Buddhism and Its Trust Networks between Taiwan, Malaysia, and the United States

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Ms. Qiu's grandfather migrated from Shanghai to Ipoh, Malaysia sometime toward the beginning of the twentieth century. She was born in Malacca and, at the age of seventy-three, had spent her entire life there. She had been attending the sutra chanting session weekly in a Chinese popular religion temple in downtown Malacca for decades, until she became involved with a Buddhist group from Taiwan named Tzu Chi (Pinyin, *ciji* 慈濟) eight years ago. She has never had family or friends in Taiwan, but has been to the Tzu Chi monastery in Xiulin 秀林 village, Hualian 花蓮, on the east coast of Taiwan four times. On her first trip there, she brought a large amount of cash, pulled together from her own savings and from her local friends in Malacca, in hopes that she could personally present it to the monastics, especially the master, to support their livelihood. She was surprised to find that the monastics in Hualian make their own living rather than relying on donations (*gongyang* 供養) from the

I thank Rongdao Lai for her careful reading of the draft and for her helpful suggestions. The revision has also benefited tremendously from the readers of *The Eastern Buddhist*. An earlier draft was presented at the Spiritual Capital series, Institute on Culture, Religion and World Affairs, Boston University, Brookline, Massachusetts, USA; the Social Science Division seminar, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore; and the Multiculturalism in Monsoon Asia seminar, the Research Center for Humanities and Social Sciences, National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan. I thank the organizers and the participants. Part of the research was supported by the visiting scholarship at Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore and by a grant from the Ministry of Science and Technology, Taiwan (99-2410-H-007 -008 -MY2).

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laity. In recent years, increasing leg pain has prevented her from traveling. Each day she works as a volunteer at the Tzu Chi Malacca branch, and watches the Tzu Chi TV channel from Taiwan via satellite. For her, the two words Taiwan and Hualian are "like hometown." In describing her trip during our interview in 2004, she said that, "Everyone treated us as if we had just returned home. It was like seeing our parents, seeing our brothers and sisters. That's why I kept going back to Taiwan. I want to learn over there [in Hualian] how to do [Tzu Chi] here [in Malacca], how to love people."

The narrative of Ms. Qiu's religious experience represents a fascinating slice of an ongoing inter-Asia connection in the Tzu Chi context. Across 3,164.09 km, religion—in this case, Buddhism—has tied a third-generation Chinese Malaysian like Ms. Qiu of Malacca (population 201,405)[1] to a monastery of eight hundred residents in Xiulin (population 15,273), Hualian County, Taiwan.[2] Her feeling of "homecoming" toward Tzu Chi members there is in stark contrast to her continued impersonal relation to them in the transnational networks of Tzu Chi: Though she feels that she can recognize some faces, she does not recall the names or personal information of people she met in Taiwan. In other words, while having strong sentiments and respect for the place and people in the larger network, she very much remains, at best, a mere acquaintance to Tzu Chi members outside of her own local network.

The relationship between Ms. Qiu and members in the network in Taiwan can be described by what Putnam[3] calls "thin trust"—the kind of trust one has for acquaintances at coffee shops around the corner. And yet her feelings toward the network as a whole, and particularly her practices locally and transnationally, demonstrate what Putnam[4] calls "thick trust"—trust for family and friends, especially those in a tightly knit network. In his words, "trustworthiness is the key to generalized reciprocity"; and generalized reciprocity is the "touch stone" of social capital.[5] Social capital is "assets in social networks,"[6] from which "social networks and the norms of

[1] *World Gazetteer*, www.world-gazetteer.com/wg.php?x=&men=gcis&lng=en&des=gamelan&srt=pnan&col=dhoq&msz=1500&geo=-152. Accessed 27 October 2010.

[2] "Monthly Report," Population Statistics, Hualian County, accessed 27 October 2010: web.hl.gov.tw/static/population/pop-index.htm.

[3] Putnam 2000.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., pp. 134–36.

[6] Lin 2001, p. 3.

reciprocity and trustworthiness . . . arise."[7] In building the foundations for democracy and civic engagement, thin trust matters more than thick trust because the former extends beyond the roster of social networks.

The question that we should ask is, how does one demarcate networks that embody this asset of social trust? In the introduction to *Better Together*,[8] Putnam and Feldstein argue that trust can only arise from long-term relations and in most cases is locally grounded. The case studies presented there demonstrate that trust can more effectively be built upon "bonding" (or exclusive) rather than "bridging" (or inclusive) social capital. Bonding social capital shows how trust within existing networks is built, but it does not explain how a new trust network can be created. For example, how do we understand the strength of Ms. Qiu's thin trust for the Taiwanese acquaintances in her inter-Asia network?

Through the notion of "spiritual capital," this article attempts to shed light on the dynamic processes through which religion creates, bolsters, and replaces trust in the kaleidoscope of social networks. Spiritual capital here refers to assets in religion-facilitated social networks. By facilitation, I mean both symbolic systems (e.g., doctrine, concepts) for meaning-making and pragmatic goods (e.g., a meeting place, a membership directory) for maintenance. Spiritual capital can be material and calculable goods as emphasized by the rational-choice school of social capital theorists: for example, "investment in social relations with expected returns"[9] such as upward social mobility. Spiritual capital can also be symbolic goods as emphasized by the Bourdieuian social capital theorists: for example, knowledge and credentials derived from education or the position of social strata. While a relatively large scope on "religious goods"[10] has been shared between the "religious capital"[11] approach and the pioneer of Bourdieuian spiritual capital theory,[12] I shall limit my purview to one form of spiritual capital: trust networks.

To understand Ms. Qiu's inter-Asia trust network, I will first give a brief introduction to Tzu Chi's transnational network. Second, I will briefly analyze the early development of its New York division in light of its being facilitated by and embedded in the existing local Buddhist networks. The case of the New York branch is a prelude to the main focus of the paper, the

[7] Putnam 2000, p. 19
[8] Putnam, Feldstein, and Cohen 2003.
[9] Lin 2000, p. 6.
[10] Iannaccone 1990.
[11] Stark and Finke 2000.
[12] Verter 2003.

development of the Malacca branch, wherein my ethnography shows a set of intricate and nuanced relationships between Tzu Chi and the local Buddhist networks. Focusing on the role of Buddhism in the relations within a trust network and the actual reciprocity arising from it, I will show how spiritual capital can be exchanged with other forms of capital and stand in competition with them. I argue that religion fosters trust networks locally while at the same time bolstering "thin trust" translocally. In other words, religion bonds at an intra-group level and creates bridges transnationally.

The Tzu Chi Diaspora

The Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation is a lay Buddhist humanitarian movement that originated in Taiwan in the 1960s under the monastic leadership of the Venerable Cheng Yen (Pinyin, Zhengyan 證嚴), a three-time nominee for the Nobel Peace Prize. The movement claims ten million members worldwide and has branches in forty-five countries.[13] The first overseas branch, the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, United States (Fojiao Ciji Jijinhui Meiguo Fenhui 佛教慈濟基金會美国分會), obtained legal status in California in 1985 and, in 1989 established its chapter house, the Still Thoughts Hall in Alhmabra, California.[14] In the ensuing ten years, Tzu Chi devotees in other countries opened their respective branches. As of 5 May 2010, Tzu Chi has a total of sixty-three branches in Taiwan, and a total of 165 overseas branches—sixty-one in Asia (including the Middle East), seventy-eight in America, nine in Africa, ten in Oceania, and seven in Europe.

Tzu Chi has been knitting together its dispersed congregations into a transnational network since 1995. Elsewhere I have described how Tzu Chi maintains itself as a movement with a charismatic center through a system of flow.[15] In general, this flow circulates in two directions: centrifugal and centripetal. One begins from the headquarters, moves around the island of Taiwan, and ends back at the headquarters; the other departs from different

[13] For the total membership, see Tzu Chi Foundation, USA, "About Tzu Chi," www.us.tzuchi.org/us/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=96&Itemid=182&lang=en, 24 February 2010. For the number of branches and chapters, see Tzu Chi Foundation, "2012 Global Tzu Chi Volunteers Geographic Locations of Branch and Chapter": tw.tzuchi.org/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1092&Itemid=282&lang=en, 4 May 2013. Both sources accessed on 20 February 2014.

[14] Tzu Chi Foundation, U.S.A., "About Tzu Chi." www.us.tzuchi.org/us/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=96&Itemid=182&lang=en, 4 May 2013, accessed 24 June 2013.

[15] Huang 2009.

regions of Taiwan and the overseas branches and "returns" to the headquarters. The former is characterized by the master's monthly tour around the island, usually referred to by her followers as "the walk of the supreme person" (*shangren xingjiao* 上人行腳). The latter consists of an array of followers' "homecoming" retreats such as the introductory tour, the "Tzu Chi Train" (*ciji lieche* 慈濟列車) for general members, the "Still Thoughts civility" orientation retreat, children's summer camps, the hospital volunteer retreat (which is the most popular), and the "root finding" tours (*xungen* 尋根) for new members of title groups, such as commissioners and honorary trustees, and the Tzu Chi teachers' club.

The system of flow expands from Taiwan to the transnational networks. Every January, core members from North and South America and Southeast Asia participate in a "Tzu Chi Spirit" retreat in Houston, Texas. In addition to the horizontal ties between branches, the headquarters maintains direct ties with overseas branches. The lay executive, sometimes accompanied by one or two of Cheng Yen's disciples, represents the headquarters and presides at every important ceremony of each major branch, such as the year-end thanksgiving party. Overseas members, including mainland Chinese, visit the headquarters in Taiwan as part of the "homecoming" ceremonies. Moreover, overseas followers take individual trips to the headquarters in the name of "root finding" (*xungen*), often obtaining a special audience with Cheng Yen and priority in the long waiting line for volunteer opportunities at the Tzu Chi hospital in Hualian. In addition to these occasional individual links to their religious "roots," representatives of each branch are invited to join in an annual retreat in conjunction with the anniversary ceremony at the headquarters. The headquarters also holds exclusive vacation camps for overseas youths and followers' school-age children. A system of transnational itineraries that centers on Taiwan has therefore emerged in the Tzu Chi worldwide organization.

In sum, Tzu Chi's overseas development is an ongoing process of transforming an ethnic religious association into both localized community services and an international non-governmental organization (NGO) that are not limited by ethnic boundaries. At the same time, the linkage among Tzu Chi congregations has created not only itineraries that bring dispersed overseas Taiwanese and Chinese—in Peter L. Berger's terms—under the "sacred canopy"[16] of Tzu Chi Buddhism, but has also strengthened ties to Taiwan as a pilgrimage center for overseas Chinese. To some extent, Tzu

[16] Berger 1967.

Chi has created a new "homeland" of religious identity in Taiwan in lieu of the traditional cultural homeland in mainland China. Tzu Chi's worldwide development constitutes the forming of a diaspora.

Nodes of New York-Hualian Buddhist Networks

At the time of my fieldwork in 1995, the Tzu Chi New York branch was expanding into the intermediate level of Tzu Chi overseas branches. In 1991, under the supervision of the chief executive of Tzu Chi United States, Ms. Kang and her friends founded the New York branch at a core member's home. The branch has maintained slightly more than twenty core members since then, but grew in membership from two hundred in 1992 to twenty-five hundred in 1994.[17] In September 1992, the branch moved to its rented office space in Flushing, New York, where it remains today, having added other sub-branches throughout the state.

In early 1990, a commissioner,[18] Ms. Qiu, migrated with her family from Taiwan to the United States. Ms. Qiu brought several Tzu Chi publications from Taiwan and distributed them to local Taiwanese through her cousin, Ms. Jian. Among those who received the materials were Ms. Jian's daughter and their family friend, Ms. Kang, who responded by spontaneously proselytizing for Tzu Chi. Both Jian and Kang have been pious Buddhists. Ms. Kang in particular, who later became the founder and first coordinator of Tzu Chi New York, had long participated in Buddhist classes and many week-long Chan meditation retreats at local temples.

Ms. Kang began to collect money from her local Taiwanese friends and sent the contributions to Tzu Chi United States in California. Until the following year, Ms. Kang and her friends remained an informal circle of charitable women. This nascent group consisted of Taiwanese women, many of them Ms. Kang's friends at the Chuang Yen Monastery (Pinyin, Zhuangyansi

[17] It had 13,512 members in 2011. Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, "Niuyue fenhui: Jianjie ji liren fuzeren" 紐約分會：簡介及歷任負責人 (New York Branch: Introduction and List of Coordinators). www.us.tzuchi.org/us/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1199:2011-12-29-19-47-54&catid=134:2011-12-28-08-05-57&Itemid=369. Accessed 21 February 2014.

[18] Commissioner or *weiyuan* 委員 is the first title group for the laity in Tzu Chi history and remains the highest and the most essential to the Tzu Chi mission. The title is earned based on the number of household members recruited and on the volunteer works within Tzu Chi. A commissioner is authorized to collect donations on behalf of Tzu Chi, and is considered to be the representative and the carrier of the mission and the embodiment of "the Tzu Chi spirit." For an analysis of the variety of title groups in Tzu Chi, see chapter 2, Huang 2009.

莊嚴寺) in Carmel, New York. The New York branch therefore began with a few Taiwanese Buddhist women who later drew in their husbands. In fact, all of the first six local commissioners were women and their husbands who had known each other in Taiwan and had been regulars of the Chuang Yen Monastery until they became actively engaged in Tzu Chi.

The linkage to the Chuang Yen Monastery is one aspect of the Tzu Chi branch's embeddedness in the diverse yet lively Buddhist community in and around New York City. According to Qin, there were more than twenty-three Chinese Buddhist organizations in that area around 1990.[19] Eighteen of them were temples and the rest were lay organizations. Almost all active members of Tzu Chi New York I spoke with said they already had been pious Buddhists prior to their participation in Tzu Chi. In addition to the Chuang Yen Monastery, Tzu Chi members had frequented the Great Enlightenment Temple (Dajuesi 大覺寺) in the Bronx, the Compassionate Temple (Ciyinsi 慈音寺) in Flushing, and the Buddha's Gratitude Temple (Foensi 佛恩寺) in Chinatown, for Buddhist teachings. Moreover, both Master Shengyan 聖嚴 of the Chan Meditation Center (Dongchu Chansi 東初禪寺) in Elmhurst and Master Xianming 顯明, a former abbot of the Chuang Yen Monastery, attended the inauguration ceremony of the Tzu Chi New York branch on 16 June 1991.

According to Qin's report, local Buddhist temples and associations adhere to the "traditional" practices of Chinese Buddhism. Their major activities included Buddhist festivals such as the Buddha's birthday and the Ullambana Festival, retreats, and the fairly ritualistic practice of "releasing living creatures" (*fangsheng* 放生). Although most Buddhist temples scheduled their major activities on Sundays according to the Christian calendar, their Sunday services consisted mainly of scripture chanting, teaching, meditation, and vegetarian feasts.[20] In contrast to the list of Buddhist activities described by Qin, Tzu Chi in New York distinguishes itself by "secular" practice geared toward achieving concrete goals as directed by the ideals of humanistic Buddhism.

In sum, the development of Tzu Chi New York shows how ethnic and Buddhist trust networks may combine and complement each other. Information pertaining to Tzu Chi was brought from Taiwan through an immigrant—Ms. Qiu—and then distributed through a network that was both ethnic (Taiwanese) and religious (Buddhist). When it reached a "structural

[19] Qin 1992, pp. 5–6.
[20] Ibid., pp. 13–16.

hole"[21]—in this case Ms. Jian's daughter and Ms. Kang—Tzu Chi tapped into the trust network. Ms. Kang was able to collect donations without authorization from the headquarters in Taiwan and before any action for registration or legalization was initiated. Furthermore, she and Ms. Jian's daughter could further distribute and proselytize through the existing Buddhist networks of local temples. The founding of the New York branch was mainly based on a dense network of the six Taiwanese couples among whom there were multiple linkages, including ethnic, religious, and local ones. The branch then expanded from there. Their dense network was maintained partly as a result of common participation in local temples. In other words, the founding network was facilitated by and embedded in a local Buddhist trust network.[22]

Nodes of Malacca-Hualian Buddhist Networks

Tzu Chi established its Malacca branch in 1992 and it became the head office for branches across Malaysia. This branch is obviously the most elaborate among those in Southeast Asia and of the grandest scale in terms of its welfare contributions. Modeled upon the mission in Taiwan, Tzu Chi Malacca is active internationally in disaster relief and free clinics, and locally in garbage recycling as well as medical and charity services for both Chinese and other ethnic groups.

The Malacca branch was founded by Mr. and Mrs. Liu, who continue to lead it. The couple had long been pious Buddhists, having taken refuge in its teachings in Taiwan under popular monks prior to their emigration. Mr. Liu distinguishes Tzu Chi from his previous Buddhist practice: "Our 'Pure Land' practice used to involve only chanting scriptures every day. The Dharma gate of Tzu Chi, which we now identify with, is more 'practical.'"

The Lius emigrated to Malaysia to set up their garment factory in Malacca in 1988, a time when most labor-intensive factories began to move abroad due to changes in Taiwan's labor market. On one of her visits to Taiwan, Mrs. Liu read a Tzu Chi newsletter and hence took a trip to its headquarters. She was very touched by what she saw and wanted to begin fund-raising in Malaysia, but her actual initiative did not begin until two years later,

[21] Burt 2005.

[22] Tzu Chi New York has turned into a large network on its own after my fieldwork. It was promoted to a regional branch in 1999, and as of 2011, had six branches under its leadership. See Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, "Niuyue fenhui: Jianjie ji liren fuzeren." www.us.tzuchi.org/us/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1199:2011-12-29-19-47-54&catid=134:2011-12-28-08-05-57&Itemid=369. Accessed 21 February 2014.

when she was introduced to local Tzu Chi members through their Buddhist teacher in Kuala Lumpur. From these pioneers, the Lius learned how to engage locally: by providing services instead of fund-raising. She and her workers began their regular volunteer work by cleaning the houses of poor local seniors, most of whom were Chinese and Indian.

Later, Mrs. Liu took her husband to visit the Tzu Chi headquarters, where he felt deeply touched by Tzu Chi's autonomous "way of cultivation" in this world. The Lius held the first charitable relief distribution at their factory in 1994, and built the Malacca Still Thoughts Hall in 1997 on the parcel of land located in the free trade zone where it currently stands.

Although the Lius are Taiwanese immigrants, the Malacca branch members are primarily Malaysian Chinese. None of the staff members I met at the foundation's office were from Taiwan. The youth corps of the branch also consists of only local-born Chinese. This is similar to the corps in Penang, though in contrast with the Taiwanese college students in Boston and Japan.[23] Nevertheless, the Malacca branch not only shares with other branches a growing attention to university students and youths, but it also has shifted its local development to education. When Mrs. Liu began to feel stuck in Tzu Chi's local development, she consulted a commissioner in Taiwan, who said, "Go to campuses." The results of introducing Tzu Chi into the Chinese educational system in Malaysia have been impressive. The branch has been able to hold Tzu Chi collegiate youth retreats of more than two thousand students in recent years. And many of the foundation's staff members are former Tzu Chi youths who have turned their volunteer participation into professional careers.[24] In addition to the youth corps, the Malacca branch has also succeeded in gradually influencing Chinese high school students. Despite her lack of teaching experience, Mrs. Liu was demonstrating Tzu Chi "Still Thought Pedagogy" in local Chinese high schools in the initial stage of their activities. Her efforts have resulted in the formation of the Tzu Chi Teachers' Association in Malaysia, the first one of its kind outside of Taiwan, whose members incorporate Tzu Chi teachings in their students' curricula in public schools.

Except for its leaders, the Malacca branch has few Taiwanese. Although there are many Taiwanese small business owners and entrepreneurs in Malacca and other cities where there are local Tzu Chi chapters, they tend

[23] See chapter 7 in Huang 2009 for an introduction to and comparison among the following branches: New York, Boston, Tokyo, Penang, and Malacca.

[24] During my fieldwork, Mr. Liu told me that the Malacca branch is unique in relying on paid staff.

to contribute money rather than participate in Tzu Chi activities. Both Mr. and Mrs. Liu spent time with the Taiwanese circle when they arrived in 1988, which was then a relatively small group. The Lius eventually distanced themselves from it because of their different lifestyles. Mr. Liu raised funds among Taiwanese entrepreneurs for Tzu Chi but did not find further social activities appealing. Mrs. Liu is a pious Buddhist as well as a frequent transnational traveler. She helped disseminate Buddhist information from Taiwan prior to her visit to the Tzu Chi headquarters. Her first instinct—to carry out Tzu Chi's work in Malaysia by collecting money locally and sending it back to Taiwan—was in line with her hitherto "traditional" practice of Buddhist charity. But soon she realized that monetary donation was not enough for the Tzu Chi mission. They needed to take further actions.

Tzu Chi's mission in Malacca started out as a team of several office staff members led by Mrs. Liu. Through the staff members' network, they learned about a nursing home that needed volunteers. In addition, female workers at the Lius' factory informed them of individuals and families that were in need of help. Citian,[25] an accountant at the factory, explains:

> Because of their own living environment, they are more likely to know people who have been suffering, and they reported to us. We followed the address as reported to us . . . And when we visited one house, their neighbors were curious. . . . Why had this deserted household suddenly gotten so many visitors? We told them we are here to help. They would report other families who also needed help. So we have more and more cases. . . . Then we held a reception (*chahui* 茶會, literally, "tea party," Tzu Chi's term for a reception) at Mrs. Liu's office, and told everyone to bring their friends and family here to learn about Tzu Chi.

Elsewhere[26] I have described and analyzed the appeal of Tzu Chi to local followers.[27] In sum, in its short history, Tzu Chi Malacca has gone through a few stages in terms of expanding and tapping into social networks.

[25] Citian is her refuge name. During my fieldwork, she was always referred to by this name and I do not know her real name.

[26] Huang 2009, 2012.

[27] Among the fourteen local adherents this paper refers to (not including the Lius) were ten females and four males. Seven were born between 1931 and 1956, four between 1960 and 1965, and three between 1972 and 1977; seven first came to Tzu Chi before or during 1997 (the year when the local branch building was erected) and the rest after 1997 (age groups are

The story traces back to **(1) economic migration**: The Lius immigrated from Taiwan to Malaysia to take advantage of the free trade zone. This initial migration further combines with **(2) Buddhist transnational practices**: Mrs. Liu continues to transmit Buddhist practices and teachings between Taiwan and Malaysia. Moreover, the Lius' Buddhist practice became a dyadic transnational one, as they became followers of a Malaysian Chinese monk, Master Boyuan 伯圓, while frequenting the Tzu Chi headquarters in Taiwan. The Malaysia-based monk eventually connected Mrs. Liu to a handful of Chinese Malaysian Tzu Chi pioneers in Perak who gave her hands-on instruction in carrying out charity work. At this point, through **(3) a network broker**, i.e., Boyuan, between two different social networks, the Taiwan-Malaysia transnational Buddhist network is connected to the local Buddhist network in Malaysia. However, according to Mr. Liu and Tzu Chi publications, the pioneers in Perak eventually disappeared and did not serve as a significant structural hole between the Taiwanese transnational Buddhists and the Tzu Chi Malaysia networks. Rather, **(4) the connection to local trust networks took place in the work place**, i.e., the Lius' garment factory, from the clerks to the factory workers, and to the workers' neighborhood. However, proselytizing occurred mainly among the clerks, who, like Citian, the accountant, had already been responding to Mrs. Liu's

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distributed equally between the two periods). Except for the one Caucasian from Australia, the thirteen Chinese-ethnic interviewees included only one Taiwanese and the other twelve were born locally with no relations in Taiwan. Four were from relatively lower-income backgrounds, the Australian was unemployed, and the other three had retired from jobs as a nurse, a tailor, and a barber. Seven were from middle-class backgrounds or had spouses who were small shopkeepers or professionals (accountant/secretary/educator/preschool principal), and three were either from the upper-middle class or their spouses were (physician and entrepreneur). The Taiwanese was a first-generation immigrant and the twelve born locally were at least second- and mostly third-generation migrants from mainland China. One straits-born Chinese did not know her ancestors' hometown; the ancestral origin or dialect group (language spoken at home) of the other eleven locally born interviewees were: five Hokkien, five Canton (four Teochu and one Hakka), and one Hainan. Three out of the five Cantonese descendents were from outside Malacca. The sample, therefore, reflects the local Chinese population quite well: predominantly Hokkien and primarily descents of nineteenth-century immigrants.

All of the thirteen Chinese-ethnic interviewees worked for Tzu Chi more than one day a week, and the Australian had worked for four months. In fact, as they listed their activities, all of them worked for Tzu Chi every day, either coming to volunteer at the branch or participating in activities such as sorting garbage for recycling and visiting the charity recipients and nursing homes, or going out individually to collect membership dues. Three of the interviewees were full-time staff members who also spent their free time as volunteers.

Buddhist charitable causes even before her Tzu Chi connection; whereas information inter-links the pool of factory workers—both in discovering prospective charity recipients and in publicizing the nascent Tzu Chi Malacca by expanding the number of participants for the "tea party."

Most of the devotees I interviewed in 2004 came to Tzu Chi during this early stage, which is often referred to as the "Shangqiao period."[28] It was the period when Tzu Chi's activities were held in the canteen of the factory complex, prior to the completion of the Still Thoughts Hall in 1997. However, as early as 1995, Mrs. Liu had begun to tap into one of the most important Chinese Malaysian networks: **(5) the Chinese education system** (*huawen jiaoyu* 華文教育), or more often in its abbreviated term, *huajiao* 華教. At this juncture, the connection between Tzu Chi and the Chinese education system was Mr. Zhang, a supervisor at the Bureau of Education in the State of Malacca, who met Mrs. Liu through the principal of a Chinese school in 1995. A pious and learned Buddhist, Mr. Zhang responded to Mrs. Liu's proposal to introduce Still Thoughts pedagogy, and began to promote this teaching methodology among the teachers in the Chinese education system while becoming an active devotee himself in Tzu Chi Malacca. Mr. Zhang was apparently a structural hole between the Tzu Chi network and the local Chinese education network. The result was the formation of the Tzu Chi Teachers' Club, extending the Lius' work-related and Taiwan-related networks to agents of Chinese schooling, which is one of the "three pillars" of the Malaysian Chinese civil society.[29]

Slightly overlapping with, yet starting a bit later than, the utilization of the Chinese education networks was **(6) the growth of Buddhist study clubs in colleges**, which Tzu Chi tapped into around 1997. If the Chinese education system can be called a reservoir of bridging social capital in reaching students and parents of a wide range of Chinese Malaysians in Malacca, the

[28] "Shangqiao" is the name of the Lius' garment factory.

[29] The "three pillars" are Chinese schools (including public and independent schools), Chinese organizations (including religious and secular), and Chinese media (mainly newspapers). See Tan 2007.

The introduction of Tzu Chi's Buddhism-inspired "Still Thoughts pedagogy" had a conspicuous success in the beginning but teachers had begun to keep it low key at least by the time of my fieldwork. I sensed covert tensions from members of Tzu Chi Teachers' Club who worked in the public Chinese primary schools. I was not able to pursue additional information on this issue before the end of my fieldwork. I did not meet teachers from the independent Chinese middle schools at Tzu Chi Malacca. I thank Rongdao Lai for reminding me of this subtle observation.

college Buddhist club network would be its counterpart for bonding social capital. The majority of staff in the Malacca office as well as in the Kuala Lumpur and even the Singapore offices are former Tzu Chi college youths who easily relate to each other through class years and cohorts. They first encountered Tzu Chi through the Buddhist clubs on campus, wherein they formed their own separate Tzu Chi group, lived together off campus, not unlike a fraternity or sorority group, and mobilized students for Tzu Chi summer camps. Some became full-time salaried staff immediately upon graduation, while others worked elsewhere, sometimes outside of Malacca, and eventually "returned" to Tzu Chi. For example, Huiwan was in the second cohort of Tzu Chi youths in her college. Eleven out of the twelve members in her cohort became full-time salaried staff in Tzu Chi offices in Malacca, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore. The only exception was a young man who did not work at Tzu Chi due to pressure from his family, who regarded jobs at Tzu Chi as poorly remunerated underemployment.

Overlapping with the above-mentioned social networks are **(7) the local Buddhist networks**. The devotees who did not belong to any of the above-mentioned social networks came to Tzu Chi through public events, such as the "tea party" receptions. Some of them learned about the event and the group through small announcements in local Chinese newspapers. The majority of them learned about the information through, and came to the events in company of, friends from other Buddhist social networks. Even those who had learned about the events through newspapers made their initial visits as a result of being encouraged by fellow Buddhist friends. In other words, as early as the "Shangqiao period," Tzu Chi Malacca had begun to tap into the local Buddhist social networks.

Local Tzu Chi followers in Malacca come from four types of Buddhist networks:

1. Buddhist study groups in neighborhoods or, in local terms, gardens (*huayuan* 花園 in Chinese, or *taman* in Malay)
2. Buddhist study groups at colleges and universities
3. Sutra chanting classes and Dharma events at local popular religion temples, mainly, Cheng Hoon Teng 青雲亭 and Seck Kia Eenh 釋迦院
4. A variety of Buddhist associations including the nationwide monastic network, the Malaysia Buddhist Association (Malaixiya Fuojiao Zonghui 馬來西亞佛教總會), the more publicly outspoken nationwide network of Buddhist groups, the Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia, and the Malaysia branch of the

Amitabha Buddhist Society (Jingzong Xuehui 淨宗學會), a transnational Buddhist association

All of the four types of networks are voluntary. The first two, (1) and (2), tend to be more "ascribed" than the other two: (1) in the sense of geographical proximity, in that people tend to join the study group near where they live, and (2) in the sense of college enrollment, since students can only join the study club in their college. (3) is perhaps the most locality-based and the least organized network, and, at the same time, the most likely to be the hub of different networks. (3) is therefore what I call the facilitator-type of network in engaged religions, in that it draws a variety of Buddhist-minded people together and allows a range of information about Buddhism to disseminate among participants. While sutra chanting does not initiate socially engaged programs, participants can learn about socially engaged groups from fellow participants. (4) is the most translocal and perhaps the most "bonding" or "thick trust" type. Members have a strong sense of their group identity and may nevertheless support other Buddhist activities and events individually and collectively. For example, members of the Young Buddhist Association enjoyed visiting the Tzu Chi Still Thoughts Bookstore Café, and members of Amitabha Buddhist Society wore their uniforms to attend Tzu Chi public lectures.

The list of four types of Buddhist networks is in no way exhaustive or exclusive. There appears to be some overlap of memberships between networks examined in my fieldwork. For example, (1) and (3) tend to have overlapping memberships, and (2) and (4), especially the Young Buddhist Association, tend to link memberships. Since my fieldwork focused on how the local existing networks facilitate the development of Tzu Chi, I was not able to observe further the relationship and interaction among different local Buddhist networks.

Three devotees whom I interviewed did not connect to Tzu Chi through any of the above-mentioned networks. They came to it through a work-related network, a public event, and a personal network, respectively. A closer look at their retrospectives show that they were either pious Buddhists or they felt strong personal ties to Mr. or Mrs. Liu.

In sum, following Dean's research on the religious networks between Putian in Fujian and Southeast Asia, we can argue that different trust networks connect the local Malaccan Buddhist to the Taiwanese initiative through several "sites or nodes"—a node can be a village, a social institution or religious group, or an individual:[30]

[30] Dean 2009, p. 773.

1. The founders and leaders of the Tzu Chi Malacca, the Lius
2. The Chinese education system
3. The Buddhist clubs in colleges
4. The local Buddhist associations, including sutra chanting groups in popular temples

It is interesting to note that the first node, the Lius, is the only non-local one. This node has a connection with a local Buddhist monk and not directly with any one of the four types of local Buddhist networks. At the same time, those who are connected with the Lius tend to overlap with one or more local Buddhist networks. The four nodes share one common idiom: Buddhism. What then is the role of Buddhism in the various social networks?

Buddhism and Trust Networks

Buddhism plays a role in three levels of trust networks. First of all, Buddhism is the foundation for the most generalized trust network for monetary charitable donation. "Doing good" in the name of Buddhism, even just in the loosely defined popular Buddhist terms, can be seen as self-explanatory since it often leads to immediate pledges, even translocally. The New York division began with a spontaneous mobilization for collecting donations to send transnationally. In Malacca, Mrs. Liu began mobilizing charitable donations before her Tzu Chi contacts—she and her employees collected money and sent it to the local Chinese newspapers in response to their coverage of people in need. Followers in Malacca traced their initial contact with Tzu Chi through monetary donations, even if they reported no follow-up participation for years after their first donation.

Other Buddhist charitable donation trust networks are often maintained even after an individual becomes devoted exclusively to Tzu Chi. For example, the computer vendor who confessed to not spending enough time with his family while keeping busy with Tzu Chi continued to respond to any sales of coupons for fund-raising bazaars and banquets from other Buddhist groups. Buddhism-based thin trust for charitable donations lays the groundwork for Tzu Chi proselytizing. Ms. Qiu, for example, was able to recruit five hundred members in Malacca on her own despite her illiteracy. She began with her family, and continued on with her friends and neighbors. When she exhausted her primary and secondary networks, she made use of thin trust in local settings. She explains in our interview: "I visit every member at home to collect monthly dues. If any bystander or onlooker seems to pay attention to my smiley face and my benevolent smile, I would immediately go over. He/she asks what I am doing. I say I am collecting

charity money for Tzu Chi. I will tell him/her how great Tzu Chi is and about our master [Cheng Yen]."

Such a trust network may also combine with more personal networks. For example, the former hairdresser, Ms. Huang, said she first bought Tzu Chi fund-raising bazaar coupons through a friend, who was her neighbor and exercised in the same park. Without asking which Buddhist group it was or the specific cause for the coupons, she simply gave her friend RM50 (about US$13 in 2004) for five coupon booklets. Her neighbor took the cash and did not give her the booklets immediately. On the day of the event, Ms. Huang and her family happened to pass by the bazaar, where she ran into her friend's sister, Yulan, who was the head of social work at the Malacca branch. Ms. Huang told Yulan that she had signed up for five booklets through her sister. As RM50 is already five times the minimum donation for initial membership, Yulan took the opportunity to encourage her to sign up as a Tzu Chi volunteer. Ms. Huang hesitated because she did not know what volunteer work would involve. Yulan persisted and Ms. Huang agreed to give it a try.

Second, Buddhism in the context of Tzu Chi contributes to social capital and trust networks that foster transnational bonds. For example, Yulan had been a devoted volunteer for a long time until she was laid off and came to work for Tzu Chi. She said she feels very "safe" when she is in Taiwan. She had been there seven times at the time of our interview. She said she just likes to go back to Taiwan, although she has only one personal connection there, not a close tie, despite her frequent visits. She said that each and every time she visits there, she is surrounded by Tzu Chi people from the moment she exits the airport gate. Tzu Chi Buddhism bonds within the group yet bridges inter-Asian connections.

In Malacca, Tzu Chi Buddhism also thickens internal trust. For example, Ms. Qiu completely relies on other members for transportation in order to participate in Tzu Chi activities. Except for a lapse in the first year, Ms. Qiu has never failed to get a ride for her next trip to any of the many scheduled Tzu Chi events. The trust and the resources in the Tzu Chi Buddhist network are particularly salient when compared to her former membership in other Buddhist associations. Her participation at the weekly sutra chanting in a popular temple downtown was made possible by her son, never by any of her fellow participants. She has also attended Buddhist Studies for Human Life (*rensheng foxue* 人生佛学), a lay Buddhist study group located not far from the popular temple in downtown Malacca. But she was not able to get a lift after her first visit, and no one called upon her to offer her one after her first participation.

Finally, while Tzu Chi Buddhism develops bonds and lays bridges across trust networks, its ability to do so lies in declining social trust in existing local settings. It is in this sense that religion may serve to circumvent, or replace, trust networks. For example, Citian, the former accountant at the Lius' factory, became committed after learning how Tzu Chi decreased instances of juvenile delinquency in Taiwan, and felt this could be the solution to the rising crime rate in Malacca. In another example, the former hairdresser, Ms. Huang, suddenly became very verbal and somewhat emotional after our formal interview. She was then in her late sixties and felt extremely grateful to Tzu Chi because it keeps her away from bad friends. As it turned out, her mother had a gambling addiction until her death. Ms. Huang could not stop her mother, and had no choice but to take up the responsibility of raising her brother's children whose tuition was gambled away by their grandmother. She said that in old age, friends come over to tell you that you have worked all your life and now it is time to "relax and play." For her, staying in Tzu Chi, being embedded in a network of trustworthy people, is the best thing that has happened to her as it keeps her from being affected by any of the "bad" social networks. In a similar example, Huiwan, a former Tzu Chi youth and now a full-time staff member, found a sense of trustworthiness being among a group of good people, preventing her from being involved in "wrong" social networks.

In sum, on the first level, Buddhism plays a key role in providing a framework for general charity donation. The strength of the thin trust under the name of Buddhism is shown in the smooth mobilization for charity and in the successful recruitment within and beyond personal networks. On the second level, in the case of Tzu Chi, the thin trust extends transnationally and yet within the group only. Members easily rely on unknown fellow members in Taiwan and yet, such a trust does not extend to non-members there. What is worth noting is the strength of the transnational thin trust, which can work to bond locally and thus is also exclusive toward the networks "outside" the group.

Conclusion

Returning to the opening vignette: What Ms. Qiu and her inter-Asia trust network demonstrate is that religion may foster thick trust networks locally, and at the same time, bolsters thin trust transnationally. Spiritual capital may work both transnationally and locally yet with certain conditions: Transnationally only within the group, although the strength of the thin trust is significant enough to inspire many trips and monetary donations. Locally,

spiritual capital exists among different Buddhist networks and may facilitate para-network mobilization. In the case of Tzu Chi, the spiritual capital tends to bond within the group while maintaining a general support for charity outside the group. In other words, religion creates bonds across groups and bridges among nations within Asia. Such processes of bonding and bridging may be a result of circumventing trust networks through constructing its NGO-ness in moral terms.[31] Further research needs to be done on the contents—for example, the moral contents—of trust networks of spiritual capital in their wider cultural contexts.

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[31] For an analysis of Tzu Chi's NGO-ness, see chapter 6 in Huang 2009.