extending itself into macro-space and constitutional thinking, the public domain constructed by the general populace is much more like a romantic, self-limited adjective, rather than a noun that can really embody a discursive model of modern liberal democracy.

Economic development in Taiwan of course can foster the emergence of a bourgeois class, and then it may possibly lead to a developmental track like that of Western civil society. However, for a society as a whole, this bourgeoisie with the color of Western democracy may only contain a very small proportion of people. At least in Tzu-Chi’s case, we see that the political openness of Taiwanese society only aggrandizes the traditional ideology of publicness, rather than fosters a Western style civil society. Moreover, due to the encroaching of Western democracy on local people’s public morality, local people get more anxious and wish to put more energy into purging bad things coming from the West, rather than building a social order based upon the model of Western civil society.

Here, a very difficult question is raised. Democracy must be based upon a spontaneous process of development and a self-governing principle. Now a local collective, with a self-regulated normative expectation, does foster something closed to civil society, yet is actually quite incompatible with Western civil society. That is to say, it

is very possible that we may attain a civil society without showing any traces of the “public sphere” that allows open public debate and rational discourse (Lii 1998). At this moment, what stance and position should be taken?

It certainly does not make sense that we criticize one type of civil society based upon the civic tradition spontaneously developing in a totally different historical context. However, we do not reject the possibility of transformation from one type of civic engagement to another one. But here I must emphasize that any kind of transformation like this should be based upon a profound understandings of both sides, and an examination on the actual interface between the two. Through data collected from the Tzu-Chi association, and through a multidimensional conceptual framework, the current study is thus a step toward both of these goals. More studies along this line should emerge in the future.

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Tables

Table 1. Space of Control and Sources of Control: A Binary Classification Model

Sources of Control \ Space of Control	Micro-space	Macro-space
Internal	A1	A2
External	A3	A4

Table 2. Space of Control and Sources of Control: A Tripartite Classification Model

<div>Space of Control</div> <div>Sources of Control</div>	Micro-space	Intermediate Space	Macro-space
Internal	B1	B2	B3
Contractual	B4	B5	B6
External	B7	B8	B9