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The Development and Dissemination of Pro-Environmental Dharma among Taiwan's Humanistic Buddhists

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Abstract: In the early 1990s, two of Taiwan's humanistic Buddhist groups—Buddhist Tzu Chi Compassionate Relief Foundation (Tzu Chi) and Dharma Drum Mountain (DDM)—began incorporating modern environmentalism as a major component in their religious teachings, practices, and behavioral norms. Neither group had been clearly pro-environmental before the 1990s, but Venerable Cheng Yen, the founding master of Tzu Chi, and Venerable Sheng Yen, the founding master of DDM, redefined and expanded Buddhist teachings and practices to include modern concepts and practices of environmental sustainability as central components of their dharmas. This comparative ethnographic study contributes to scholarship with findings regarding how and why the two groups developed and disseminated pro-environmental dharma: (1) both groups began promoting environmentalism as a moral, religious response to Taiwan's waste management crisis of the early 1990s; (2) both groups tied their pro-environmental teachings to two of the most popular elements of Buddhist dharma among Chinese humanistic Buddhists—the bodhisattva path and pure land teachings; (3) both groups fully integrated environmental teachings, practices, and behavioral norms into all aspects of their organizations; and (4) both groups adjusted the framing of their pro-environmental messages to match specific audiences in their work in order to promote environmentalism in Taiwan's society.

Keywords: Chinese humanistic Buddhism; Taiwan; Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation; Dharma Drum Mountain; environmentalism



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1. Taiwan's Buddhist Leaders Begin Promoting Environmentalism

Today, the island of Taiwan is internationally known as a champion of recycling, with one of the world's highest recycling rates at 55% (Davidson and Lin 2022). In 2016, Taiwan showed the highest 10-year percentage rate of improvement in East Asia on the Environmental Performance Index (EPI) (Hsu et al. 2016). However, in the 1980s and 1990s, Taiwan was so polluted that it earned the nickname of "Garbage Island" (Davidson and Lin 2022). Taiwan had industrialized and modernized its economy rapidly during the years of its "Economic Miracle" from 1979 to 1992 (Arrigo 1994). In that period, it went from a traditional agrarian economy to a modern consumer-based capitalistic economy, and its non-biodegradable waste tripled. The government was unable to deal with all the garbage and only 70% of the trash was collected by government waste-removal services (Davidson and Lin 2022). The rest was dumped randomly around the island. This caused citizens to protest, sometimes violently, in "garbage wars" to prevent the dumping of garbage near residential communities (Weller 2006). There was little environmental oversight of factories, and in addition to the garbage problem, air pollution filled the skies and toxic wastewater from factories contaminated both the soil in agricultural areas and fresh water supplies around the island (Arrigo 1999–2000). Secular NGOs and local communities engaged in the "garbage wars" and other environmental protests, but the government was slow to develop effective environmental policies to solve these issues.

In response to this chaotic situation, Venerable Cheng Yen (1937–), a Buddhist nun and the founder of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Compassionate Relief Foundation (Tzu Chi), gave

a dharma talk in the city of Taichung on 23 August 1990, which ended with the following call to action:

Taichung is my hometown. I have a wish—I keep hoping that the purifying flow out of Tzu Chi could purify our society, especially my hometown. I have repeatedly emphasized that Taiwan should be a Pure Land because Taiwan is an island with such beautiful scenery. If we have the heart to clean it up, it will become even more beautiful.

In one day, the average person produces more than one kilogram of garbage. How can we get rid of it? This will require the strength of many people. I hope everyone will get together to call for the elimination of garbage.

... If the populace and the government work together we can purify our society.

I hope that all of you can use your clapping hands to begin the work of sorting garbage [to pull recyclable items out of the waste stream]. (Shi 2020, pp. 12–13)¹

One of Tzu Chi's lay volunteers in the audience began a recycling project in her own community and the practice caught on among the Tzu Chi members in Taiwan. This was the start of Tzu Chi's Environmental Mission.

Around the same time, Venerable Sheng Yen (1930–2009), a Chan master and the founder of Dharma Drum Mountain (DDM), used the organization's Nung Chan Monastery in Taipei to model the modern environmental practices of reducing consumption, reusing and repairing broken items, and recycling. Sheng Yen and his monastic disciples lived such an austere lifestyle that one informant reported seeing soap dishes made from the flat metal parts of broken stir-fry spatulas on her first visit to the monastery in the early 1990s (DDM Taiwan Interviews). In 1992, Sheng Yen increased his promotion of modern environmental behaviors by proclaiming the Year of Environmental Protection. He and his leading disciples began teaching people how to practice recycling, reusing, repairing, and repurposing items to keep them out of the waste stream (Ng 2018). As a Chan Master, Sheng Yen taught that his followers should first calm their minds by practicing "spiritual environmentalism" through meditation. He instructed the believers that once their minds were calm, they should change their lifestyles and practice "nature environmentalism" by adopting the modern environmental practices listed above.

2. Introduction

Recent scholarship shows that the work of Taiwan's humanistic Buddhist groups has positively impacted Taiwan's society with respect to the adoption of practices of environmentally sustainable lifestyles. Robert Weller (2006) found that Taiwan's humanistic Buddhist groups were one of three important social forces promoting environmentalism on the island. Clippard (2012, 2013) analyzed the rhetoric of the major humanistic Buddhist leaders in Taiwan, finding that their teachings promoted environmentalism. Lee and Han (2022) did a quantitative analysis of the data from the 2009 Religious Module of the Taiwan Social Change Survey and found that membership in Taiwan's humanistic Buddhist groups, such as Tzu Chi and DDM, was significantly correlated with adopting the environmentally-friendly lifestyle habits of recycling, vegetarianism, reducing consumerism, and taking public transportation. They also found that Tzu Chi and DDM were the two humanistic Buddhist groups with the greatest number of teachings and events related to environmentalism on their websites. Additionally, they did an in-depth analysis (Lee and Han 2015) of the development of environmental discourse on Tzu Chi's website. Tzu Chi and DDM have made environmentalism a core part of their dharma and continue promoting environmentally sustainable lifestyles today. This study contributes to the research on environmentalism among Taiwan's humanistic Buddhist groups with ethnographic data on group practices; interviews of monastic and lay leaders, rank-and-file members, and people outside the groups; and comparative analysis of how and why the two groups updated their dharma to incorporate modern notions of environmentalism and how they propagated the new pro-environmental religious ethics among their believers and the

general population. It finds that (1) both groups began promoting environmentalism as a moral, religious response to Taiwan's waste management crisis of the early 1990s; (2) both groups tied their pro-environmental teachings to two of the most popular elements of Buddhist dharma among Chinese humanistic Buddhists—the bodhisattva path and pure land teachings; (3) both groups fully integrated environmental teachings, practices and behavioral norms into all aspects of their organizations; and (4) both groups adjusted the framing of their pro-environmental messages to match specific audiences in their work to promote environmentalism in Taiwan's society.

3. Overview of Research Methods and Data

To understand how Tzu Chi and DDM developed and disseminated their pro-environmental dharma, I undertook a four-year multi-site, comparative ethnographic study of the two organizations in Taiwan and California. I engaged in participant observation at various facilities and events with both groups. I read some of the writings by the founding dharma masters Venerable Cheng Yen of Tzu Chi and Venerable Shen Yen of DDM. I also attended lectures and watched YouTube videos by these founding masters and other leaders from both groups. I conducted formal and informal interviews with lay and monastic leaders and with rank-and-file members of each group. While conducting my research in Taiwan in 2016 and 2017, I interviewed “people in the street” about their perceptions of these groups with respect to the promotion of environmentalism.²

Prior to undertaking this research, my knowledge of Buddhism came from books. I had had some interactions with Buddhist friends and relatives in Taiwan, who mainly practiced traditional folk Buddhism, but I did not really understand the practices of modern Chinese Buddhism. Therefore, when conducting my participant observations, I put myself in the position of a new group member and began my research by attending the basic classes and activities organized by each group to see what they taught about environmentalism and how they socialized new members into living sustainably.

I lived in Taiwan from 1982 to 1990 and I am fluent in Mandarin Chinese. I also have a basic knowledge of Taiwan's Hakka dialect. Moreover, I had spent more than twenty years as the eldest daughter-in-law in a working-class Hakka family from Zhongli, Taiwan. Therefore, I was both linguistically and culturally competent to undertake this research project. Since I already understood the language and the culture, I was able to focus my attention on how these groups practice and promote environmentalism within the framework of Buddhism.

3.1. The Organizations in This Study

The Buddhist Tzu Chi Compassionate Relief Foundation was founded in 1966 by the Buddhist nun Shi Cheng Yen as a benevolent or charitable association, in which lay people of any religious persuasion, but particularly Buddhist lay people, can cultivate themselves on the Mahayana Buddhist bodhisattva path to Buddhahood with numerous opportunities to engage in its first step: generous, compassionate giving of their money, energy, and time through volunteering and supporting the organization's many charitable works. In 1967, after its first year of operations, Tzu Chi records show 400 regular donors, 10 commissioners (trained lay volunteer leaders), who met regularly to consider the referrals to charity and the distribution of funds from each month's donations, and 10 other volunteers, who went out to collect donations (Lee 2017). The organization has grown over the past 57 years to become the largest NGO in Taiwan, with approximately 90,000 commissioners and more than 3 million donors (Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation 2015, field notes 2017). In addition to monthly charity aid to the poor, the organization operates a disaster relief charitable mission, a medical mission with charity hospitals and the largest bone marrow donor registry in Asia, an educational mission that includes both schools at all levels and community-based education, and a cultural mission for improving society that includes pro-environmental projects, such as running recycling centers and promoting other green lifestyle practices like veganism.

Dharma Drum Mountain was founded in 1989 by Shi Sheng Yen (1930–2009) for the purpose of “realizing the vow he made when he was a young boy to benefit others by sharing with them the compassion, methods, and teachings of the Buddha” (Dharma Drum Mountain 2013, p. 17). The group’s mission statement outlines its goal: to uplift the character of humanity and build a pure land on earth. The primary method for attaining this goal is education. Dharma Drum Mountain’s headquarters in the Jinshan District of New Taipei City, Taiwan, is called the Dharma Drum Mountain World Center for Buddhist Education. This Center is home to the Dharma Drum Mountain Sangha University, that trains Dharma Drum Mountain’s monastics, the Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies, that promotes the academic study of Buddhism, and Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts, that combines both the Dharma Drum Buddhist Studies College and the Dharma Drum College of Humanities and Social Sciences. Moreover, Dharma Drum Mountain is a Buddhist religious sect that provides classes on Buddhist dharma and Chan meditation and holds regular Buddhist ritual events and meditation retreats at all its temples and monasteries around the world. It also runs the Dharma Drum Humanistic and Social Improvement Foundation (HSIF), an NGO based in Taipei that provides lay members with opportunities to serve the community in Taiwan (Zimmerman-Liu 2019, pp. 65–66).

Jimmy Yu, a former DDM monk and Master Sheng Yen’s English interpreter, explains that in founding the Dharma Drum Lineage, Sheng Yen was endeavoring to create something new within Buddhism. Sheng Yen believed that Chan is the “doctrinal fulfillment” of all the Chinese schools of Buddhism and that, in his dharma lineage, he harmonized Chan practice with the major teachings of all Chinese Buddhism’s various schools (Yu 2022, p. 143). Sheng Yen also strongly emphasized that Chan meditation and sutra study should result in the practitioners going out to uplift the standard of society through their teaching, lived example, and community service.

3.2. Analytical Considerations and Overview of Findings

Buddhist Tzu Chi Compassionate Relief Foundation is the largest NGO in Taiwan. It engages in many different charity projects and is open to people of all religious persuasions (including those with no religious belief). The only requirement for membership is a desire to help others and engage in community service projects. Dharma Drum Mountain, on the other hand, is a Chan Buddhist religious group that emphasizes the believers’ self-cultivation through meditation and sutra study and their work to improve society through education, community service, and modeling uplifted behavior at their monasteries and among their believers. Since the groups are so different from each other, I conducted a comparative analysis of my data from each organization to find the commonalities that were important in both groups to the development and dissemination of pro-environmental dharma.

I found that the first important commonality was that their pro-environmental teachings and practices developed as a response to the environmental crisis related to waste management in Taiwan in the 1980s and 1990s. The groups continued to refine their environmental dharma as the environmental situation changed. The second important commonality lay in the Buddhist teachings adapted to promote environmentalism. Both groups tied their pro-environmental dharma to important Chinese humanistic Buddhist teachings about the believers’ practice of the Mahayana bodhisattva precepts and the establishment of a pure land here and now in the human realm on this Earth. The third important commonality was the integration of pro-environmental teachings, practices, and norms into all aspects of each organization. This blurred the line between the sacred and the mundane, adding the weight of religious authority to sustainable lifestyle practices like sorting garbage and washing recyclables. The final important commonality was framing the message in ways that resonated well with each different audience. Both groups code-switched seamlessly among several discourse systems (Scollon et al. 2012)³: namely, the Buddhist Discourse System, which is based on Buddhist texts; the Utilitarian Discourse system, which is based on European Enlightenment texts; and the Confucian Discourse

system, which is based on Chinese Confucian texts. Hence, they were able to effectively communicate their message to diverse audiences.

4. Updating the Interpretation and Application of Buddhist Dharma in Response to “Terrestrial Strain”

As described above, Dharma Masters Cheng Yen and Sheng Yen both began promoting environmentalism in response to the social strain⁴ caused by environmental degradation in Taiwan during the early 1990s. In Buddhist terms, they were exercising wisdom to apply Buddhist dharma to the karmic causes and conditions of that moment in Taiwan’s society. The responses of these dharma masters to Taiwan’s environmental issues can also be explained by social theory. Smelser’s Theory of Collective Behavior states that social groups, particularly religious groups, adapt their values, practices, and norms in response to structural strains in society (Smelser [1962] 1965). Snow et al. (1998) find that strain is a useful concept for the analysis of social action when the strain is severe enough to disrupt the “quotidian”, as environmental degradation in Taiwan did in the late 1980s and early 1990s when these groups began incorporating environmental values and norms into their religious teachings and practices. Such findings dovetail with Latour’s (2018, p. 42) theory that climate change must be dealt with as the “Terrestrial”, an environment that reacts materially to human actions in our current geological epoch of the Anthropocene. As such, I coin the term “Terrestrial Strain” to denote structural strain from the material impacts of environmental degradation, including climate change, that disrupt the quotidian in a particular community. The dharma masters in my study developed their pro-environmental dharma in response to Taiwan’s Terrestrial Strain in the 1990s.

It is important to note that both Cheng Yen and Sheng Yen began promoting environmentalism with teachings and practices aimed at resolving the garbage crisis that was roiling Taiwan’s society at the time. In the early stages of their environmental teachings, both dharma masters promoted modern recycling practices that they and other group leaders learned from abroad. Dharma Drum Mountain modeled these behaviors in their monasteries and taught people how to sort and process recyclables in their classes. Master Cheng Yen asked all of Taiwan’s Tzu Chi volunteers to spend time each week picking up trash in their community and then processing what they had collected so it could be sold to recyclers and made into other products. Tzu Chi’s volunteers learned how to wash and sort recyclables to maximize the chances that each item could indeed be used to make new products. The Tzu Chi NGO set up recycling centers around the island of Taiwan and began promoting recycling in the volunteers’ neighborhoods. One volunteer told me that she did recycling work in her community for more than 10 years before the city government started regular recycling collection in addition to trash collection. “People-in-the-street” interviewees reported that they had learned how to rinse and sort their recyclables from the Tzu Chi volunteers doing recycling work in their neighborhoods.

After the recycling mission was well-established, both organizations further developed their environmental dharma. DDM began updating Buddhist rituals to make them more environmentally friendly by reducing the amount of incense and paper burned to reduce air pollution. Tzu Chi began promoting veganism to combat climate change. Both groups started encouraging their members and the community to conserve water, reduce consumption, and to reduce personal carbon footprints. These new aspects of the pro-environmental dharma were developed and disseminated in response to the continued degradation of the environment due to global warming and pollution of air, water, and soil from production processes and plastic products in global industrial society.

5. Updating Popular Aspects of Chinese Humanistic Buddhist Dharma to Include Environmentalism

Just as Tzu Chi and DDM are very different organizations in their missions and structure, so too did Master Cheng Yen and Master Sheng Yen rely on different sutras as they developed their dharma lineages. Master Cheng Yen emphasizes The Sutra of Infinite Meanings and The Lotus Sutra as the basis for Tzu Chi’s Jing Si Dharma Lineage (Buddhist

Tzu Chi Foundation 2023), while Master Sheng Yen emphasized The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch, The Avatamsaka Sutra, and The Vimalakirti Sutra as foundational texts for the Dharma Drum Dharma Lineage's Four Kinds of Environmentalism (Cheng 2022, pp. 7–8). Nevertheless, both dharma masters strongly emphasize passages in their foundational Buddhist texts that relate to the bodhisattva precepts (the Bodhisattva Path) and to the concept of pure Buddhist lands. These two concepts are critical to both Cheng Yen and Sheng Yen's pro-environmental teachings.

To better understand how Cheng Yen and Sheng Yen updated Buddhism as they developed pro-environmental dharmas, it is helpful to first define the humanistic Buddhist movement that began in mainland China in the 19th century and migrated to Taiwan in 1949 after the Chinese Communist Revolution. Chinese humanistic Buddhism is the form of engaged Buddhism that developed in China following its contact with Christianity and Western imperialism, when the country was forced open to Christian missionaries after China's losses in the Opium Wars (1839–1842, 1856–1860). The relative weakness of China's traditional Buddhism in the face of Western imperialism and Christian missionary activity prompted the rise of Buddhist reformers in China, the most important of whom was the monk Taixu (1890–1947). Taixu called for better education of Chinese Buddhist monastics, many of whom were illiterate. He also promoted "human life Buddhism" or Buddhism that engaged with social problems and came out of the monasteries to meet social needs (Pittman 2001). He framed his reforms as a return to the original purity of Shakyamuni's religion before Chinese Buddhism had been "polluted" by the various influences of Chinese folk religion and culture (Zimmerman-Liu 2019).

Many other monastics and lay Buddhists responded positively to Taixu's ideas and began working to modernize Chinese Buddhism. Some of the more important monastic leaders in the movement, from both China and Taiwan, are Venerable Yinshun (1906–2005), Venerable Dong Chu (1907–1977), Venerable Hsing Yun (1927–2023), Venerable Sheng Yen (1930–2009), and Venerable Cheng Yen (1937–present). Chinese humanistic Buddhism never operated as a single unified organization managed by Taixu. Instead, each movement leader worked in their own way, making individual contributions to update Chinese Buddhism and adapt it to the modern world. For example, to make Buddhism more text-based for the modern, literate middle class, the lay Buddhist reformer Yang Wen-hui (1837–1911) began collating and printing Buddhist sutras and commentaries to make them more widely available (Welch 1968, pp. 4–5). As the sutras were published, a variety of lay and monastic organizations were established to publish popular explanations of the texts (Yü 2013, p. 107), and this led to a demand for Buddhist seminaries or institutes of Buddhist Studies. It also led to the establishment of study groups among lay Buddhists and a widespread interest in the study of Buddhist sutras and teachings among the laity (Yü 2020). Although each humanistic Buddhist leader developed his or her own unique angle within the general movement, this new kind of Buddhism is best characterized as "text-based, ethical, socially engaged, and 'humanist' . . . as the antithesis of 'funerary Buddhism'" (Goosaert and Palmer 2011, p. 81; c.f. Pacey 2005).⁵

5.1. Keeping the Bodhisattva Precepts on the Path of the Bodhisattvas

To promote active lay participation and service to society in the Chinese humanistic Buddhist movement, several of the important leaders of the movement began emphasizing the need for all Mahayana Buddhists, both monastic and lay, to emulate the great Bodhisattvas and to make a bodhisattva vow to save all sentient beings when they attain Buddhahood. Believers in Tzu Chi and DDM are encouraged to model their compassion for sentient beings after the Bodhisattva Guanyin (Avalokitesvara) and to make vows like those made by the Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha, the Buddha Amitabha, and the Medicine Buddha (Baisajyaguru). Venerable Yinshun (Yinshun [1998] 2008, p. 100) further instructed modern Buddhists who "aim toward attaining Buddhahood as a human" to "keep the five precepts and the ten good deeds in constant focus". Such practitioners can be considered "novice bodhisattvas", at the beginning of the ten stages of the bodhisattva path, which

will lead them to “attain liberation but also to combine their self-help with help for others, and their own benefit with benefit for others. They hope to reach the other shore along with all sentient beings” (p. 43). While Yinshun and other early leaders of the Chinese humanistic Buddhist movement promoted the bodhisattva precepts for lay practitioners, they did not include environmentally sustainable practices in their teachings about the bodhisattva path. The bodhisattva precepts were explicitly connected to protecting the natural environment through modern pro-environmental practices in the 1990s by the leaders of Tzu Chi and DDM.

Master Cheng Yen states: “To enter the world of Tzu Chi is to embark on the journey on the Path of the Bodhisattvas” (Shi 2002, p. 212). She then ties the practice of the bodhisattva precepts to the cultivation of compassion and wisdom, which are the hallmarks of self-cultivation on the bodhisattva path. Tzu Chi members extend their compassion to the Earth and all sentient beings to the extent that “[they] practice environmentalism because they cannot bear that the earth be damaged. There is only one earth; it is the mission of every human to treasure and care for it” (Shi 2008, p. 92). These teachings and others tie Tzu Chi’s pro-environmental dharma to the heart of Chinese humanistic Buddhism.

Master Sheng Yen did an extensive scholarly study of all the major texts related to the bodhisattva precepts. He concluded:

In summary, the bodhisattva precepts are formed out of the Three Refuges, the Four Great Vows, the Three Sets of Pure Precepts and the Ten Virtues. These can be easily maintained by anyone. Therefore, everyone should receive the pure bodhisattva precepts (Shi 2021, p. 124).

He further ties the bodhisattva precepts to the recognition of the equality and interdependence of all sentient beings. He encourages his followers on the bodhisattva path to develop compassion for all sentient beings because all are suffering in the cycle of death and rebirth (Shi 2005, pp. 8, 11). Such teachings root DDM’s care for the natural environment in Chinese humanistic Buddhism’s foundational practice of receiving the bodhisattva precepts.

5.2. *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth*

Beginning with Venerable Taixu, most dharma masters in the Chinese humanistic Buddhist movement have encouraged their followers to cultivate themselves and serve society with a view to establishing a pure land in the human realm here and now on Earth. Taixu taught that cultivating oneself in the suffering human world by working to uplift society through moral education and to reduce the suffering of people in one’s community is more effective than cultivating oneself in one of the pure Buddhist realms (Jones [2021] 2022, p. 85). Taixu focused on expanding the benefits of modern technology but did not mention environmentalism. Venerable Yinshun further developed the concept of creating a pure land on Earth by teaching that becoming a pure land was the natural end of every suffering human realm that passed through a purification work “carried out by Buddha, Bodhisattvas, and human beings” (Travagnin 2004, p. 292).

Both Master Cheng Yen and Master Sheng Yen aligned themselves with Taixu and Yinshun by teaching that the goal of their groups’ religious practice is to establish a pure land in the human realm today. As can be seen in the quote by Master Cheng Yen at the beginning of this article, she equates the environmental practices of her believers with the purification of this Earth to make it a pure land. Likewise, Master Sheng Yen’s mission statement for DDM, “Uplifting human character and building a pure land on Earth”, equates uplifting the human character with the personal cultivation of “spiritual environmentalism”, and “building a pure land on Earth” with improving human relationships and protecting the natural environment (Ng 2018, pp. 426, 430; c.f. Clippard 2013; Cheng 2022, p. 10). As such, the pro-environmental dharma of both Tzu Chi and DDM ties into a second foundational concept in Chinese humanistic Buddhism: purifying the Saha human world to create a pure land on earth today.

6. Blurring the Line between the Sacred and the Mundane with Integrated Teachings, Practices, and Behavioral Norms

In its practice, Chinese humanistic Buddhism frequently blurs the lines between the secular and sacred for all practitioners, both lay and monastic. As [Travagnin \(2016, p. 182\)](#) notes, Chinese humanistic Buddhism “[aims] to maintain a *chushi* attitude (a spiritual and over-worldly approach) in anyway a *rushi* practice (a practice focused on problems and questions of the contemporary and actual human world)”. [Chandler \(2004, p. 76\)](#) explains that, in Taiwan’s humanistic Buddhist groups, “the softening of boundaries between the mundane and the supramundane affects practice; since everyday activities are legitimate and perhaps even the best forms of cultivation, lay and monastic spheres of performance merge . . . to bring an element of the sacred into their lives”. Therefore, Chinese humanistic Buddhism, as it is currently practiced in Taiwan, can be considered a pietistic form of the Buddhist religion that endeavors to bring sacred religious practice into all aspects of the believers’ daily lives. The line between the sacred and the mundane is blurred with respect to the groups’ pro-environmental dharma because the group leaders have tied pro-environmental practices and behavioral norms to important Buddhist teachings and integrated them into all aspects of their organizations. By making these concepts, practices, and norms part of the believers’ sacred Buddhist cultivation, the groups gain a strong moral authority to socialize new members into adopting practices of environmentally sustainable lifestyles.

6.1. Pro-Environmental Teachings, Practices, and Norms in Tzu Chi

For many decades, Master Cheng Yen gave two talks to Tzu Chi members every day. After the morning prayer and meditation time in the Abode of Still Thoughts Monastery, she would speak at 5:30 in the morning on a passage from a Buddhist sutra or from a repentance ritual text, working her way through the entire book over the course of several years. These dharma talks were given in Taiwanese, and Cheng Yen spoke in a homiletic style, relating the sutras to the believers’ daily lives. Due to her age and health, she no longer gives morning dharma talks, but she still speaks on the sutras at large events. When the passage from a sutra text ties into an environmental theme, Master Cheng Yen reinforces her teachings on the need for pro-environmental practices among her followers.

During her second speech of the day, which occurred after breakfast at 7:30 a.m., Master Cheng Yen would speak in Mandarin and give instructions and exhortations to Tzu Chi’s volunteers. She showed video clips of volunteers doing admirable work or clips of natural disasters requiring the group’s attention and then taught the volunteers what they should learn from each example or what areas were waiting for Tzu Chi aid. She frequently spoke of Tzu Chi’s environmental mission during these exhortations, and she often praised the “recycling bodhisattvas”, the elderly men and women who volunteer regularly at Tzu Chi’s recycling and environmental education centers. Master Cheng Yen’s second morning talks regularly featured volunteers who mobilized their communities to carry out a mission. For example, in a 2017 morning talk with the volunteers, Master Cheng Yen highlighted a town in mainland China where ten Tzu Chi volunteers got the entire town involved in cleaning up the garbage around the night market by picking up the garbage every night themselves, while teaching their neighbors about recycling and reducing waste as they worked (field notes 2017).

Videos⁶ of Cheng Yen’s teachings, either current or from the archives, go out daily to Tzu Chi volunteers around the world, and then the staff in the Tzu Chi Foundation’s Religious Affairs Department organize the master’s teachings and combine them with scientific information to form a compendium of the organization’s comprehensive doctrines on each of its major areas of focus. This material is then used in outline form for training and community outreach events. Later, Master Cheng Yen’s teachings are edited and published in book form to facilitate study and discussion in Tzu Chi’s local study groups and book clubs ([Zimmerman-Liu 2019](#)).

Because Tzu Chi is primarily an NGO that focuses on community service, Master Cheng Yen's teachings are not the primary focus of the organization. They provide the theoretical foundation for the group's service projects. As mentioned above, Tzu Chi has four major areas of community service: Charity, Medical Aid, Education, and Culture. Tzu Chi's recycling centers and official pro-environmental outreach projects are housed in the Culture section of the organization, but the other three sections also integrate environmentalism into their work. For example, recipients of Tzu Chi charity and disaster relief aid are fed vegan foods and supplied with blankets and clothing made from recycled plastic bottles. Disaster relief missions include environmental impact assessments and steps are taken to reduce further harm to the environment while helping the victims. Students in Tzu Chi's schools and after-school children's programs do community service in Tzu Chi's recycling centers and learn how to live sustainably. Tzu Chi's hospitals in Taiwan are built with the latest green technology, and they participate in a pilot program sponsored by Taiwan's government to reduce plastic medical waste by recycling uncontaminated plastic IV bags. I found that Tzu Chi volunteers who have completed their training are quite knowledgeable about best practices for living and working in an environmentally sustainable manner.

In addition to integrating environmentalism into its teachings and charitable activities, Tzu Chi has strict behavioral norms for its volunteers that are enforced among participants in the organization's activities and strongly encouraged for home practice. These include eating a vegetarian diet, conserving water, taking public transportation whenever possible, reducing consumption, and recycling whatever can be recycled. Most of the regular Tzu Chi volunteers that I met in Taiwan and the US had adopted most of these practices in their daily lives. They considered these lifestyle practices as part of their moral cultivation, which is an important core motivation for committed Tzu Chi volunteers, even the ones who are not Buddhist. Tzu Chi's Buddhist volunteers believe that their service in the organization and their pro-environmental lifestyle choices further their progress on the path to Buddhahood and contribute good karma to the collective karma of our world. Adding to the positive collective karma of our world seems to be viewed as a way that Tzu Chi volunteers purify this world to create a pure land on Earth today (field notes 2015).

6.2. *Pro-Environmental Teachings, Practices, and Norms in Dharma Drum Mountain*

As the first modern Chinese monk with a Ph.D. in Buddhist Literature, Venerable Sheng Yen wrote scholarly treatises like the one on the bodhisattva precepts, cited above. However, he developed a simpler curriculum for the lay members of DDM. After declaring 1992 the Year of Environmental Protection, he proceeded to develop DDM's Four Kinds of Environmentalism as the core of the organization's teachings and practice. A better translation of "Environmentalism" in this system is "Protecting the Environment". The basis for all kinds of environmental protection is "protecting the spiritual environment", which is mainly a matter of purifying the mind by "treating others with compassion, by acting with wisdom, and by alleviating our own vexations and impurities". Protecting the spiritual environment is then expressed through and intertwined with protecting the social environment, protecting the living environment, and protecting the natural environment. After one's thoughts and intentions have been purified, it is easy to get along with others and to create peace in society, which are the goals of "protecting the social environment". To "protect the living environment", people are exhorted to only consume what they need and to not be "ruled by desire". In this way, they will not waste energy or resources and they will reduce garbage and pollution. The result is the "protection of the natural environment" (DDM Taiwan interviews).

Master Sheng Yen explains his insistence on first purifying his followers' minds as a way of getting at the root of all social and environmental problems, in the following passage:

Because selfishness and self-interest are deeply rooted in the human heart, even though we know that destroying the environment and creating pollution are actions that will harm ourselves and others, as soon as [protecting the environment]

comes into conflict with our profit or when we have an opportunity to satisfy our private lust, then we easily forget the common good. Instead, we do not consider the far-off consequences and only think about how we can obtain our desires. . . . Human civilization's technology harms the environment too quickly . . . to the extent that it is a severe disaster threatening the space for human existence. Therefore, we promote spiritual environmentalism, calling on the entire human race to use its principles to construct a healthy and proper attitude towards human life, which values benefitting both oneself and others, so that you and others can live healthy, happy, peaceful lives. (Shi 2012, pp. 19–20)⁷

Hence, Sheng Yen integrates all aspects of living sustainably into the believers' Buddhist cultivation on the path to Buddhahood. Moreover, he developed these teachings from 1992–1994, at a time when the world was celebrating the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe and the opening of China's markets with a major expansion of unfettered global capitalistic expansion. Sheng Yen seems to have understood that capitalism's relentless pursuit of profit and its need for endless consumption would eventually exhaust the resources of the planet and endanger the continued existence of humanity. His teachings provide an integrated philosophy and set of ethics by which humans can mitigate the evils caused by blindly pursuing profits to save themselves and the world from environmental collapse.

Master Sheng Yen developed two more sets of teaching to further define the principles of the Four Kinds of Environmentalism. From 1995–1999, he developed the Spiritual Renaissance Campaign that gives practical tips for living out the goals of the Four Kinds of Environmentalism. Master Sheng Yen taught that the contents of the Fivefold Spiritual Renaissance Campaign consist of the "concepts and methods for practicing the Four Kinds of Environmentalism" (Shi 2004, p. 5). In 2007, Sheng Yen developed a system called the Six Ethics of the Mind, that gives more in-depth advice on how to properly manage all human relationships, including our relationship with nature (Bai 2017). These ethics can be considered an update and modernization of Confucianism's five ethics. They include family ethics, daily life ethics, school ethics, environmental ethics (nature), workplace ethics, and ethics between ethnic groups (Shi 2013). All three sets of teachings are designed to help Dharma Drum Mountain believers practice the bodhisattva ethic, that they define as cultivating oneself to benefit others, thus ultimately benefitting oneself (DDM Taiwan Interviews).

Sheng Yen and his disciples then worked these moral teachings into all the Buddhist Studies and meditation classes offered by Dharma Drum Mountain. For example, one DDM monk reported that when he teaches outdoor meditation classes, he always leads his students to pick up garbage in the area where they meditated before they finish the class. He explains to them how to sort the trash and recyclables and gets them to leave the outdoor meditation site cleaner than they found it (DDM Taiwan Interviews). In the dharma lectures of the *Fagu jiangtang* series, the monastic teachers frequently connect teachings in the sutras with environmentally sustainable lifestyle practices. In the first lecture on the Ksitigarbha Sutra in November 2017, the homework was for each person to avoid using disposable plastic straws and utensils and to eat vegetarian all week, in order to protect the planet. This is because Ksitigarbha is translated "Earth Treasury" in Chinese, and the lecturer connected the sutra's message about the Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha vowing to save all sentient beings with modern believers cultivating themselves by working to save sentient beings on Earth through their pro-environmental lifestyle practices (Zimmerman-Liu 2019). In a 2016 *Fagu jiangtang* lecture on the Medicine Buddha sutra, the monastic speaker interpreted the sutra's exhortation to "release living things" (*fang sheng*) as eating food from farms that do not use pesticides and allow the insects to live (Shi 2016). Thus, when the members of Dharma Drum Mountain learn about Buddhist sutras and Chan meditation, they also receive practical instruction on how to apply the teachings of Buddhist texts in their daily lives by living sustainably. This again blurs the line between the sacred and mundane and expands the scope of the Buddhist dharma to include modern sustainable lifestyle practices.

Venerable Sheng Yen also updated Buddhist rituals to make them greener by reducing the amount of incense burned at dharma gathering (*fahui*) rituals to a small amount in a central censor in front of the altar, while the participants pray with sincere hearts in lieu of holding joss sticks. As technology improved, further updates were made to reduce pollution from the rituals. Historically, the names of the deceased, to whom merit is transferred in the dharma gathering ritual, were carved on bamboo plaques that were burned at the end of the ritual. Later, the names were recorded on paper that was also burned at the end of the ritual. At first, Dharma Drum Mountain used paper to record the names, and now in the age of the internet, DDM name plaques are in the cloud to reduce harm to the environment. Anyone who wants merit blessings transferred to a living or dead person can go onto the website of the branch monastery or field office holding the dharma gathering (*fahui*) and enter the person's name. The names are then projected onto the wall in the temple's Buddha Hall beside the Buddha statues. The names of the deceased are surrounded by a digital lotus flower and are given the protection of Amitabha; the names of the living are surrounded by a digital crystal tear drop and are given the protection of the Medicine Buddha (Zimmerman-Liu 2019, p. 96).

In addition to updating the dharma gathering (*fahui*) to make it more modern and less toxic to the natural environment, Master Sheng Yen also advocated simple Buddhist chanting rituals in lieu of the extravagant, wasteful folk ceremonies that are quite popular in Taiwan for weddings, funerals, and birthday parties for elderly parents. Master Sheng Yen decided to update social rituals as part of his teachings on social environmentalism after a conversation with the mayor of Taipei City. He and his followers spent significant time in the mid-1990s promoting simple Buddhist rituals for major life events.⁸

Folk funeral rituals in Taiwan are complex and expensive; moreover, they require more land than is available with recent population increases. According to my more than twenty years of experience as the eldest daughter-in-law in a Hakka family of Taiwan, folk funeral rituals require the family to hire Taoist priests, traditional Buddhist monks, and sometimes spirit mediums to perform chanting rituals every night during the week after a family member's death. The burial ritual is not held until the days of chanting are over. These religious professionals are quite expensive. Additionally, during the week prior to the funeral, friends and relatives send gifts consisting of tall pyramids of stacked canned food or beer cans, which are often wrapped in plastic. These plastic-wrapped pyramids are displayed in the family's memorial to the deceased. People paying respect to the deceased give the family funeral wreaths made of plastic flowers stuck on Styrofoam backing that are tied onto large bamboo tripods and set out on the road in front of the home of the family in mourning. In addition to the large cost, these traditional gifts produce piles of garbage.

On the day of a traditional funeral, the family usually hires religious professionals to chant before the funeral cortege sets off for the grave site. Traditionally, graves were purchased for a period of five to ten years and, at the end of that period, the family needed another religious professional to oversee the opening of the casket and the removal of the bones. The bones are then sealed in a funerary vase and interred in a government-run burial pagoda or a family tomb, if the family is fortunate enough to have their own land. More recently, the deceased is often cremated and the ashes are interred in a pagoda or the family tomb. In the forty-nine days after the person's death, religious professionals must be hired to perform rituals every seven days. During these rituals, incense and paper money are burned. Guests on any of the days with chanting and on the day of the funeral cortege are fed elaborate feasts that usually result in significant food waste. The entire process is extremely expensive and wasteful, but failure to provide the proper funerary rites for a parent means the descendants are unfilial and they lose significant social capital in their local communities.

Master Sheng Yen's modern Buddhist update for these ceremonies simply consists of free chanting for the deceased and their family by a team of monastics and lay volunteers from a specific department in DDM.⁹ When a family requests a DDM funeral service, the Dharma Drum Mountain volunteers visit the dying person and their family in the hospital

to comfort them and help them prepare for death. Once the person passes away, the team chants for eight hours beside the deceased's body in the hospital immediately after the moment of death. The chanting is meant to soothe the soul's painful escape from the dead body and to facilitate an auspicious reincarnation. The ritual lasts for eight hours until the body has completely cooled after death. Later in the week, the chanting service team goes to the family home to chant the Amitabha Sutra as comfort for the family of the deceased. The team will also chant at the memorial service, if requested. During the home chanting visit, the team promotes organic burial if the family seems open to the idea. Families that choose Buddhist chanting funerals do not accept the wasteful gifts or engage in the polluting folk practices; instead, they ask people to honor their dead relative by making charitable donations in the name of the deceased to create merit that will give the deceased an auspicious reincarnation (DDM Taiwan Interviews).

Instead of a lavish funeral cortege and burial in a large tomb, Master Sheng Yen also advocated cremation and organic burial. The Dharma Drum Mountain World Center for Buddhist Education surrounds the first plot of ground for organic burials on the island of Taiwan.¹⁰ Master Sheng Yen himself was buried there. In an organic burial, the deceased's ashes are ground up into a fine powder and poured into three paper bags, which are tied with stalks of grass. The family carries the bags in a basket and walks solemnly and silently up the hill to the burial ground, where a DDM volunteer has dug three small holes into the grass. Various members of the family take turns pouring a bag of ashes into each hole, placing a flower on top of the ashes, and then covering the ashes with dirt. The family then stands in quiet remembrance and prayer before walking back down the mountain. Instead of hiring people to perform polluting seven-day rituals, the family is encouraged to attend the weekly chanting and dharma gathering (*fahui*) rituals at their local Dharma Drum Mountain temple or center where they can use the sincere wishes of their hearts to bless their departed relative (DDM Taiwan Interviews).

Like Tzu Chi, DDM teaches its members specific behavioral norms related to living sustainably. One of my DDM informants gave me a list of the specific practices that Dharma Drum Mountain seeks to inculcate into its believers under the rubric of nature environmentalism. The list is as follows: (1) reduce your carbon footprint as much as possible (take public transportation, conserve electricity, etc.); (2) recycle resources (washed so they will be reused and not burned); (3) eat locally produced food without fertilizers and pesticides (support natural farming); (4) conserve water; (5) do not use plastic bags; (6) do not drink bottled drinks; (7) carry your own bowl, chopsticks, and cup; (8) practice vegetarianism; (9) deal with animals appropriately (including do not "release wildlife" unless it has a chance of surviving without harming local communities). Dharma Drum Mountain's curriculum developers, teachers, and mentors help DDM members develop these habits of an environmentally sustainable lifestyle as part of their personal Buddhist cultivation (DDM Taiwan Interviews). The specificity of the behavioral norms related to protecting the natural environment helps blur the line between the sacred and the mundane in this aspect of DDM's dharma practice, as even rinsing recyclables becomes an act of Buddhist cultivation.

7. Disseminating the Pro-Environmental Dharma in Discourse That Resonates with Specific Audiences

Like many modern Buddhist teachers, the monastic and lay leaders of Tzu and DDM adapt their dharma to resonate with diverse audiences (Williams-Oerberg et al. 2021). One Tzu Chi informant reported that they adjusted their message according to the Buddhist practice of *upaya* or "skillful means". I found it best to analyze these shifts in discourse by applying the concept of discourse systems, which Scollon et al. (2012, p. 113) explain as follows: "Any group can . . . have a unique ideology, unique forms of discourse, unique patterns of relating, and unique systems for the socialization of its members". Scollon et al. further explain that most East Asian societies today primarily use two discourse systems: the Utilitarian Discourse system based on European Enlightenment texts that

emphasizes individualism, science, and reason; and the Confucian Discourse system based on Chinese Confucian texts that emphasizes harmonious interpersonal relationships and family obligations related to filial piety. Most people in contemporary East Asian societies use the Utilitarian Discourse system for business and work, but they code switch to the Confucian Discourse system for family and personal relationships. Each religious group has its own discourse system, too. The groups in this study used the Chinese Humanistic Buddhist Discourse system that is based on Buddhist texts in Chinese translation and the writings of Chinese dharma masters.

7.1. The Buddhist Discourse System

Most of this article has discussed how Cheng Yen and Sheng Yen updated the Chinese Humanistic Buddhist Discourse system in Tzu Chi and DDM to include pro-environmental dharma. Other modern Buddhist groups in Taiwan soon followed the lead of these two groups by including a certain amount of pro-environmental dharma, even though these other Buddhist groups did not make environmentalism a core component of their teachings and practices. In Taiwan, the humanistic Buddhist consensus related to environmentalism includes the following general themes: all groups promote the sacred cultivation of simple lifestyles without greed or desire that result in reduced consumption and smaller carbon footprints; all the groups promote vegetarianism as a tenet of Buddhism and as a way to fulfill the bodhisattva ethic of compassion and care for all sentient beings; all groups build temples and monasteries with award-winning green technology, as part of their religious mission to care for all life; all the groups now advocate “green” rituals in the practice of their religion; most of the groups advocate the consumption of organic or natural farm products from local farmers as a way of reducing one’s carbon footprint, protecting the earth, and protecting one’s physical health; most groups occasionally engage in pro-environmental community service projects, such as picking up garbage in public places near the monastery or planting trees in their communities (Zimmerman-Liu 2019, pp. 138–39).

7.2. The Confucian Discourse System

Taiwan’s society has been heavily influenced by Confucian ethics. Confucian texts and principles of filial piety are taught in schools at all levels. The Confucian Discourse system was even stronger in the early 1990s when Cheng Yen and Sheng Yen began promoting their pro-environmental dharmas. Both dharma masters strategically adopted public identities that resonated with the Confucian Discourse system and maximized their moral authority in Taiwan’s society. These identities allowed them to influence Taiwan’s society outside of Buddhist circles.

Master Cheng Yen and her early female disciples projected an image as caring mothers in society (Pacey 2005; Lu 1998a, 1998b; Huang and Weller 1998). In the early days of Tzu Chi, Master Cheng Yen tied into Confucian gender archetypes of loving mothers as a source of moral authority in society. This was particularly useful at that time because Buddhism was not well-respected in society due to perceptions that it was a religion filled with unscientific superstitions. Using Confucian symbols of motherly moral authority helped Master Cheng Yen establish her group’s moral voice in Taiwan’s society at a time when Buddhism was not yet widely viewed as a modern, moral, and ethical religion (Zimmerman-Liu 2019, p. 120).

Master Sheng Yen’s Ph.D. degree elevated him to the ranks of the *literati*, the highest moral authority for a man in the Confucian Discourse system. During China’s late imperial period, beginning with the reforms of Zhu Xi (ChuHsi 1130–1200) in the Song Dynasty (960–1279), the role of a Confucian *literatus* increasingly included an obligation to educate the community, especially in matters of morality (Bol 2008). The *literati* were expected to cultivate themselves morally, to serve as exemplars to the local community, and to educate the populace in their area, even the non-literate. This tradition created an expectation among the population that teachers must be moral and exhibit exemplary behavior. Master Sheng Yen achieved this, according to my “people-in-the-street” informants. The informants

who knew of Master Sheng Yen always referred to him as a gentleman and a scholar. His monastic disciples were generally described as having *qi zhi*, which means to be cultivated and refined. Sheng Yen's disciples were also praised for their excellent etiquette (*hen you li mao*). Because Master Sheng Yen and his monastic disciples meet the public's expectations for Confucian literati, Sheng Yen's teachings are respected and widely received (Zimmerman-Liu 2019, pp. 115–16).

Both Tzu Chi and DDM emphasize the cultivation of proper human relationships as part of their dharma, especially in classes and events for families. Both groups have programs for children and families that include teachings on environmentalism and teachings on how to maintain harmonious relationships within the family according to Confucian mores. Several of my "people-in-the-street" interviewees reported sending their children to Tzu Chi and DDM schools or youth classes so that their children could learn how to be moral, ethical, contributing members of society. One mother of children in Tzu Chi's after-school classes reported that when she was a college student, she had thought Confucianism was outdated and irrelevant in modern society, but after having children, she realized that she wanted them to value community and harmonious relationships according to the Confucian doctrine of filial piety. Another mother, who worked as a manager in a large international bank in Taipei, reported that she liked DDM's parent-child preschool classes and Tzu Chi's after-school programs for elementary school students. She stated that the classes from both groups taught a combination of Buddhist values of compassion for all living beings and self-discipline with Confucian values of family and harmonious interpersonal relationships. She felt both groups introduced the children to important moral values that are not taught in public schools. Hence, by assuming identities that resonate well in the Confucian Discourse system and by including aspects of Confucian morality in their classes for the general public, Tzu Chi and DDM gain moral authority in society that helps them promote their pro-environmental dharma beyond their organizations.

7.3. The Utilitarian Discourse System

Both Tzu Chi and DDM emphasize the compatibility of humanistic Buddhism with modern science and reason. Both groups offer classes aimed at government officials and business professionals with pro-environmental components that include teachings about the latest scientific findings, modern technology, and best green business practices. In Taiwan, Tzu Chi has a trained group of environmental lecturers who have taken advanced training in the group's pro-environmental projects. These lecturers speak to government and business groups and to large community gatherings. I observed an environmental lecturer guiding a group of county officials from southern Taiwan through the Hualien Recycling and Environmental Education Center where I was performing participant observation by sorting recyclables in July 2017. The lecturer pointed out the educational and operational aspects of the Center and explained how the county could incorporate Tzu Chi's practices in its own recycling facility (field notes 2017). Another environmental lecturer in Taipei reported being regularly invited to consult with businesses that wanted to improve the environmental sustainability of their operations (TC Taiwan Interviews).

Dharma Drum Mountain offers classes that are geared more toward business ethics, including pro-environmental business ethics. DDM's community-service-oriented NGO, the Dharma Drum Humanities and Social Improvement Foundation (HSIF), has developed formal classes on business ethics that have been approved by the Taiwan Stock Exchange Corporation and the Taipei Exchange as meeting its requirements for advanced courses on ethics. The business ethics course includes a component on not destroying the natural environment for the sake of profit. Taiwan now has a regulation that top-level managers of larger companies traded on the TSE must take ethics classes every year, and the HSIF's business ethics class completion certificate fulfills this legal requirement (DDM Taiwan Interviews). Dharma Drum Mountain also has a special book club in Taipei for business professionals. The book club meets once a month and brings in important speakers twice a year. I attended their last meeting in 2017 when they were discussing the Dalai Lama's

book about business ethics. Leaders of the book club told me that they use the book club to promote ethical business practices, including pro-environmental business practices.

The preceding examples show how Tzu Chi and DDM adjust their discourse to match their audiences. In Taiwan, they code-switch among the Buddhist Discourse system, the Confucian Discourse system, and the Utilitarian Discourse system. Their ability to adapt their messaging helps spread their pro-environmental dharma and moral values to society beyond their organizations' membership.

8. Conclusions

This study of the Buddhist NGO Tzu Chi and the Chan Buddhist group DDM, identifies the important commonalities that contribute to the groups' ability to promote environmentalism in Taiwan. By introducing pro-environmental components to their dharma at a time when the entire society felt plagued by environmental degradation, Master Cheng Yen and Master Sheng Yen ensured that their moral solution to the environmental social problems was considered relevant. This increased the probability that their pro-environmental dharma would be accepted. Both dharma masters chose the same elements of Mahayana Chinese humanistic Buddhism, but from very different sutras, as the foundation of their pro-environmental teachings. By grounding their pro-environmental dharma in the popular teachings of the bodhisattva precepts and the pure land, they ensured that the members in their respective organizations would embrace the new updates to the dharma as orthodox and important. By integrating their pro-environmental teachings with group practices and individual behavioral norms that were actualized in all parts of their organizations, Master Cheng Yen and Master Sheng Yen facilitated the socialization of group members into adopting some, if not all, of the recommended lifestyle practices. Finally, by adjusting their speaking to the discourse system that resonated best with a particular audience, they helped disseminate their pro-environmental moral message more broadly in Taiwan's society. More research is needed to understand if these four commonalities are universal to all pro-environmental Buddhist groups and to pro-environmental groups from other religions. If versions of these commonalities are generalizable to non-Buddhist religious groups, it may be possible to use them as the basis for an ideal-typical model that explains the "greening process" of pro-environmental religious groups.

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Data Availability Statement: Per the IRB protocols for this research project and my agreements with the organizations in this study, all field notes, interview transcripts/notes, and other data are private and stored in a locked storage locker in Long Beach, CA. Computer files are stored on password protected devices in the author's possession.

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Notes

¹ Translated by the author.

² My primary method of research was participant observation. Over the four years of my research, I engaged in participant observation at least once a month for several hours, and most months I engaged in 30 h or more of participant observation.

I conducted a total of 40 formal interviews, 20 at each group. I conducted informal interviews at each time of participant observation, and I conducted 50 people in the street interviews in Taiwan.

³ Scollon et al. (2012) define discourse systems as the set of symbols, ideologies, narratives, and social norms held by each group in a modern society. Religious groups each have their own discourse system, as do business organizations, ethnic groups, and even different nations. Discourse systems are frequently based on the philosophical and religious ideologies taught in a nation's schools. The language and concepts of the philosophies enter the language and worldview of the people in the nation's culture, but the people who use the discourse are usually not philosophers. For example, in Europe and the United States, our discourse is frequently connected to ideas from the Enlightenment that we learn in school, but most people who hold this worldview are not philosophers.

⁴ Social strain is a concept first developed by Robert Merton (1938). Merton theorized that unequal social structures prevent certain groups of people from achieving their goals by legitimate means, thus driving them to crime. An example from Merton's time was the situation of African Americans under the "Jim Crow" laws that kept them from enjoying full rights of citizenship in the United States. Neil Smelser updated this theory in 1962 with his analysis of the social movements for equal rights in the Civil Rights era. Hence, social strain is a situation in society beyond an individual's control that prevents the individual from enjoying the good life and that can impel disadvantaged groups to organize themselves and attempt to change society. In Taiwan of the 1980s and 1990s, the social strain was caused by the government's failure to effectively develop structural mechanisms to deal with the increased waste produced by the transition to a consumer, capitalist economy.

⁵ "Funerary Buddhism" was the term the reformers used to characterize Buddhism's "degraded role" in the late imperial era when Buddhism was mainly practiced during funeral rituals.

⁶ The early morning sutra teachings are available to active volunteers worldwide via an online link for local group cultivation, and a written Chinese version of an onsite Hualien member's notes are circulated for those who do not understand the Taiwanese dialect. These talks are edited by Tzu Chi's Da Ai TV station, rebroadcast later in the day, and posted on the TV's YouTube channel as *Wisdom at Dawn*. I was told that the videos with English subtitles on the YouTube channel are about one year behind the daily talks. The videos of the morning talks with volunteers are edited, rebroadcast on Da Ai TV, and then posted online with English subtitles under the title *Life Wisdom* on the same day that they are given. The web version of each talk is considerably shorter than the original, giving Da Ai TV plenty of previously unscreened archival material to use when Master Cheng Yen is unable to personally minister.

⁷ See note 1 above.

⁸ Once other Buddhist groups also began offering these rituals, DDM ceased its heavy promotion of these events (field notes 2018).

⁹ Tzu Chi also provides a free sutra chanting service of eight hours for relatives of its members, staff, and commissioners. This chanting is usually performed by lay volunteers, as the Tzu Chi nuns all live in Hualien at the Abode of Still Thoughts Monastery.

¹⁰ The burial ground belongs to the government; it was given to the government by Dharma Drum Mountain, as public burial sites must be on government-owned land.

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