

Delivering Buddhist Philanthropy: Chinese Women and Religious Volunteerism

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Introduction

In the 21st century, there is a reassessment of the role of religion and religious organisations in a globalised world. Within local communities of the faithful, such roles are being scrutinised with great intensity and individuals increasingly search for religious roles within the secular sphere. Spirituality is increasingly embedded in the present, the material and the actions.

Within the Asian societies, socially engaged Buddhism has become the hallmark and an agency of modernity. Socially engaged Buddhist organizations are actively engaged in non-governmental activities through the delivery of philanthropy and civic engagement. They become involved in poverty alleviation, crisis intervention and reconstruction of communities as a result of natural and man-made calamities, provision of health and education facilities with local and global communities. Through philanthropic activities, socially engaged Buddhism embedded spiritualism as social engagement. Indeed, social engagement becomes the idiom for spiritual attainment. In the pursuit of Buddhist philanthropy, women have become active players in the management as well as the delivery of compassion in the field.

This paper sets out to ask a simple question: what attract and motivate these women to become so actively engaged in religious volunteerism and commit their time, energies and resources into doing philanthropic works for the greater needs of their local and transnational communities? Here, I want to explore how through their understanding of the Buddhist teachings, these women Buddhists interpret and integrate their status, role and actions within their local socially-engaged Buddhist community. And at the same time to understand how, in today's globalised world, these women focus and frame themselves as performers of emotive compassion within this new theologized Buddhist paradigm.