



Scientific and Sacramental: Medical Charity in the Buddhist Tzu Chi (*Ciji*) Movement

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The Buddhist revival in the last two decades in Taiwan unfolds several large-scale modern Buddhist organizations. All of them have charismatic leadership, active in transnational development, and, above all, engaging religious charity through facilitating public goods, such as delivering disaster reliefs and building universities. Among the various engaged Buddhist efforts, Tzu Chi (*Ciji*, literally, Compassion Relief), a lay Buddhist charitable movement under monastic leadership, stands out with its continuous focus on medical care, among other things. Tzu Chi gained its momentum when it was mobilizing for a hospital and subsequently built the first Buddhist general hospital in Taiwan in 1986. Presently it runs an islandwide medical network which includes three 900-bed state-of-the-art hospitals, and, outside Taiwan, it runs the largest bone marrow databank in Asia, and builds free clinics in California, Toronto, and Malacca.

How and why is medical care so crucial to Tzu Chi? How is Tzu Chi's medical charity "Buddhist"? This paper is an attempt to describe and analyze the core of medical concerns in the Tzu Chi movement and the impacts Tzu Chi's mission has on the medical practice in Taiwan. I would argue that there is a mutual empowerment between religious charity and scientific medicalization: The first part of the history focuses on how medical care "upgrades" the Buddhist charity to a modern and institutional, and scientific scale. The second part of the development unfolds into various ways in perpetuating Buddhist teaching in the medical practice: for example, the tearful testimonials of hospital volunteers, successful bone marrow donation drive within the Chinese diaspora, a new and sacred model for corpse dissection in medical school and its result in a long queue for donation.