

Media Representation of Buddhist Women in Taiwan: A Case Study of Da-Ai Drama

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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ABSTRACT

In an era bombarded by information society has become more and more dependent on mass media communication and computerised communication technology. As “religion finds technology” (Biersdorfer 2002), religious symbols can be found in media texts. As media consumption and interpretation processes can be subjective, Hoover suggests that modernity has changed the meanings of “traditionally defined religion” (2006). The textually based study on religion is inadequate to study the socio-cultural context of the lay people as well as the changing practices of religions in the media age.

This thesis selects three dramas from Da-Ai Drama (the most popular TV programme on the Da-Ai TV network) to examine how the Tzu-Chi organisation, the largest Buddhist civil organisation in Taiwan, uses its own TV network, Da-Ai TV network, to spread Buddhism. The narrative structure of the selected dramas shows the intricate relationship between the secular discourse on gender and the religious teachings. To further understand how Da-Ai Drama is perceived by the audience or Tzu-Chi’s followers, fifteen one-to-one interviews were conducted in Taiwan and discussions from online users were collected to further understand the audience’s response to Da-Ai Drama. Results from the interviews suggest that there is a reassessment of religion in an East Asian context in the twenty-first century. This thesis provides an innovative research method to explore the relationship between media discourse, gender discourse, and religious discourse. In the media age, religious teachings can be transmitted via various media platforms. Written texts are no longer the only way to transmit religious teachings. Also the media provides a greater choice of ways in which lay people may practise religions. A media approach to studying Buddhism provides a different perspective on the discussion of women in Buddhism.

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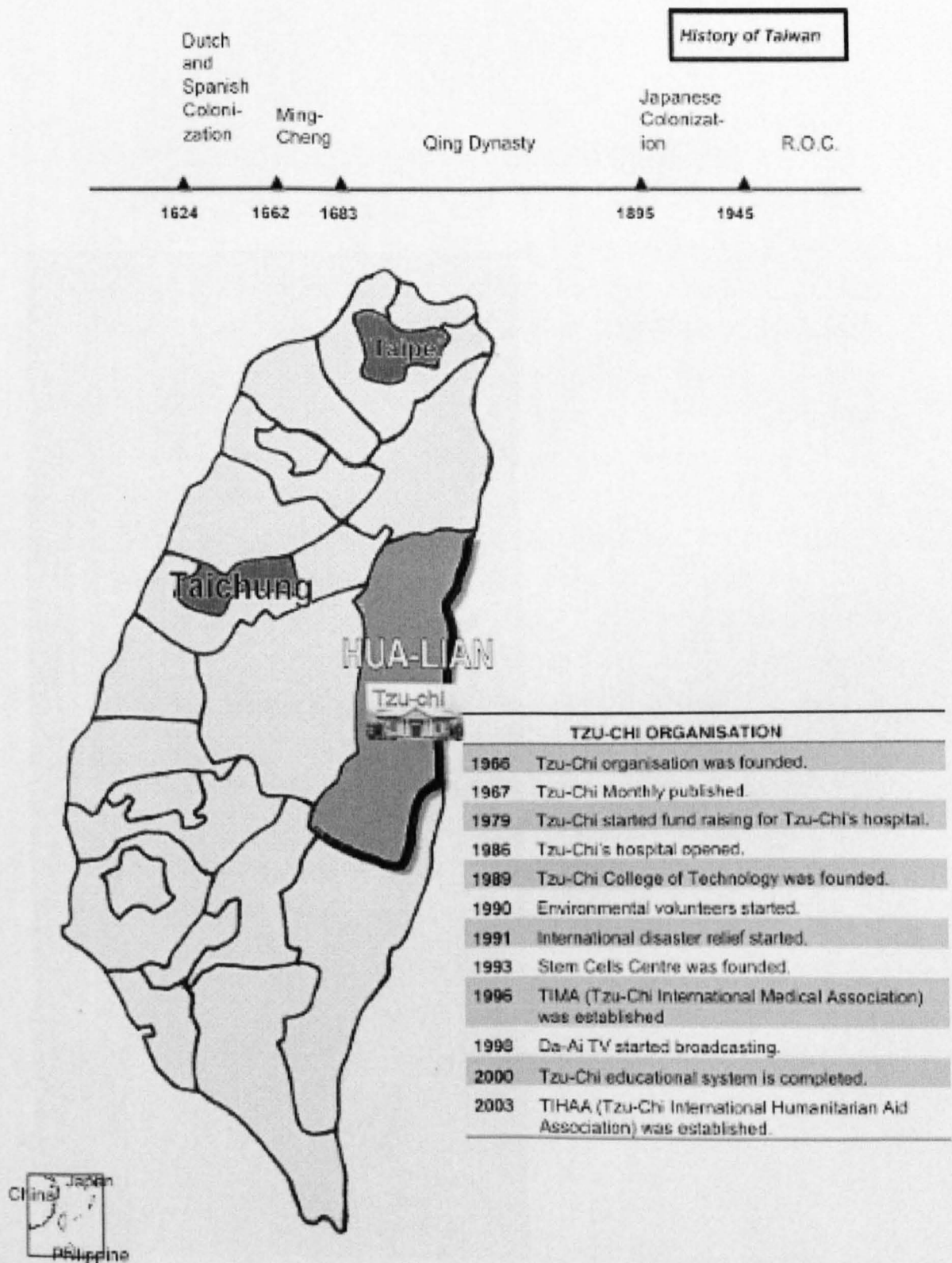


Fig. 1

Chapter 1

Introduction

Introduction of the Tzu-Chi Organisation and Da-Ai TV

This thesis is concerned with gender and religious representations in Da-Ai Drama, broadcast by the Da-Ai channel, which belongs to the Tzu-Chi (also *Ciji*) Foundation (*Tzu-Chi Gondehui* or *The Buddhist Compassion Relief Foundation*, hereafter *Tzu-Chi*). The Da-Ai TV channel, owned by Tzu-Chi and run as a non-profit making TV network, is unique for its religious focus with various genres of TV programmes. A Buddhist channel, Da-Ai TV has the same vision as public broadcasting--to serve for the public good. Programmes on Da-Ai TV can be divided into several categories: Da-Ai Drama; Buddhist teaching by Master Zheng-Yan; information and education; children's programmes; culture; medical information and news (Mandarin Chinese and English). Da-Ai dramas, adapted from the real-life stories of senior Tzu-Chi members, are a prime-time series on Da-Ai TV. As most of Tzu-Chi's members are women, Da-Ai Drama can be seen as docudramas that record Taiwanese women's life stories across the twentieth century. Despite the fact that prime-time TV is a competitive market in Taiwan, the Da-Ai TV network manages to beat commercial TV networks in terms of ratings and TV awards. The Da-Ai TV network is broadcast globally to more than twenty-five countries, from Asia to America, Africa and Europe, via terrestrial broadcast signals, and satellite, as well as webcasting. In Indonesia Da-Ai TV is localised as the Da-Ai Indonesian TV network, established in 2007 with a potential audience of twenty million.

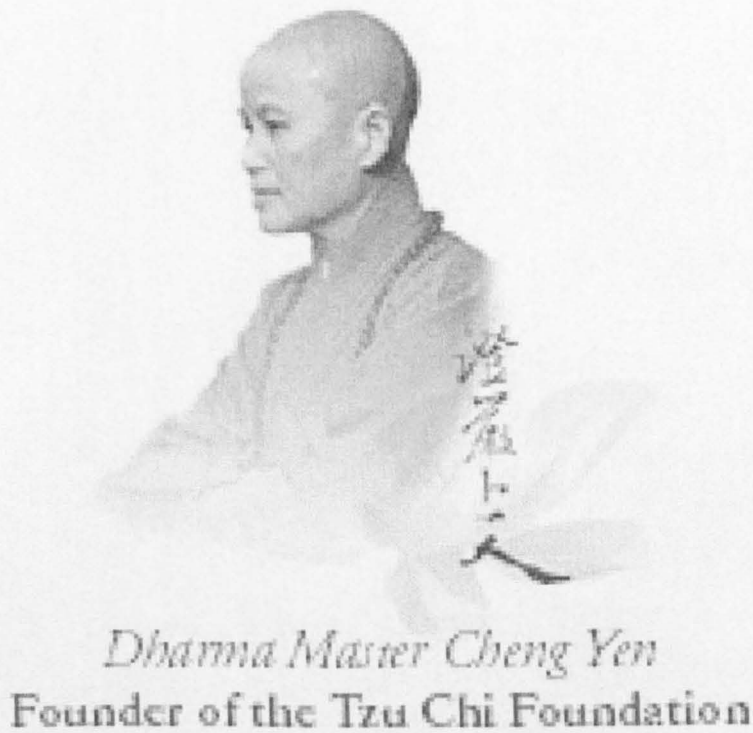


Fig. 2 Image of Master Zheng-Yan

Claiming more than five million members worldwide and nearly twenty percent of Taiwan's population, Tzu-Chi runs several state-of-the-art hospitals, schools and colleges, radio stations, TV channels, magazines, and had over sixty-five branches in 2007. Tzu-Chi was founded in 1966 by Master Zheng-Yan. Beginning with a group of thirty lay women and several nuns who were Master Zheng-Yan's disciples in Hualian, a rural area of Taiwan's eastern coast, Tzu-Chi is one of the largest civic organisations in Taiwan today. Rather than being registered as a religious organisation, the Tzu-Chi Foundation is registered as a civic organisation¹ which reflects an important change of modern Buddhism that is characteristic of its lay nature. Regardless of its registration as a civic organisation, Tzu-Chi is a Buddhist foundation in nature because of its founder Master Zheng-Yan, who has led the foundation for more than forty years as an ordained nun. The goal of the foundation is to build a Pure Land on Earth by following Master Yinshun's teaching, "for Buddhism, for all sentient beings".

Tzu-Chi has laid hands on media industry, with magazines (*Tzu-Chi Monthly* etc.); on-line radio stations; TV channels (*Da-Ai TV network*); and *Jing-si Bookstores and café*². Commencing with a humble group of women, the Tzu-Chi Foundation has now become a distinct symbol of Taiwanese Buddhism and its great influence is, without

¹ Before martial law was lifted in 1987 there was a legal restriction on registering civic organisations.

² *Jing-si Bookstores* are non-profit making bookstores that sell books, magazines, and media materials published and produced by Tzu-Chi.

doubt, across class, gender, age and religion in Taiwan. Laliberte (2003) points out that the Tzu-Chi organisation consists of 80% of women, mostly housewives. A matriarchal Buddhist organisation led by a large number of lay Buddhists, the Tzu-Chi organisation is a good example to study lay Buddhist women in contemporary Taiwan.

Research Background

This research was initiated by my experiences of watching Da-Ai Drama with my father. I thought it was a religious TV programme which carried heavy religious teachings; however, the drama caught my eye because of its quality and the plots. My Dad shared his nostalgic experience with me while I asked stupid questions like how they lived in the agricultural society. We discussed the scenes, the plots and the issues presented in the drama. Not only did I discuss the drama with my dad, but I also discussed it with my friend's mum when I visited her family. It seems like there are many trivial matters about life presented in the drama that we had seldom talked about. Then, I noticed the realness and subtlety as essential parts of the watching experience. As Da-Ai Drama represents the leading characters' life carefully and faithfully, the docudrama form records the social changes and social discourses on gender. This is where I started my research. I wanted to study women from a medium different from written texts. I hoped to find out how religion interacts with the social context and how women are situated in this complex network.

My experience of being a woman in Taiwanese society is not an unhappy or oppressed one. Born in the 1980s, I was born into an environment where girls received equal rights with boys in the education system. I was spoiled by my parents and grandparents because of my excellent performance in school. I entered a single-sex high school where all the girls were trained to attain higher education. We received courses on cooking as well as military training. Studying foreign literature for my first degree is how I first learnt about feminism. It was both fascinating and liberating. Choosing modules on gender theories and women's history increased my understanding of feminism. Back then, I truly believed that the society I was in was a powerful patriarchy that oppressed every woman. But, was I really oppressed? Had I not enjoyed enough freedom compared with women in other parts of the world? It was not until later that I found out that the feminism I knew was situated in a literary critical tradition. When I first read literature on British suffragettes I was stunned because I am from a society where voting is not an issue of gender but of authoritarian state. When martial law was lifted in 1987, everyone enjoyed the right to vote.

When I heard about people debating on the changing of surnames after getting married, I was stunned (AGAIN!) because that was never a practice in my society. Women from my grandparents' generation added husbands' surnames onto their own surnames while the children carried only the husbands' surnames. Women from my parents' generation did not have to change anything all the while the children carried their husbands' surnames. Things changed for my generation; women now retain their surnames whilst they have every right to decide whether the children's surnames are to be on the fathers' side or the mothers' side. (Some would argue that their husbands wish to carry on the patrilineal name, but at least there are options.) My clan has a more interesting tradition. A male heir has to change his surname to a different one after death. (So, the surname is changed at funerals and on tombstones.) We are living with the matrilineal surname; therefore, a change back to the patrilineal one is required as a mark of respect for our patrilineal ancestors. All these practices are in order to continue the patrilineage but are they patriarchal?

Not until I started to do research for my PhD thesis did I realise that I have never questioned the practicality and applicability of feminism, originating in the Eurocentric context, in Taiwanese society. The later chapters will show how gender issues were discussed among elite intellectuals during the process of modernisation in China and Taiwan. However, the process of modernisation includes a severe attack against Confucian and traditional values and a thorough implantation of Western philosophy and institutions. Confucianism is indeed a powerful patriarchy; however, an overhaul of this system needs a more complete understanding of historical and social contexts. It is easier for elite intellectuals to criticise Confucianism as a patriarchy than to understand the power relations and gender construction within this powerful and influential system. To study contemporary Taiwanese women requires a thorough understanding of the social changes and an examination of the legacy of Confucianism. To re-examine the applicability of the feminist framework in the local context might help the spread of women's movements and women's awareness. The gap between elite feminists and grassroots women³ can be seen in the following example.

³ The terms "elite feminists" and "grassroots women" are used to reflect a Confucian convention which classifies society based on education and the examination system. As an ideal, Confucian society is a class society consisting of elites and peasants. The terms "elite feminists" and "grassroots women" simplifies women into two categories: a) intellectuals and academia that practise and specialise in gender issues; b) lay women who do not have much knowledge on academic feminism. Different from the class structure in British society, the class structure in Taiwanese society bases itself more on the educational level. This is not to say that the class structure is not based on wealth at all; however, the example of the former President Chen, Shui-bian, best shows that an individual from an impoverished household became President of the country through education.

During my fieldwork, I have been asked by a retired civil servant about the point of gender mainstreaming and feminist thought. As a part of Taiwanese governmental policy, civil servants are encouraged to take training courses on gender issues. The woman who asked me the question is around fifty years old and she could not agree with the feminist thoughts taught in the courses, because she is happy with her family life and her position as a keeper of the familial tradition, which is seen as conservative by her children. Her response to feminist thoughts and gender mainstreaming reflects a gap between the modernised state and the prevailing ideology in the people's psyche. The state and the legal system might be modernised and present a wonderfully gender-equal image; however, the prevailing ideology presents quite an opposite picture. The struggle between modern and traditional is simplified as being a struggle between the East and the West by most people.

Objective

This research aims to produce a multi-disciplinary analysis, based on gender theories, media studies and religious studies, in order to develop an understanding of gender and religious issues from an audience's perspective as well as media content. The intertextuality between media and everyday life is also a main concern of this study. The docudrama form of Da-Ai Drama presents a visual biography of ordinary women's lives in the twentieth century. The media representation not only reflects the social context and social changes but it also reflects the contemporary interpretation towards women and gender representation.

Buddhism in contemporary Taiwan is an orthodox Chinese Buddhism and since the 1980s, Humanistic Buddhism has become a dominant discourse in Taiwanese Buddhism. The lay characteristic of Mahayana Buddhism contributes to the syncretization of Buddhism in the Chinese soil (Schopen 2000). Humanistic Buddhism carries the strong lay characteristic from Chinese Buddhism and develops into several large lay Buddhist organisations in Taiwan (Chiang 2003; Laliberté 2003). Apart from being lay characteristic, Taiwanese Buddhism is unique in the sense that "Taiwanese Buddhist nuns greatly outnumber monks: approximately 70%-75% of Buddhist monastics in Taiwan are nuns" (Cheng 2006 p. 39). The Tzu-Chi organisation, well known for its matriarchal nature, is one of the representative lay Buddhist organisations of Humanistic Buddhism. Cheng (2006) believes that Master Zheng-Yan is "a symbol or inspiration of empowerment for Buddhist nuns" (p. 43). The strong lay characteristic

and the status of female monastics in Taiwanese Buddhism exemplify the inadequacy of conventional religious studies which are based on sacred texts.

The exceptionally high status of female monastics as well as the high percentage of lay women in Taiwanese Buddhism demonstrate the gap between sacred texts and daily practices. Social contexts and historical background are important in studying Buddhist women because Buddhism, as a religious philosophy, intertwines with secular ideology in most Asian countries (Kawanami 1996; Lefferts 2000; Mellor 1991). In order to put Buddhist women back into the cultural contexts they belong, the scholars should look into the secular ideology that greatly influences daily practices. As for this research, the Tzu-Chi organisation is a Buddhist organisation situated in a Confucian society. It is essential to look into gender in Confucianism as contextual information to study Buddhist women in Taiwan.

In Confucian traditions, women are tied up with the family which is a patriarchal heterosexual matrix. In Butler's terms (1993), the compulsory heterosexual matrix is where male sex is appointed to masculine gender attributes and a desire for female sex and vice versa. That is, the process of gendered subjectification is centred on heterosexuality. The heterosexual matrix is where a subject acquires gender identification which strongly binds them to their biological sex. The heterosexual matrix provides the basis for sex and gender binary opposition. The process of naturalised gender and sex is a product of discourse under the heterosexual matrix. Butler's analysis loosens the naturalised pairs of female and feminine, male and masculine. However, the dual oppositions of female/ male, feminine/ masculine and heterosexual/ homosexual do not disappear from Butler's analysis. Confucianism is indeed a powerful heterosexual matrix but the naturalisation of gender discourses works in a slightly different way. The dual oppositions of sex and gender should be seen as a complementary pair which is a different point of view from Eurocentric feminists (Yin 2006). Delphy (1993) argues that gender is a hierarchy where one gendered group (men) overpowers the other one (women). Through naturalising biological sex, the superiority of male sex and masculinity are established. Adapting this point of view makes Confucianism a patriarchal tradition that oppresses and victimises women (Kwok 2002). Bringing the ethics of *fen* (duties and obligations) into the discussion of gender construction, I would like to argue that Confucian gender discourse lies in an individual's abilities to fulfil his/ her duties in different social networks (Yin 2006). Women and men alike need to situate themselves in the human relationship expanded from marriages. Only by fulfilling their roles as sons and daughters, husbands and wives, and fathers and mothers are they qualified as gendered beings.

Although heterosexuality is the only normative way to manifest a subject's desire in Confucian society, it is not homosexuality that is feared. Homosexuality is feared not because of their sexual orientation or sexual behaviour but because they are unable to fulfil their duties and roles assigned by the heterosexual mechanism of Confucianism. Huang-lin (2004) argues that, in pre-modern China, homosexual behaviour was a sexual act that did not determine an individual's subjectivity. As long as a man fulfilled his duties and obligations as a son, a husband and a father, his homosexual act was not condemned. In pre-modern China, the definition of gender was situated and defined in human relationships rather than biological sex or sexuality (p. 162-163). Not only is homosexuality a threat to Confucian heterosexual matrix, but also singlehood⁴ because single people or homosexuals have no place in the familial networks. In imperial China, women who were not satisfied with their marriage chose to leave the family for a monastic life in Buddhist temples. Or, some chose to buy concubines for their husbands to fulfil the wifely duties (i.e. to produce male heirs) and serve their husbands' sexual needs. Leaving the family for celibacy is against Confucian values of filial piety; therefore, lay Buddhist groups such as Vegetarian Halls or sutra chanting groups enable women to "develop Buddhist religiosity without leaving the family" (Weller 1999 p. 94). The tendency for women to choose a religious life establishes a strong lay feature in Chinese Buddhism.

The intertwining relationship between social contexts and religious philosophy is more complicated in the age of electronic media. The textually based study of religions fails to acknowledge the complex network between social context and religious doctrines. Furthermore, a textually based study risks ignoring various types of media used to transmit and circulate religious symbols in the contemporary world (Arthur 2004; Lundby and Hoover 1997). In studies of religions, a method that looks into different media other than the written text helps us to understand how religions adapt electronic media to reach a broader public, as well as lay people's perceptions and practices of religions based on electronic media (Meyer and Moors 2006). Studies of religions should bring the electronic media use of religions into discussion while cultural studies should consider religion as an important topic like gender, race, or class (ibid.).

This study of Da-Ai Drama examines the religious use of prime-time dramas and its influences on the audience. Da-Ai Drama sets out to record life stories of Tzu-Chi members in a docudrama form. The docudrama form of Da-Ai Drama offers the

⁴ In late imperial China, widowhood was encouraged by the state under the supervision of Neo-Confucians. Therefore, the singlehood here refers to people who have never entered marriages.

audience a chance to see how the leading characters, usually ordinary people, live their lives and go through ups and downs. As 80% of Tzu-Chi's members are women, Da-Ai Drama often records Taiwanese women's life stories which happened in the twentieth century. Examining the media contents of Da-Ai Drama helps to understand how women are represented in the dramas as well as how they are constructed in a Confucian society. The heavily lay feature of Humanistic Buddhism makes it necessary to see how Buddhist organisations use secular media to approach and attract the public by embedding the religious agenda in the media.

The aims of this study are:

- (a) To examine gender and religious representation in Taiwanese Da-Ai Drama and the interactions between gender representation and religious representation.
- (b) To examine a religious TV form other than Christian evangelism in order to analyse the interactions among media discourse, gender discourse and religious discourse.
- (c) To understand the extent to which media representation of gender and religion reflects dominant ideologies of gender and religion, and to explore the impact of this media text on its audiences.
- (d) To shed light on broader issues of gender and religion in Taiwanese society, and to contribute to academic debates about media audiences, religious broadcasting and gender.

Methodology

Noting the weakness of text-based studies on women in Confucianism and Buddhism, I undertook research on a media platform other than written texts. Rather than interviewing or observing participants from contemporary lay Buddhist organisations, I attempted to see how the televisual media is used to represent contemporary practitioners and how the audience reads the media representations. Thus, the methodology used in this thesis is experimental in a sense that it combines qualitative research methods from different areas, mostly cultural studies. The research methods also reflect my standpoint as a bridge between 'elite feminists' and 'grassroot women.' Undertaking research on televisual contents is a challenge against 'conventional' way of studying religions and religious women. As a researcher, I cannot avoid the 'elite' tradition I am critiquing in this thesis. Therefore, in addition to my reading and

interpretation from an 'intellectual' point of view, I chose to represent the audience's readings and interpretations on the televisual contents. It is not my purpose to speak for, or, represent any group of women; however, it is one of my purposes to point out the way in which the academia constructs a discourse of victimised religious women and how the 'grassroot women' respond to the 'patriarchal oppression.'

Firstly, to I undertook some textual analysis of Da-Ai Drama examine a religious broadcast which is not televangelism. This is done for the purpose of studying religious women from a non-written textual tradition. Deriving my concept from the huge amount of feminist studies on soap operas, I would like to add a religious approach to the communication studies because religions play an important role in mass media culture. Also, it is my attempt to bring media studies into the field of religious studies as media studies and religious studies are often treated as two separated fields

Secondly, in addition to my analysis of the chosen dramas I also analysed audience response. At the beginning of my fieldwork I intended to conduct focus group interviews in a family setting so that I could observe different readings of Da-Ai Drama from different generational positions. However, as the dramas cover sensitive familial issues, it was difficult to get the younger members to talk when the senior family members were around. I soon discarded the focus group interviews and started one-to-one in-depth interviews, as it turned out that this method encouraged people to talk more easily. I started to recruit interviewees by asking my parents and my friends if they had friends who regularly watched Da-Ai Drama. It then turned out that most of my interviewees were of my parents' generation because snowballing is a very efficient method as my parents are active members in several voluntary services. The one-to-one in-depth interviews gave me an insight to how the audience viewed Da-Ai Drama in a broad sense: I asked them questions such as why they watched Da-Ai Drama during the prime-time slot and what they thought about the media representation of women and the family in Da-Ai Drama.

Following the in-depth interviews, various comments were collected from the Internet. Considering the popularity of social networking websites and various internet tools to transmit information, I decided to use online materials as an additional research resource. As an insider of online fan activities, I have become aware that there is a lack of scholarly discussion on the potential of online fandom to consume media products and found a discourse around mass media culture. The usage of online materials creates a slight anxiety among scholars because the virtual community cannot tell the scholars about the informants' social and economic backgrounds. However, the online

users create a discourse towards certain topics. The televisual media have increasingly transformed these comments and norms into televisual form. The success of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution has shown the world how powerful the virtual community can be. It is the 'real' human beings who are active in the 'virtual' world, this is a potentially useful research tool. Therefore, I chose to collect online materials from different social networking sites.

Examining Media Contents

In order to explore the themes on gender and religion in Da-Ai Drama, a study of media content is necessary. Evans (1990) notes that the recent assumption of media studies is that media content is open to interpretation and that the audience is active in interpreting the media messages. However, Corner (1991) argues that too much emphasis on the polysemic media content over-estimates the interpretative power of the audience. Although the audience is active, it does not mean that the effects of media texts and messages can be reduced. Therefore, Morley (1992) argues that "the analysis of the text or message remains, of course, a fundamental necessity, for the polysemy of the message is not without its own structure. Audiences do not see only what they want to see, since a message (or programme) is not simply a window on the world, but a construction. [...] The message is capable of different interpretations depending on the context of association" (p.21). As a researcher, my interpretation is influenced by the social discourses I have access to; this is also true of other audiences. Apart from analysing media texts of Da-Ai Drama, this research includes interviews from the audience as well as blogging and online forum discussions to present various readings on Da-Ai Drama.

Visual narrative can best tell us how the production teams of Da-Ai Drama tackle gender issues in the drama series as well as the embedded religious themes in the dramas. Different from sociologists who use visual methods to study society (Artieri 1996; Grady 1996; Harper 2005; Jenks 1995), this research studies society through the visual materials carefully edited and professionally produced by Da-Ai TV. Da-Ai Drama is a visual material that provides large amounts of docudramas on women in the twentieth century. Okely (1992) argues that the autobiographies, either oral or written, are shaped by the tellers as well as the listeners (p.16). The biographies of Tzu-Chi members need to be transformed and mediated through televisual discourse so that the stories reach the audience. As Hall (2003) argues, "a 'raw' historical event cannot, *in that form*, be transmitted by, say, a television newscast" (p.52). In order to make an historical event into a *communicative event*, the event must become a story

which involves the working of social discourses and televisual discourse. Thus, Da-Ai Drama is a product of Tzu-Chi members, the production teams and the audience. The represented social reality in Da-Ai Drama is produced not only by the production teams but also by the leading characters and the audience.

Narrative analysis is useful to reveal the social context because “culture ‘speaks itself’ through an individual’s story” (Riessman 1993 p. 5). It is Chaffe’s (1990) belief that narrative analysis opens up a window towards understanding cultures of different groups of people. Through narrative analysis of Da-Ai Drama, the mediated and constructed social reality of Buddhist women in Taiwanese society can be unfolded. Developing from the tradition of literary studies, narrative analysis is used by sociologists to analyse qualitative data in order to study the way the narrators speak and the subjectivity of the narrators (Rosenwald & Ochberg 1992). Narrative analysis studies the story narrated by the narrator (the content) and the way the narrator narrates it (the narrative discourse). As we can only see a story through a narrative discourse, “the story is always mediated” (Abbott 2008 p. 20). Traditionally, the narrative analysis is used on written texts that are transcribed from the interviews. That is, the narrative analysis is mostly used on examining verbal narrative discourse. I would like to broaden the scope of narrative analysis by examining the visual and audio materials, because this research sets out to critique the textual-based tradition in the studies of religion (i.e. Buddhism) and philosophy (i.e. Confucianism). This study would then look into the media content of Da-Ai Dramas as well as the narrative discourse (i.e. the way the stories are represented in the dramas and the ideology behind the telling of the stories).

Three dramas are chosen for analysis, *Ming-yue zhao hong-chen* [明月照紅塵] (hereafter, *Ming-yue*), *Huang jin-xian* [黃金線] (hereafter, *Huang*), and *Xi-gu A-ma* [矚谷阿嬤] (hereafter, *Xi-gu*). *Ming-yue* is chosen for analysis because every one of my interviewees mentions this drama and the rating was high when it was broadcast in 2005. *Ming-yue*, consisting of sixty-six episodes, tells the story of a female Tzu-Chi member’s life story from the 1910s up to the present day. *Huang jin-xian* (2008) is an award-winning drama that consists of seventeen episodes. *Ming-yue* is chosen for analysis because of its popularity among the audience while *Huang* is chosen because of its award-winning quality. The director of *Huang* turned to commercial TV networks and made a huge success in 2009. *Xi-gu* is chosen because the director directed one of the most discussed Da-Ai Dramas, *Cao-shan chun-hui* [草山春暉]. Both the

production team and the cast are award-winning teams with successful ratings in the industry.

These dramas are visual biographies which are based on the leading characters' oral narratives of their life stories. The visual and dramatic adaptation of these stories implicitly reflects Tzu-Chi's agenda which is the main focus of this study. For the purpose of the study, I purchased the DVD sets of these three dramas right after the fieldwork had been finished. In preparation for the analysis of the dramas, I collected articles and reports related to these dramas from newspapers as well as the Internet. Before I started to watch the dramas, I had read reports from journalists as well as discussions and comments from online forums. The analysis started with watching one drama after the other. In order to extract the contextual information from the production team, I also watched the talk-show sessions after each episode of the drama. The talk-show sessions showed interviews with the production teams as well as the actors and the actresses. What is more, the 'real' people from the adapted stories also showed up in the talk-show sessions to talk about the stories. I took notes on those interviewing sessions in order to construct a framework for the production end. The first step was to familiarise myself with the plots. Therefore, during the first watching, I scribbled down the plots in each episode. After finishing one drama, I drew a plot summary with the relationships among its leading characters. From May to June 2009, I spent approximately four to five hours a day watching the dramas for the first time. Having the basic plots in the notes, I then proceeded to closely watch them episode by episode. For the second time of watching, I spent approximately three to four hours a day from July 2009 to September 2009. During the second watching, I took notes on the scenes containing themes around gender construction and gender roles. After this, I then went through the notes from the first watching and the second watching and started the coding process.

During the process of viewing the notes and making major groupings, I found a narrative pattern which corresponded to Reed's study (2003) on the narrative of the written texts of Guan-yin⁵ stories in Taiwan. The Guan-yin narrative begins with the narrator being in a tragic situation, be it an accident or an illness. Struggling to get over the difficult time, the narrator comes into contact with friends or family members who introduce Guan-yin's healing power to him. The climax of the narrative structure lies in the narrator's personal encounter with Guan-yin. Guan-yin's power of immediate healing or protection from disasters turns the narrator into a devout Buddhist. The

⁵ Guan-yin is a Bodhisattva who transformed from a male deity to a female one in Chinese folk Buddhism.

similar narrative pattern in Da-Ai Drama and Reed's Guan-yin narrative encouraged me to look into the narrative structure of Da-Ai Drama. During the third watching, I elicited scenes that were related to major groupings and looked into the visual arrangements of those scenes. This is a process of examining themes and building codebooks. The analysis of the visual arrangements of those scenes raises an issue of "cultural repertoire" that I have. The non-linguistic signs are open to interpretation because the signifieds are floating (Barthes 1964 p. 39). My knowledge to access these floating signifieds is culturally and historically specific. Researchers from other cultures or different generations from my culture would not read the signs in the same way as I did. Being aware of my situated knowledge, I went on to compare my readings of the dramas with other audiences' views (i.e. data collected from interviews and online materials).

Examining the Reception End

What is the audience of TV industries? Ang (1991) points out that the audience "is not an ontological given, but a socially-constituted and institutionally-produced category" (p.3). The actual audience has been transformed into numeric based figures called "ratings" which contain heavy commercial information. The socio-cultural and institutional contexts should be considered when studying the audience because they are simplified into numbers, to serve the commercial benefits of TV industries. Therefore, the audience is a construction which is "a figment of the sober, expensive and often influential imagination of impersonal institutions" (Miller 2002 p. 60). Is there a real existing audience? Both McQuail (1997) and Miller (2002) believe that the audience belongs to a larger context and they are products of the social contexts. Morley (1992) urges for a study of the audience which investigates "the extent to which these individual readings are patterned into cultural structures and clusters" (p.54). That is not only to study the audience's interpretations of the media texts but also to examine the discourses where the audience belongs. This research not only looks into Da-Ai Drama to understand a larger narrative discourse where it belongs, but it also looks into the larger discourse where the audience belongs. How gender is constructed in Taiwanese society can be understood by unfolding the complicated network between media discourse and audience interpretation. Scholars like Bobo (1988) study black female viewers on mainstream film in order to understand the way "a specific audience creates meaning from a mainstream text and uses the reconstructed meaning to empower themselves and their social group" (p.92-93). This research also looks into audience response to see how a female audience is empowered through their gendered viewing behaviour.

Brown (1994) suggests that the gendered viewing of soaps is political and a kind of empowerment for women because soap watching does not stop when the show finishes. Women enjoy gossiping and talking about it afterwards. Through talking and gossiping about soaps, the female audience establishes solidarity, enabling women to share their pleasure, secret knowledge and “probably” power to break rules (p.132). Similarly, Geraghty (1991) states that “escapism” is what enables a utopian possibility for its audience to enjoy changes or solutions to their daily emotional dilemmas (p.130). A united sisterhood seems to emerge as an impact of soap watching. However, the theorisation of gendered audience is because it often refers to white, middle-class, First World women. In her opinion:

“...gendered viewing, however, needs to be conceptualised in terms of certain specific cultural, social, and historical notions of what appropriately is viewed, enjoyed, and valued as masculine or feminine viewing practices and other practices of daily life and sense-making” (Brown 1994 p.14).

As for the images of women in soap operas, Ang (1996) argues that “soap operas do not simply reflect already existing stereotypical images of women, but actively produce a symbolic form of feminine identity, by inscribing a specific subject position--that of the ‘ideal mother’--in its textual fabric” (p.112). With feminists, works on media and audience evolve; women’s roles as media consumers switch from passive victims to an empowering position in which female audiences are able to resist the dominant meanings and discourses in the media (p.114). In order to find out how the audience think about the gender representation in Da-Ai Drama, and whether those images are oppressive or empowering, I have conducted in-depth interviews and collected articles from online forums.

Whilst carrying out my fieldwork, I was often asked about my research topic. As soon as my friends or my parents’ friends knew about my research on Da-Ai Drama, they all had a word or two to say about Da-Ai Drama. Some of my friends appreciate the quality of Da-Ai Drama and would start recommending dramas to me. Some of my friends watch Da-Ai Drama with their parents and dislike the “traditional values” embedded in the dramas, while some like how the dramas help them to sort out confusions in life. I was impressed by a woman in her eighties who started to share with me her experiences as a Tzu-Chi volunteer over the past two decades. The casual chats with people gave me the impression that Da-Ai Drama reaches a broader public than other religious channels. These people are not exclusively limited to Tzu-Chi

members or Buddhists; neither are these audiences limited to a certain age group. Da-Ai Drama becomes the name of a particular genre of dramas which connotes with quality drama, Buddhism, Tzu-Chi, traditional values, educational programmes etc. In order to know more about audiences' thoughts on gender representation and religious themes in Da-Ai Drama, I chose in-depth interviews to know more about audiences' opinions in general.

I conducted fourteen⁶ one-to-one, semi-structured interviews with people from the Taiwanese audience, each lasting half an hour to an hour. The interviews were conducted during December 2008 and January 2009. The interviewees, aged from thirty to sixty years, were recruited via snowballing from my parents and my friends who live in the central part of Taiwan (Taichung).⁷ Seven of them were more than fifty years old; three of them were forty to fifty years old; and four of them were thirty to forty years old. Only two interviewees were male and only one of all the interviewees had never been married. The interviewees were from audiences who have the habit of watching Da-Ai Drama at prime-time. Apart from one male interviewee, aged thirty to forty, who watched Da-Ai Drama via webcasting, all of the interviewees watch Da-Ai Drama during prime-time at home. Each interview took place in the interviewees' house or their place of work, within travelling distance that was convenient for all concerned. Before each interviewing session, I asked the participants to fill in a consent form in which they were asked to provide basic personal information on age, marital status, gender, religion and if they wished to request anonymity. I chose not to ask their educational background because, as Chapter 2 will show, educational background does not fairly represent an individual when discussing Taiwanese society across different generations⁸. Although only one of them chose to be anonymous, I struggled in the writing process about the degree to which I should reveal the marital status of some of my participants as well as details they gave about personal familial conflicts⁹. Only two of the interviewees chose not to disclose their religious identification whereas the rest of them identified themselves as Buddhists. The

⁶ In fact, I conducted eighteen interviews but only fourteen of them with better recording qualities are transcribed and used for the analysis purpose.

⁷ Please see Appendix B. for more details.

⁸ For example, a few of the female interviewees with primary school education had their children studying in one of the best universities on the island. Others who received high school education had children studying in universities as well. Interviewees with poorer or richer backgrounds all had their children studying in higher education institutions. The issues on education will be further discussed in Chapter 2.

⁹ For example, I got to know the 'actual' marital status of some interviewees which were different from what they 'claimed' on paper during the interviews. As divorce or separation remains a sensitive issue among certain communities, I struggled at how much information I could disclose when the informants agreed to use their real names.

questions were open-ended and half-structured,¹⁰ and they were designed not only to understand how the audience perceived gender and religious themes in Da-Ai Drama, but also to understand the social discourse of gender and religions.

Among the female interviewees, only two of them held a job, and they both belonged to the cohort of thirty to forty-year-olds. The rest of the female interviewees were either retired or had been housewives after getting married. One of the male interviewees held a job in an art gallery while the other one was a retired civil servant. As generational difference is one of my focuses in this thesis, my interviewees can be separated into two generations. People aged more than forty years old share a more or less similar social milieu to that of my parents who were in their early fifties at the time of my fieldwork. People under forty years old more or less belonged to my generation¹¹. Saying so does not mean we shared exact similar experiences in terms of rapid social changes.¹² What was most noticeable was that only two of the interviewees (one male and one female) did not have any voluntary experiences prior to the interviews. Most of the women aged over forty regularly attended voluntary services, be it in the public sector or private sector, mostly religious based social services, while the female interviewees aged under forty attended voluntary services occasionally. The fact that most of the interviewees have experiences in voluntary services demonstrates that women could generate 'informal capital' via undertaking voluntary services¹³.

For most of the time I chatted with the interviewees as a warming-up session before I started recording. The advantage of recruiting the interviewees through snowballing was to get them to talk more frankly in the interviews. As most of them knew about me from my parents or my friends, they did not act shyly or nervously during the interviews. As most of my interviewees were female, around my parents' age (in their fifties), they answered questions or told their own stories as if they were sharing their life experiences with me. I did recognise the role gender played in these interviews. When talking about family or their opinions on the familial values, the female interviewees talked more than male interviewees and the female interviewees were more willing to share the difficult times they had had with me. My position as a younger woman enabled me to listen to their life stories in more detail. It seems like I will tread a similar path one day in the future so they felt that they had to tell me something in advance. Some of them acted like seniors who were responsible for educating a junior and so

¹⁰ Please see Appendix C. for more details.

¹¹ One of my female interviewees was my eldest cousin from my father's side

¹² Chapter 2 will show that society has changed rapidly in the last few decades.

¹³ Chapter 2 will show that encouraging the public to undertake voluntary services is one of the government's agendas.

they gave me lectures on certain topics, particularly those related to marriage. Although they did not appear to be extremely anxious about the presence of the recorders, some of the interviewees talked more freely when I was not recording so I took notes as soon as I had finished the interviews.

After each interview, I spent half an hour to an hour reflecting on the content of the interview, as well as making notes on the unrecorded part of the conversation and the certain gestures and facial expressions used. After I had finished all the interviews, I started to transcribe them into written texts for future analysis. As all the interviews were conducted in either Chinese or Taiwanese, all the transcriptions were in Chinese. I did not start to translate them into English until the writing-up period, as I did not wish to lose the original sense of the interviews. When the transcriptions were done, I started the coding process in a thematic way. On the first time of reading the materials, I made notes on individual transcriptions and listed keywords under each question. Furthermore, I linked the fieldwork notes to each transcription for an understanding of the social context of the interviewees. In later readings of the transcriptions, I cross-linked the codes between interviewees.

Added on to the in-depth interviews are the comments collected from the Internet forums and blogs. From the start of my PhD research, I have been reading several online forums about Da-Ai dramas and Taiwanese TV dramas, including the official website of the Da-Ai TV channel. Reading people's comments and discussions on dramas or films in the online forums is a habit of mine, because I am one of those girl fans who join online forums to discuss their favourite singers and actors. At the beginning, using online materials did not occur to me. I read Da-Ai's forum as a way to observe fan culture online, which has nothing to do with this research. However, as I was watching Da-Ai's forum one day, there was a huge debate on the drama being broadcast at the time because it was about a man with two "wives".¹⁴ It caused an overwhelming number of arguments on moral values and so on. One of the supporters of the drama suggested users to Google "Da-Ai dramas" to see what other viewers had written in their blogs.¹⁵ With that in mind, I googled it and found quite a lot of discussions about Da-Ai Drama in various online forums and individual blogs. Because my interviews lacked a focus on opinions of individual dramas, I then decided to use online materials¹⁶ as a complement to the audience end of Da-Ai Drama. Although I

¹⁴ He lived with two women, one was his wife in the legal sense and the other one was his real wife.

¹⁵ In Taiwan, blogging is popular not only among the younger generation, but also among people in my parents' age group who are now learning how to blog.

¹⁶ Please see Appendix D.

had been reading the online forums from the official site of Da-Ai Drama, I did not use any materials from the official site. Instead, I went to one of the biggest and most popular Bulletin Board Systems (BBS), PTT, in Taiwan. Within this huge site, there are various discussion boards covering topics from everyday life to academic discussions. As it is a huge virtual community where a lot of online users discuss different issues, I read two discussion boards, "TaiwanDrama" and "Da-AiTV." The BBS system allows the discussion boards to have shorter comments after each article. Instead of having a long thread of responding articles, some articles might be followed by short comments from different users.

During my search for online bloggers and forums that discuss Da-Ai Drama, I found an online forum, *Forums for Xi-gu A-ma*, set up by Tzu-Chi members in North America. The discussion board was actively engaged by members who were closely connected to one of the leading characters of my analysed dramas. Some of the comments were posted by people whose stories were shown in the drama. It is an exciting example of how online discussion forums can be used to share life experiences as well as watching experiences. Apart from the websites I mentioned above, I used some online materials from forums that mostly discuss popular culture, from TV dramas to films. Also, a few bloggers' articles were used in response to their watching experiences.

The online materials were used to a) analyse the discourse on Da-Ai Drama vs. commercial prime-time dramas; b) collect comments and thoughts on the dramas I chose to analyse. The online materials were treated like interview transcriptions. All the materials were coded in a thematic way. Although it is difficult to get the social context of online users, the online materials provided discourses of Da-Ai Drama and other commercial dramas. The online communities were observed and the online comments were used in the thesis for the purpose of analysing the community network among the audience. As soap operas can be empowering to a female audience when they discuss them with a fellow female audience, the boost of online communities could add a new aspect to the fan community and its empowerment.

Thesis layout

As Taiwanese society is strongly connected with Confucian tradition, a brief review of Confucianism and Buddhism, before the modern period, is a way of getting to know the cultural and historical context of Taiwanese society. I will start the thesis with a discussion of women in Confucianism. Chapter 2 presents contextual information of

women in Taiwanese society for readers who are not familiar with the history and society of Taiwan. Using major political moments as a breakdown of different historical periods, the chapter presents an overall social change from the beginning of the twentieth century to the end of the twentieth century. Beginning the chapter with Japanese colonisation (1895-1945), the first section of the chapter reveals the way in which Chinese cultural practices were kept under Japanese colonisation. After a discussion on the social environment during Japanese colonisation, the second part of the chapter proceeds to economic changes and women's movements during the KMT period (1945-1987). The contextual information shows the way in which family patterns were changed throughout the economic development, and how these changes challenged academic discourse on women in Confucianism and Sinic societies. The final part of the chapter shows the current situation of women in the legal system, the education system, and so on.

Chapter 3 begins with contextual and factual information on religious activities in Taiwanese society. The discussion leads to a re-definition of religion in this thesis. The institutionally-oriented and textually-based definition of religion does not fit into the context of Taiwanese religious traditions. Chapter 3 presents the contextual background of the origin of Humanistic Buddhism as a response to the process of modernisation in China. Seeing the decline and corruption of Chinese Buddhism at the end of the nineteenth century, Master Taixu came up with Humanistic Buddhism to reform and modernise monastic systems in China. Following his advocacy of Humanistic Buddhism, Master Yin-Shun encourages Buddhists to participate in "this-worldly" affairs because Buddha attained Nirvana in this world. Master Yin-Shun becomes the indexical figure in contemporary Taiwanese Buddhism because the leaders of the largest Buddhist organisations are disciples of Master Yin-Shun. The discussion of Humanistic Buddhism is the context where the Tzu-Chi organisation locates Master Zheng-Yan as one of Master Yin-Shun's disciples. Aiming to build a heaven in this world, Master Zheng-Yan encourages her followers to practise Buddhist doctrines by *action*. As Tzu-Chi becomes one of the largest NGOs in Taiwan, scholars have become more and more interested in the different aspects of the Tzu-Chi organisation, other than the religious perspective. Chapter 3 provides essential background for readers to familiarise themselves with the religious context of this study, which aims to explore how Tzu-Chi's agenda is embedded in its media products.

As the main focus of this study is Da-Ai Drama, which uses the docudrama form, Chapter 4 provides a basic understanding of the Taiwanese media industry. After a brief introduction to the media context, Chapter 4 brings in the discussion of religious

broadcasting. The history of religious broadcasting first raised scholarly interests in the 1950s. Televangelism was the first type of religious broadcasting that raised scholarly interests. Studies of televangelism did not make religion an aspect of study in media and cultural studies. Not until the last two decades did scholars notice the complicated relationships between various types of media and religion. The discussion on religion and media helps us to understand the significance of Da-Ai Drama in terms of religious broadcasting and how Da-Ai Drama changes the followers' Buddhist daily practices. Because of the docudrama form used by Da-Ai Drama, debates on the values of docudrama need to be drawn into the discussion. Scholarly interest in 'fact' and 'truth' in docudrama helps us to understand why Da-Ai Drama takes a semi-reality TV format. The re-constructed and staged reality helps the audience to watch serious issues within an entertainment format. The docudrama form is one of the reasons why Da-Ai Drama is so successful nationwide. Chapter 6 will show a detailed analysis from the audience end.

In Chapter 5, there are three dramas chosen for analysis. All the dramas show a similar narrative structure, in which the leading characters go through a typical life passage of women in Confucian society; from daughters, to wives, to mothers to mothers-in-law. In order to present the blurry line between the dramas and the reality as well as the narrative structure, Chapter 5 is presented as a playscript: *LIFE AS A PLAY*. The narrative structure of these dramas can be divided into three stages. These three stages are presented as three acts in the play. Within each act, various themes are discussed to unfold the gender representation and religious themes in the dramas. The leading characters who enjoy happy childhoods start to face various kinds of challenges and difficulties after being married. Being tough and strong, the leading characters overcome the difficulties and start to devote themselves to the Tzu-Chi organisation. Analysing gender representation in these dramas helps us to understand how women are constructed in a Confucian society. Analysing the religious themes embedded in these dramas enables the audience to know how Tzu-Chi embeds its agenda in the docudrama form of Da-Ai Drama. Although there are Da-Ai dramas that tell the stories of Tzu-Chi's male members, my analysis here focuses on female members in the Tzu-Chi organisation. Chapter 5 shows readers what Da-Ai Drama is and the themes covered in the dramas. Understanding what Da-Ai Drama is allows us to further discuss what the audience thinks about Da-Ai Drama.

Presenting the response of the audience to Da-Ai Drama, Chapter 6 starts with a debate about prime-time TV dramas in Taiwan. The debate explains why some members of the audience choose the Da-Ai TV network over commercial TV networks.

This chapter presents a possibility for practising Buddhism via watching Da-Ai Drama. The educational meanings of docudramas enable the audience to reflect on their personal experiences via the dramas. Therefore, the reality presented in the dramas blurs with the reality lived by the audience. Seeing the leading characters' abilities to cope with difficult times, the audience learns from the dramas and tries to behave and think in a positive way. The narrative structure of Da-Ai Drama creates the leading characters as human Bodhisattvas--saint-like figures--who help themselves, as well as others, out of difficult times. The practice of Bodhisattva's path invites the leading characters as well as the audience to create a "this-worldly" heaven, which is the core value of Humanistic Buddhism.

Chapter 2

Taiwan in the 20th Century--Women in a Fast-Changing Society

Introduction

Da-Ai Drama is a docudrama series that records the life stories of Tzu-Chi members (mostly women) in the twentieth century. In order to foreground the analysis of Da-Ai Drama (Chapter 6) and the responses of the audience (Chapter 7), I would like to provide some brief contextual information about Taiwanese society in the twentieth century. Taiwan has undergone rapid social, political, and economic changes in the twentieth century. These changes demonstrate changing concepts about gender relations and women. Da-Ai Drama represents the changing role of women in the process of modernisation and such social changes become an essential part of watching behaviour. This chapter aims to examine the process of modernisation, democratisation, industrialisation, and urbanisation of twentieth-century Taiwan. In the first half of the century, Taiwan remained an agricultural society, which means that industrialisation has happened rapidly, in less than fifty years, in Taiwanese history. The rapid changes from industrialisation, urbanisation, and democratisation are part and parcel of the contents of Da-Ai Drama and watching experiences. These changes create generational differences and a sense of nostalgia for those watching Da-Ai Drama which themselves reflect the social changes of the twentieth century.

An overall picture of social change in Taiwanese society will help to contextualise Buddhist women and the female audience of Da-Ai Drama. Also, this chapter aims to demonstrate the generational differences created by rapid social changes. An understanding of women across the generations also helps us to understand the changes in women's situation in society, and to avoid the biased tendency to lay blame on religious organisations for teaching women to put up with their difficult lives or patriarchal oppression. Prior to Japanese colonisation (1895-1945), Taiwan went through a short period of Dutch and Spanish colonisation (1624-1662) and a long

period of Chinese rule (1662-1895).¹⁷ In terms of immigration history, the largest ethnic group in Taiwan is Han-Chinese. 'Indigenous Taiwanese' include 'Han-Chinese' and 'indigenous aborigines,' who constituted 2% of the population in 1900. There are two major ethnic groups among Han-Chinese: Ho-los who speak Taiwanese, which is spoken among most Chinese diaspora in South-East Asia, and Hakkas who speak Hakka, a dialect similar to Cantonese. Since the 1990s, there have been more foreign brides from South-East Asia which has created a more diverse picture of ethnicity in contemporary Taiwan. Politically speaking, Japanese colonisation and the KMT regime (1945-1987) have played an important role in shaping modern Taiwan. These authoritarian states are recent history and still remain as a vivid picture in a present day democratic society. This chapter chronologically presents the social changes, accompanied by discussions on the political changes, economic growth, social class mobility, educational system, and women's status in society.¹⁸ This contextual information about social changes helps to foreground the discussion of women in a Confucian society in the contemporary world. The religious aspect will be elicited as a separate section in the next chapter. This chapter demonstrates the rapid changes that have taken place within Taiwanese Confucian society and suggests that a textually based study on gender/ women is not sufficient to unravel the complex of 'patriarchy' in this context and a wider global society more broadly.

Japanese Colonisation (1895-1945)

At the beginning of Japanese colonisation, Taiwanese culture, which is predominantly inherent Chinese due to immigrant history, was preserved. Not until the 1930s and the 1940s, when the Japanese government started the *Kominka* movement ('Japanisation' movement), did the government start to repress Taiwanese indigenous culture, languages, religions, and so on. Culturally speaking, most Taiwanese people were allowed to preserve their cultural backgrounds and religious beliefs. Tomiyama (1995) states that Japanese colonisation is more a 'cooperativism' than an 'oppression' of cultures. The next chapter will discuss religious activities in the Japanese colonial period. Early studies on rural development show that 65% of the Taiwanese population

¹⁷ Teng (2004) examines the Ch'ing (1644-1911) travel accounts to analyse the gender discourse on indigenous women in early Taiwan. The study offers an understanding of Ch'ing colonial discourse which sexualised the 'savage women' in Taiwan.

¹⁸ Farris (2004) has a detailed account of the role of Taiwanese women and their liberation in the process of modernisation. Focusing on the socioeconomic changes and the political democratisation, Farris examines women's status in the twentieth century in great detail.

were employed in agriculture in 1900 while 50% of the Taiwanese population were in agriculture in the 1950s (Wu, 1979). The class division in an agricultural society lies in the possession of lands. Marsh (2003) states that “the main class division was between landlords and landless in rural Taiwan” (p.39). Adding ethnicity into the discussion, Marsh’s statement should be refined to reflect the fact that the main class division ‘among Han Chinese’ was between landlords and landless in rural Taiwan. In the Japanese colonial period, the Japanese were ‘the elite’ while the indigenous Taiwanese, mainly Han Chinese, were engaged in agricultural activities. As the indigenous aborigines basically lived in the mountainous areas, their economic activities were based on hunting rather than farming.

Although Taiwan remained an agricultural society under Japanese colonisation, the Japanese government initiated projects to modernise Taiwan’s infrastructure. A modernised educational system was implanted and indigenous Taiwanese with better social or economic backgrounds had the opportunity to enter the Higher Education system or to study in Japan. The segregation of education between Japanese and Taiwanese was lifted in the 1920s which further narrowed the gap between the coloniser and the colonised people. These intellectuals who received higher education either in Taiwan or in Japan initiated the democratic movement and the women’s movements. Under Japanese colonisation, Taiwan had made huge progress in agricultural development and was prepared for an industrial and service economy (Howe 2001, pp. 47). The improvement of the quality of human resources through formal education and job training laid a foundation for the later period (ibid., pp. 48).

In terms of political movements, local councillors were partly made up of Taiwanese, elected by Taiwanese men who held certain social status. Partial freedom in politics was given to the Taiwanese population. There were attempts to set up a women’s group during Japanese colonisation; however, it was dismissed (Chen 2000). Within the small amount of literature on women’s movements in the Japanese colonial period, Yang (1993) points out that the women’s movement in this period resembled the women’s liberation movements in China, which was greatly influenced by the May Fourth Movement. The issue of women’s liberation became a predominant concern of patriotic intellectuals because of the fear of Eurocentric colonialism and the changes of the political system (from imperial regimes to democratic states). It was believed that liberating women from ‘corrupted traditions’ helped to build up a progressive nation against colonialism from the West. Different from most women’s movements in Europe or America, women’s liberation was advocated by *male* intellectuals in the early

twentieth century. Information about women's social status in the early twentieth century is hard to retrieve. However, through examining the representation of female characters in early twentieth-century Taiwanese fiction, Chen (2003) divides women under Japanese colonisation into three categories: 'new-edge women'; 'traditional women'; and 'women in-between'. Chen's examination of early twentieth-century fiction reveals the fact that there was a diversity of women in the early twentieth century. There were women who had received higher education in Japan and, therefore, held more 'modernised' attitudes towards marriage. There were women who were brought up in farming families and, therefore, were confined and oppressed by traditional 'patriarchy'. There were women who received modernised education but acted more 'conservatively'. Women of this period lived under Confucian traditions and Japanese patriarchy, their social status was way below that of men (e.g. they did not have the right to vote). These were women of my grandparents' generation who were brought up with Japanese education in the public sphere and Confucian tradition in the private sphere. The family size remained an extended family form due to the need to provide labour for farming. The agricultural society helped to preserve the practice of Confucian doctrines such as the extended family, patrilocation and patrilineage etc. Although women were portrayed as victims of 'patriarchy' in this period, there were also women who succeeded in education.

Lu (2004) studies Taiwanese students who studied in Japan in the 1920s and shows a similar pattern to the May Fourth intellectuals' agenda of gender issues via seeking the "new women" in the process of modernisation. By examining earlier writers' articles on gender issues, Lu points out that most of the writers, educated in Japan, approached women's liberation by proposing a new way of marriage which was based on romantic love. The early intellectuals critiqued the practice of arranged marriage, concubinage and the dowry system (p. 85). Wolf's (1972) empirical study demonstrates different forms of marriage arrangements practised in early Taiwan. Although these forms of arranged marriage were critiqued severely by early liberal intellectuals, Wolf offers a different view on women's central roles in the family and kinship network. Her empirical examples constitute a grassroots voice which is different from the academic or intellectual discourse on oppressed and victimised women under Confucian patriarchy.

Ko (1994) argues that "the invention of an ahistorical 'Chinese tradition' that is feudal, patriarchal, and oppressive was the result of a rare influence of three divergent ideological and political traditions: the May Fourth or New Culture Movement; the communist revolution and Western feminist scholarship" (p.3). It is not a denial of the

patriarchal tradition in Confucianism but rather a reminder of examining Confucianism within a particular historical and cultural context. The doctrines might remain the same but the practices change with time. That is, in Nyitray's (2010) terms, Confucianism should be understood as "a continuum of tradition from Confucius on to the present day" (p.148).

To study women and gender dynamics in Confucian societies means to examine women's various obligations and roles in the familial networks. A textually based study of Confucianism could not reflect the daily practices of women, which fails to trace the origin of women's oppression. In order to understand women in Confucianism, it is unavoidable to position women in the familial kinship because *nuxing*, a Mandarin equivalent of woman, is a modern term that appeared in the late nineteenth, early twentieth century. Before the arrival of *nuxing*, women refer to *funu* which signifies kinship and division of labour in Confucian hierarchy. Li (1994) argues that before 1919, the term 'women' equals the family. That is, women are bound to the family. During 1919 to 1949 women's issues were related to nationalism for the interests of the nation's survival (p. 3-4). Li distinguishes that the differences between the Eurocentric women's movements and the women's liberation movements are the different approaches and focuses. Eurocentric women's movements fight for women's interests while Chinese women's liberation movements were led by male intellectuals to support nationalism (p.5). These are the intellectually-led social movements in early twentieth-century China and Taiwan.

In the early modern period, the Western concept of *woman* started to influence the Confucian concept of woman. The issues and welfare of women became a state issue. Entering into the modern world, women were produced not only from the family but also from the state. Women's issues became the central concern for intellectuals, mostly males, for the sake of the state. Yin (2006) argues that the May Fourth Movement constructed a discourse which remains influential in the twentieth century, "that depicted Confucianism as the cause for all problems by which China was troubled" (p.13). He further argues that "in this type of discourse, Confucian ethics were constructed in opposition to liberal individualism, which was symbolised as the only viable means to rescue China from Western colonisation and other social ills" (p.13). Underlying this discourse is the assumption that women following Confucian ethics are powerless victims under the patriarchal tradition of Confucianism. From the May Fourth Movement in 1919, *woman* has been treated as a state category (Barlow 1994 p. 254), and "woman" has become a catachresis that was bound into nationalism to serve the

Maoist state (Barlow 2004). In the May Fourth Movement, a large amount of Western literature was translated into Chinese. Certain literature was chosen to be translated in order to serve men's calls for modernisation and patriotism. In this process of modernisation, women's liberation was not for women's welfare but for men's patriotism (Liu 2000). "New women" [xin nuxing], emerging as a new identity for women, "was everywhere disciplined by the intellectual (male-centred) self" (Chan 1993 p. 13). The legacy of the May Fourth intellectuals remains influential among contemporary academia. Instead of re-examining the Confucian tradition, the elite intellectuals tend to encompass the Western framework in the study of women. The later sections will show a *school of literature type* of women's movement in Taiwanese history.

The subjectivity of Chinese women was constructed in the modern era to serve nationalism. Therefore, *nuxing* is a political and intellectual construction; it falls into a monopolised category in which the experiences of real women are ignored and homogenised (and sometimes victimised). It would be insufficient to treat women as a product of modern state ideology; neither is it sufficient to analyse how Confucianism constructs women in a textual and ahistorical approach. Contemporary women are constructed through Confucianism as an ethical system and a state ideology, influenced by the Western philosophy of human rights. To understand women in Taiwanese society, cultural texts as well as social practices are important (Evans 2008 p.70). However, scholarly debates tend to situate women and women only in the family, while men are naturally seen as individuals that can be discussed outside the framework of family. This gender biased study neglects the fact that the family produces men as well as women. Men have to perform their duties and fulfil their obligations in the family as well. A neglect of men's roles in the family results in an imbalanced gender relationship that victimises women.

KMT Regime (1945-1987)

When the KMT government lost mainland China in 1947, it retreated to Taiwan. It remained an authoritarian regime until the lift of martial law in 1987. The next chapter will show the influences of institutionalised Buddhism brought about by the retreat of the KMT government. As the KMT government tried to eliminate the Japanese influences in Taiwanese society, Mandarinisation was launched which included using Mandarin Chinese as the official language and Confucian texts as the "authentic" cultural legacy. Under the authoritarian state control, civil activities were strictly

monitored. Women's organisations established in the 1950s served the benefits of the KMT government rather than women's welfare. Women's movements were limited to several governmental organisations that encouraged the traditional virtues of women such as *xian qi liang mu* [賢妻良母] (virtuous wife and good mother) and *xiang fu jiao zhi* [相夫教子] (help the husband and educate the children) (Wang 1999 p.20). Again, similar to the intellectuals' call for 'modernised' women, women's role as mothers who bring up virtuous children was emphasised.

Economically speaking, the dramatic transformation of the economic structure started in the 1950s. The KMT government launched a project of "Land Reform" in 1949. A big group of landless farmers became land owners which broke the earlier class division of "landlords/ landlesses" (Wang, 2002). The rise of agrarian culture accompanied this "Land Reform" as well as more advanced seed and farming technology. The development of agricultural activities stimulated industrial development which, as a result, led to the fall of agrarian culture (Huang, 2005). The fall of agrarian culture influenced the function of the 'community' which, in agrarian society, was based on blood relationships.¹⁹ "Ten Major Projects" were initiated in the 1970s and 1980s to modernise the infrastructure of Taiwan. During this process of modernising Taiwan's infrastructure, the economic structure relied more and more on small and medium enterprises. By the 1990s, only 9% of the population were involved in agricultural activities (Rubinstein 2007). The class division (landlords/ landlesses) of the early twentieth century was broken down by the changes in economic and industrial structures. The economic transformation in the 70s and 80s, often called "Taiwan's Miracle", created a larger "middle-class" who might have belonged to the "landless" category in the earlier period. The newly rising middle-class became the driving force of social movements in the 1980s (Schafferer, 2001; Yang, 2007).

Early scholars, like Gates (1987), divide the late 1970s' Taiwanese society into five classes. His division of classes was used and discussed among recent scholars who studied class and ethnicity in Taiwanese society; however, rarely have scholars doubted the concept of "class" and its applicability in Taiwanese society. Formal school training opens up an individual's career options. Rubinstein (2007) points out that "there was a clear relationship between the highest level of education attained and the career path that one followed" (p.382). As education is the key to obtaining a better

¹⁹ Chapter 3 shows how religious activities are the main function of community centres in contemporary Taiwan.

career path, this also increased social mobility. The rigid boundary among classes can be shaken by educational background as well as capital accumulation. Sociologists should bear in mind that Gates' division of classes reflects a late 1970s' Taiwanese society that had undergone huge changes by the turn of the century. This is not to dismiss the class issue in Taiwan but education has assisted the class mobility.²⁰

Under strict state control, student movements started from 1971. Not until the 1970s and 1980s did women's movements flourish as a result of the flourishing social movement. Annette Lu, former Vice President of Taiwan (2000-2008), is the first feminist who bravely challenged the patriarchal society in Taiwan. In 1971, Annette Lu published *New Feminism*, a critique on Japanese and Confucian patriarchal traditions which subjugate women to men.

Lu's advocacy for women's equal rights was strongly influenced by her educational background as a student in the States. As the first woman to fight for women's rights, Lu established a helpline for abused women and found a publisher to advocate women's rights and gender equality to the public. In a rather conservative and authoritarian society, Lu's attempt was outrageous. She was arrested and put in jail in 1979. Her attempt is seen as a *school of literature type* of women's movement (Wang 1999 p. 23). The *school of literature type* of women's movement is a unique feature of the women's movement in Taiwan because most of the participants, especially those in the early stages, were students from schools of foreign languages and literature. Deriving their standpoint from a literary tradition, the participants are good at producing a narrative of gender issues and selling it to the mass media (Wang 1999 p.39-40). Scholars have pointed out that feminism and gender studies in Taiwan are influenced by European and American women's movements and feminist theories (Chang 1993; Gu 1995; Chiang 1995). I myself hold a first degree in foreign languages and literature and it is indeed where I started my interest in gender issues. This feature could be problematic, as the leaders and the participants of women's movements are from a more elite background and they might falsely represent the voice of grassroots.

²⁰ It is my intention to dismiss the accessible levels of resources in rural areas and urban areas. In 1968, the six-year compulsory education (primary school) was extended to a nine-year basis (primary school plus junior high school) for every citizen. Education indeed played a crucial role in terms of class mobility. Yang (2007), in his analyses of political stances and ethnic cleavages among different classes, argues that 'classes' are mostly used in the process of democratisation as a tool to create differences in Taiwanese society.

Reading studies that present Chinese women as victims (eg. Chow 1991), Yin (2006) argues that “rather than advancing a vision of real equality, these discourses subjugate Chinese women to the hegemony of Western feminism” (p.9). It is not my intention, nor Yin’s intention, to critique Eurocentric or Anglophone feminism as a problematic framework. All we ask for is a more cultural specific orientation of feminist agenda for non-Western contexts, because Eurocentric feminism is not the only right way for non-Western world women.

Confucianism is often critiqued as an antifeminist philosophy which subjugated women (Lai 2000; Li 2000). However, the feminist issue never occurred to earlier Confucians in imperial China. What is more, individual interests or individual human rights are in conflict with the ideal of Confucianism—harmony and unity. Of the three characteristics of Eurocentric feminism proposed by Yin, I agree with the individualistic starting point which is often critiqued by East Asian countries. Yin believes that Eurocentric feminism, following Locke’s philosophy on individual rights, “attempts to restore to female individuals the rights that have been robbed from women by unjust sociocultural relations” (p.11). As I have argued, the problematic category of *nuxing* reflects the philosophy on individual rights which is contradictory to the prevailing ideology (i.e. Confucianism) that emphasises harmony.

Lai (2000) argues that “East Asian philosophy upholds a holistic, nondualist conception of personhood and a non-dichotomous view of femininity and masculinity” (p.130). What is valuable about Confucianism is its cosmic view that stresses the unity of the household, the society and the world. Therefore, binaries such as high/low, senior/junior, or male/female should be understood as complementary pairs which work hand in hand to create a harmonious relationship and society. Sexist traditions in Confucianism are found in the androcentric social organisations rather than gender symbolism or gender identity (Li 2000; Rosemont 1997). Therefore, Li (2000) believes that Confucianism and feminism could support each other and become an alliance (P. 193). To put Confucianism on the contemporary path helps to modify values and virtues that are compatible with the feminist ideals of gender ‘equality’. Achieving such an ideal is not impossible as long as the correlative model can be understood.

Ames and Hall (2000) note that understanding genders in a correlative way helps to understand gender as a non-exclusive pair. Rather than understanding Confucian *sexism* as an inequality, the correlative model of genders suggests that Confucian

sexism is a matter of differences. In the correlative model of gender, 'difference' is understood as functional difference which is emphasised to maintain the order of a harmonious society, whereas in dualistic models, often used by Eurocentric feminists, gender differences are a matter of the difference in kind. That is, gender issues are more of a problematic discourse of symbolic differences. This is a result of Confucian emphasis on "harmony rather than conflict between humanity and nature" (Li 2000 p. 198). Li argues against the idea that women are 'empowered' at home for she believes that women's status at home cannot be equal to men's control in society (public sphere) (p.188). The dual opposition of "private/ public" should be understood as a complementary pair rather than a dualistic binary. I cannot say that since women are empowered at home, they have never been oppressed. However, in a society where harmony and unity are stressed, to have women and men in charge of private and public, spheres, respectively, is to put every individual into 'suitable' positions. What should be questioned is why these roles and positions are not interchangeable between different genders. The social changes brought by modernisation have brought about the possibility of interchangeable roles and positions.

With the transformation of the economic structure, more and more women were encouraged to enter the labour force. Women's roles changed from being housewives to bread winners who shared their husbands' burdens. Rubinstein is very positive about the changes in women's status because of the access to the educational system and the demands of the labour market (2007, 386). The changes in family patterns (from extended families to nuclear families), and the changes of gender roles in the family (i.e. women's participation in the labour force) are an adjustment to the industrialisation and urbanisation, which means lifestyle changes during modernisation shape people's perception of 'traditional values'. Lee (2004) argues that the modernised and industrialised economy could bring 'liberating' effects as well as conflicts and contradictory forces for women. This is a struggle between a 'modernised lifestyle' and 'traditional values'. Her case study shows that a woman growing up in a transitional period has to compromise her personal interests to the collective good of the family because of Confucian doctrines of 'filial piety'. Her conflict with her family further demonstrates the generational differences created by rapid modernisation and industrialisation. The traditional values of 'filial piety' etc. are thus embodied and practised in a 'modernised' way.

Pascall and Sung (2007) argue that one of the biggest problems is that Confucian traditions, which strongly emphasise the familial values, remain influential in most East

Asian countries. The persisting Confucian ideology creates a state which relies very much on the family (and its responsibilities). Is it possible to transcend the traditions and change to a modern way of living?

Feminist studies on Chinese women tend to discuss women under the framework of *nei/wai* (private/public) which is based on sex segregation in Confucianism. This section examines how women are constructed in the patrilineal family and seeks a different approach to discuss women in the private sphere. In an ideal Confucian society, women and men should keep physically apart and do things differently. Sex segregation "tends to merge with the differentiation in duties and proprieties of husbands and wives within families" (Ebrey 1993 p. 24). The genderisation starts from the moment an individual is born by appointing various duties to his/her gendered roles. Following Confucian doctrines, women are confined in the inner chamber while men are allowed to participate in the public sphere. This sort of *nei/wai* segregation is critiqued by feminist scholars because the feminist narrative prioritises the 'public sphere' over the 'private sphere.' Being aware of the class structure, Ebrey argues that sex segregation of women in *nei* and men in *wai* is more an elite practice than a peasant culture (ibid. p. 25). By examining paintings from the Sung period, Ebrey argues that ordinary people practised sex segregation as well. However, there is not enough evidence to prove that the peasants followed the rule of sex segregation as strictly as the elite did. What I find problematic about discussing women's status in imperial China is the framework of *nei/wai* which resembles the public/private duality in the Eurocentric feminism. The ahistorical application of the *nei/wai* framework in the discussion of women's status reflects a modern ideology which prioritises the public sphere over the private, where women are thought to be powerlessly confined. Through the lens of Confucian doctrines, it is fairer to argue that power dynamics in the private sphere could empower women who are confined in the inner chamber. Wolf's anthropological work (1972) on Taiwanese women also shows women's ability to form horizontal ties with their own communities. Not only are married women able to form women's communities outside the family, they are keen to establish a 'uterine family' within the extended family. Wolf's fieldwork observation of Taiwanese women in the 1950s and the 1960s demonstrates women's role in a more traditional agricultural society where women were not always victims of Confucian 'patriarchy'. The way to form women's horizontal ties has, however, changed with rapid modernisation. The next chapter will show how religious activities have similar functions and impacts among married women. 'Community' plays an important role between 'the family' and 'the state'.

To establish a harmonious society is the ideal in Confucianism; therefore, Confucians emphasise harmony and social order among different social groups. The family is the starting point of the complicated social network in society. For individuals living in Confucian society, marriage is a must and divorce is not allowed. Confucianism is a compulsory heterosexual matrix within which men and women work hand in hand to complete this matrix. Having children, especially a male heir, is necessary in a marriage in order to continue the patrilineal family (Tamney and Chiang 2002 p. 49). It seems that Confucianism is a powerful patriarchy that grinds women's individuality into nothing. However, Ebrey (2003) argues that (by analysing the marriage system in the Sung period) to see marriages or Neo-Confucian writings from a Western way of thinking might lead to a misogynist reading (p. 32). For Neo-Confucian writers, marriages were "about how families perpetuate themselves through the incorporation of new members" (ibid.). The women's side of the story shows all the difficulties married women have encountered during the integration process of joining a new family. What Neo-Confucians tried to do was to "place people firmly in well-defined roles" in the family (ibid. p. 38). That is, men learned to blend in from birth while women, when they married, had to learn to incorporate into their new family. Ebrey argues that the subjectivity of an individual, male and female alike, is constructed in the familial network. Men and women alike are oppressed by this huge matrix of Confucianism. To study the power dynamics that work to construct gender helps to understand how men and women are oppressed differently, as well as to find a way to liberate women from the shackles of gendered virtues. Wolf's (1972) observation of the 'uterine family' shows how women can be the guards of the 'patriarchal' tradition.

From Zhang's (1999) point of view, Confucius himself did not discriminate against women. A text-based study of *The Analects* neglects the fact that Confucianism is a school of philosophy that involves many literary works apart from *The Analects*. Although *The Analects* serves as the basis of Confucianism, there are more works that explain the power dynamics in the Confucian tradition. Among the great amount of Confucian literature written by male intellectuals there were works by female literati aiming to teach women virtuous moral conducts. Ban Zhao²¹'s *Nujie* [女誡], one of the most influential Confucian texts, subordinates women to men. It states that women are born to be inferior to men and that men are the head of women. Although it is seen as

²¹ Ban Zhao (aprox. A.D. 45-117) is one of the first female literatis who achieved high position in official systems. *Nujie* is her representative work that sets the rules of Confucian sexist tradition.

a prominent text that authorises women's inferiority in both family and society, Rosenlee (2006) reads both Ban Zhao's text and Ban Zhao herself progressively. Ban Zhao's literary achievement contradicted her views on gender propriety in *Nujie*. However, her success in the public sphere set the best example for women; that womanly virtues are compatible with literary talents (p.106). Although *nei/wai* binary is difficult to transgress in imperial China, women's potential can be fully developed in the inner chamber. What oppresses women is not simply due to the *nei/wai* binary. Empirical evidence of women in late imperial China as well as contemporary Taiwan shows that the 'sexist tradition' or the 'patriarchal oppression' does not simply lie in the *nei/ wai* boundary. Through studying women's participation in religious activities, I would like to argue that the feminist critiques on Confucian familism neglect the important role of 'informal capitals' generated by women's 'horizontal ties'. Historical evidence shows that women could form horizontal ties from different activities.

Ban Zhao was not the only woman who achieved literary success in imperial China. By looking into female writers in the seventeenth century, Ko (1994) reverses a common misconception of women as being confined in the inner chamber and deprived of the chance of an education. In the seventeenth-century Jiangnan area, commercial publishing flourished as a result of economic boom and a commercialised society (p. 32). As publishing became commercialised, the reading public evolved despite the fact that large numbers of the population were illiterate. When more and more books became available, the needs of education increased. Therefore, men as well as women started to receive education. Although women were supposed to stay in the inner chamber under Confucian doctrines, the reality in Ko's depiction, different from the typical construction of women in imperial China, was a liberal sphere where women had access to education and the public sphere where "women played active and constructive roles" (ibid. p. 30). Her work shows that it is more important to look into the realities than to study a frozen and idealised doctrine of Confucianism. Scholars approach women under Confucianism from historical records and Confucian texts; however, both of these sources cannot reflect the real lives of a broader public. As Ko notes:

"Commentators at the time were all too aware of the incongruity between realities in this floating world and the idealised Confucian order frozen in terms of such binaries as high/ low, senior/ junior, or male/ female" (ibid.p.33).

Similar to Ko's interests in literary women, Berg (2007) examines the very first poetry club founded by a woman and for women in seventeenth-century Hangzhou (a major city in southern China). This particular club (Banana Garden Club) "seems to free its poets from the confines of the inner chambers, leading them out into the public arena and lending them visibility before a wider audience" (2007 p. 88). It was the first but not the only literary club for women. More women's networks and poetry clubs came after it. These women were praised by male contemporaries and they were allowed to enter the public sphere (still being excluded from the examination system) (ibid. p. 89). Not only did their works demonstrate the gap between idealised Confucian doctrines and daily-lived realities, but their studies on women in southern China revealed a biased focus in Chinese studies. In most studies on China or Chinese women, Jiangnan or southern China is marginalised. However, as a more commercialised area in China, women in Jiangnan or southern China are more likely to escape from the patriarchal familial system because of their ability to be economically independent. These studies also show a lack of scholarly interest in women's ability to generate 'informal capital' via forming communities outside the family. The next chapter will demonstrate Tzu-Chi's ability to maximise women's 'informal capitals' via religious activities.

Taiwan from 1987 to the Present Day

Taiwan witnessed a huge wave of social movements in the 1980s which shook the authoritarian state. After a long period of fighting against the authoritarian regime of the KMT government, the opposition party, DPP (Democratic Progress Party), was founded in 1986. The next year, the martial law was lifted under social pressure. The island did not become a fully democratic society until 1996 when the first President of Taiwan was elected by voters, male and female adult citizens alike. It was a landmark leading towards a democratic state (in Taiwan as well as other states with Chinese culture). Before 1996, Taiwanese voters enjoyed limited democracy under Japanese colonisation and the KMT regime. Generally speaking, the suffrage right was limited to local councillors rather than senators or any level higher. Women were not given suffrage under the Japanese colonial period but they started to enjoy the suffrage rights in the last half of the twentieth century. Four years later, the first President from the DPP was elected which marked a historical moment in the history of democracy in Taiwan. The process of democratisation demonstrates that Confucianism is compatible with democracy (Gold 1996; King 1996; Weller 1999). As an ethnographer in Taiwan, Weller (1999) describes Taiwanese society as "a place [that can] remain culturally

Chinese while it develops a democratic political structure” (p. 11). Since Chinese culture is a synonym of Confucianism, what Weller means is that Taiwanese society remains a Confucian one even though it has transformed into a modernised and industrialised state. De Bary and Tu (1998) argue that Confucian ethics are compatible with the modern state. Confucianism is no longer the supporting ideology to run political, legal and educational institutions; however, Confucian ethics of mutual duties and obligations play a role in the formation of a modern society and shape people’s human relationships in daily life. Rather than understanding human relationships as dual oppositions, Confucian ethics form a society in which human relationships are based on mutual understanding and mutual obligations. That is, an individual fits into various roles depending on the situations of different networks. Life is a process of fulfilling diverse obligations given by different roles and individual plays.

Departing from institutional Confucianism in the process of modernisation (or democratisation) (King 1996 p. 241), Taiwanese society is still under the influence of Confucianism, considering moral conducts and human relationships. Therefore, it would be better if we put the discussion of women and gender issues under the framework of Confucianism as an ethical tradition that has survived two millennia. Entering into the modern world, *institutional Confucianism* is collapsing. As Confucianism gives way in the political sphere to a modernised democratic state, the influences of Confucianism survive in films, drama, and popular culture (Goldman 1998 p. 261-269). With the circulation of media products in Asian countries, a pan-Asian identity based on Confucian culture develops (Otake and Hosokawa 1998). What I am agreeing with here is that globalisation and modernisation should not be seen as arch-enemies to the traditions of Confucianism. Traditions transform and find a new place to survive in arts and media products. Tamney and Chiang (2002) discover that modernisation can threaten traditional arts but it can also help popular culture such as films and popular music to flourish. Under the current globalisation, traditions have become a source of creating new genres of artistic work (p.125). Tradition should not be seen as a fixed subject for academia; instead, it changes with time. Tradition is not an ahistorical existence which stops at a certain historical moment. It might adapt modern forms but it never really disappears. Confucianism, seen as a traditional philosophy in East Asian countries, is not an unchanged school of thinking. The fact that Confucianism remains an influential ideology in the modernised East Asian countries reminds us that a mere examination on Confucian doctrines in texts is not enough. A media-biased study of Confucianism (i.e. textual tradition) fails to

demonstrate Confucianism as a living ethical system that transforms its practices with time.

The political system has departed from institutional Confucianism in the process of democratisation; however, Confucian ideology remains strong in society, with respect to moral conduct and interpersonal relationships. It also plays a role in the formation of a modern society and shapes people's knowledge. Although scholars and the general public agree that Confucianism remains influential, they do not know how Confucian doctrines as a moral guidance transform in the contemporary world. This thesis tries to study gender construction from the basis of daily practice rather than textually based analysis. The analysis of Da-Ai Drama in Chapter 5 and of the audience response in Chapter 6 shows that generational differences play an important role. Through media representation of Taiwanese women's life stories in the twentieth century, a modernised transformation of gender construction in a Confucian society can be examined.

The economic miracle can be seen in the huge changes to the urban and rural landscape (Edmond, 2001). As the population involved in agricultural activities dropped massively in the last half century (from 50% in 1950 to 6% in 2004), the farming fields gave way to urbanised buildings or infrastructure. Governmental statistics show that 69% of the population reside in urban areas (2008 No. 46). Contemporary Taiwan is an industrialised, urbanised and modernised society. The educational status of the population has largely increased. (See the table below.)

	Percentage of the population with first degrees	
Age Group	Female	Male
65+	4.2%	15.1%
50-64	16.4%	27.1%
35-49	37.9%	40.7%

15-34	56.9%	52.1%
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Table 1: Population in Higher Education

The previous section has shown how the educational system has changed in twentieth-century Taiwan as well as the importance of education in Taiwan. Educationally, the gender ratio is quite balanced in the education institutions. Statistics indicate that women and men enjoy equal access to education systems. From primary school to higher education institutions (excluding MA and PhD studies), the gender ratio in education institutions resembles that of the population within different age groups. However, when it comes to MA and PhD studies, there are far less female students than male students. At MA level, the male:female ratio is 140:100 and at PhD level, the male:female ratio is 259.1:100. Although the gender ratio from primary school to university has not changed much in the last decade, female students at MA and PhD levels have significantly increased in that period. In 1998, the male:female ratio for students at MA level was 209.9:100 and it was 394.5:100 for students at PhD level.

A few decades ago, a woman's preferred choice after leaving school or university was marriage rather than a career. At the present time, 49.5% of women are in the labour force (10% more than two decades ago), while 66.4% of men are in the labour force. Among women in the labour force, there are 10% fewer married women than single women. An increasing percentage of married women have chosen to stay in the labour force in the past two decades. However, the statistics indicate that children and the family remain the major reasons why women enter or leave the labour force. The statistics show that 89.3% of married women who have children under the age of five years give up their careers to take care of the family. A decade ago, only 48.1% of married women, with children under the age of six years, stayed in the labour force. Nowadays, there are 61.9% of married women, with children under the age of six years, working.

Not only are women active in the private sector, but they are also active in the public sector and the legislative body. In the legislative body, 31% of the legislators are women and 30% of the local councillors are women. Women's participation in the political sphere has increased. Among the civil servants, 52.1% are women. However,

as only 17.8% of women are in the managerial positions, this means that most of the women working in the public sector are in the lower positions. Women's participation in the public sphere is also active in the voluntary services advocated by the government. 62.8% of the volunteers are women while 43.3% of them are housewives. It seems as though the voluntary services offer housewives a community function like that in an agricultural society. The horizontal ties formed by female volunteers cannot be underestimated, as the 'informal capital' generated by them can be of great impact. Apart from entering the labour force, the voluntary services for government or civil organisations offer women and housewives another way to participate in the public sphere. The Tzu-Chi organisation, the main focus of this research, best exemplifies women's participation in the public sphere via voluntary services.

The economic boom in Asian countries led many governments to encourage women to enter the labour force. Therefore, there are adjustments to women's traditionally subordinated role in society. Women's paid work outside the family is normal nowadays, but their burdens and responsibilities at home are not lightened a bit. That is, working to support the family is an integral part of women's duties and their contribution to the family. Motherhood is, however, a natural part of womanhood. Therefore, women's participation in the public sphere cannot rid them of their burden of being mothers. In Taiwan, statistics show that 51.7% of women who are not in the labour force stay home because of the household chores (2006). It shows that women are still in charge of the household chores in contemporary Taiwanese society. Quah explains that the reason why the definitions of gender roles do not change much is that "the state's aim is not to make radical changes in the social definitions of male and female roles but, rather, to create the basic necessary conditions to bring women into the labour force without altering their traditional roles of wife and mother" (2008 pp. 121). Gender equality is more an economic issue than a human rights issue. Quah suggests that in order to cope with conflict between the traditional values about gender roles and the current change of women's entrance into the public sphere, women should "think liberal but act conservative" (ibid., p. 127).

Women's organisations thrived in the 1980s and 1990s because of a more liberal political environment and the loosened state controls. A group of women who published the feminist magazine *Awakening* in 1982, before martial law was lifted, then went on to establish an organisation named *The Awakening Foundation* in 1987. At this stage, women's movements focused on promoting gender equality and women's rights. In 1985, the first academic research centre of gender and women's studies was

established in the National Taiwan University. Two decades have passed but there are only ten similar departments or research centres in higher education institutions. Among the student population, women's societies and LGBT societies started to appear in colleges and universities. Women's organisations prospered in the 1990s and they have realised the advocacy of gender equality via the amendment of the laws. Women's organisations, especially *The Awakening Foundation*, have played an important role in advising the amendment of the laws.

The increasing number of women participating in the public sphere is a result of the increasing respect and protection shown by the laws. The development of the *Civil Code* shows that the legal status of women has been raised to a more equal level with men in the last two decades. There are several important changes in the *Civil Code* concerning women's equal status in the legal system. In 1985, the *Civil Code* was amended so that property could be equally distributed to divorcees (Article 1030). Before the amendment, a divorcee would get nothing but the property she had brought with her at the commencement of the marriage. The amendment of the *Matrimonial Property Regimes* (2002) allows married couples to have control over their own property, respectively. Before the amendment, husbands had the right to be in charge of all the property owned and earned by husbands and wives.

In 1996, the articles on parental rights and guardianships were amended, allowing the divorcee to take children into custody (Article 1051, 1055). The statistics show that 35.9% of women had custody over their children in 2002 and the percentage of maternal custody rose to 39.1% in 2009. As well as the maternal custodianship, the percentage of co-custodianship rose from 10.6% to 13.1% from 2002 to 2008. In 1998, the article on the prefixation of surnames was amended so that women are not obliged to prefix their husbands' surnames to their maiden names (Article 1000).

. In 2007, Article 1059 was amended to allow the parents to agree on the surname of the children. The amendment of this article has great potential for breaking the patrilineal tradition, since the children do not necessarily belong to the patrilineal family. However, the statistics show that, until 2009, only 1.5% of newborn babies took their mothers' surnames. This is a good example of the huge gap between the gender equality laws and reality.

The diverse aspects of women's movements appeared in the 1990s: communitarianism; sexual liberation; gay and lesbian issues; localisation and so on

(Chang 1994). Unlike women's movements in the 1980s, women's organisations in the 1990s collaborated with the government for structural changes. The concept of women and gender issues has broadened to the LGBT communities. The annual Gay Pride parade has become one of the biggest Pride parades in Asia since 2006. The intellectual movements in the 1980s paved the way for the prospering women's societies and the LGBT communities in colleges and universities in the 1990s. Not only have students' societies prospered, the civil organisations have thrived as well. There are about sixty feminist or women's organisations at the present time. The *school of literature type* of women's movements remained the dominant feature of women's movements in the 1980s and 1990s. Fan's (2003) study of women's movements in the 1980s and 1990s shows that the active participants of women's movements all hold degrees (first degree or above) and they all belong to the upper middle class. Women's movements are led and engaged by a group of more elite and advantaged women. Her study points out that women's movements in the 1980s were not able to generate grassroots participants because of the conservative and authoritarian political environment; therefore, the feminists turned their focus onto the legislative body, hoping to amend and pass laws with gender awareness.

The statistics also show a gap between the practised reality and the perfect legal system. For example, the *Civil Code* grants female heirs the same rights as the male heirs to inheritance. In reality, 64.9% of the female heirs choose to discard their rights to inheritance. An intellectual movement risks losing the subjectivity and voice of grassroots women, and leaves the lived reality behind. Liu (2006) points out that feminism is wrongly understood and represented only as an extreme school of thought (i.e. Taiwanese feminism lacks diversity), while women's organisations are wrongly perceived as representative of all women. The public holds a negative view towards feminism and women's movements under the misleading representation of mass media (Wang 1999 p. 283). Two problems lie in the intellectual movements of women's organisations: a) Are grassroots aware of their unequal status in the society? b) If all women are aware of the inequality, why don't they stand up and fight against it? The answers seem to lie in the persisting influences from Confucian traditions. Studies demonstrate that a gender-equal legal system is not enough to promote women's status in society, especially in East Asian societies where Confucian traditions remain a powerful ethical system (Pascall and Sung 2007). Another issue arises here; how are Confucian doctrines transformed and embodied in the contemporary world? Also, through examining the religious discourse on women and gender construction, scholars could start to think why women choose religions as an 'escape' from

patriarchy. All these discussions aim to bring about a conversation between the elite and the grassroots.

Fan (2003) points out that the major problem of feminist movements across different generations is that feminists from those different generations are unable to communicate due to the essential differences (i.e. social changes bring about a different political and social environment). Fan's opinion is incomplete because her study is based on women's movements that are intellectually based. The essential problem of widening the scope of women's movements within society is the inability to communicate with grassroots women, even when those grassroots women recognise the 'inequality' from which they suffer. Why do a huge portion of women choose religions as an alternative? Rather than seeing religious activities as teaching lay women to put up with their problems, feminists might need to see what religions offer these lay women.

Instead of accusing women for residing and securing themselves in the 'false consciousness,' the intellectuals should re-examine the theoretical framework they apply to the analysis of women in society. Taiwanese women's movements evolved into state-feminism in the mid-1990s. Aiming at establishing a state-femocrat, following the examples from North European countries, women's organisations work closely with the governmental bureaucrats. Lin (2009) points out that "gender mainstreaming' tends to replace 'women's rights' and 'gender equality' in the turn of the century" (p.4-5). Unlike the gender-equal strategy that aims to critique on the division of the public and the private, the strategy of gender mainstreaming aims to create bureaucrats and policies with gender awareness (Lin 2009). Gender mainstreaming is cooperation between the government (the policy makers) and women's organisations (consultants). Under the trend of gender mainstreaming, women's organisations and feminist organisations work hand in hand with the government, risking the loss of women's organisations' subjectivity and their supervising functions (Liu 2006). Not only do women's organisations lose their subjectivity but also *women* themselves. The cooperation might result in women's organisations being unable to stand against the inappropriate policies. To help protect women's welfare a governmental committee, the *Commission on Women's Rights Promotion* was first established in Taipei City Government in 1996. The committee consists of directors from various bureaus; scholars; and representatives from women's organisations. Now, national and municipal governments across the island have set up similar committees as a way to

practise gender equality. In 2004, the *Outline of Women's Policies* was launched as a guideline to the governmental policies concerning gender issues.

One of the problems of gender mainstreaming in Taiwan is its inability to reach the grassroots (i.e. how thoroughly the policy and the law are practised). Peng's (2008) study on civil servants in the public sectors reveals difficulties in practising the policies of gender mainstreaming in the public sectors. First of all, the training of gender awareness is insufficient for civil servants. The lack of understanding on gender issues results in fights among practitioners and consultants, from women's organisations, and the policy makers. Secondly, the "patriarchal" framework in the bureaucrats limits the influences of gender mainstreaming. It is difficult to eliminate the patriarchal tradition that has for so long existed in the bureaucrats. And, again, what does that "patriarchal" tradition mean? Thirdly, the political correctness on the table creates a gender-equal illusion. Numbers and statistics cannot fully represent the real world wherein the elite and the grassroots women live. This is what I find most problematic, because the grassroots women are not connected to the trend of women's movements, let alone gender mainstreaming. During my fieldwork, I was asked by a retired civil servant what gender mainstreaming means, because she could not see how the training courses helped her in daily life as a woman. We had a long talk on gender issues. Most of the women are aware of the patriarchal traditions they live by (such as the patrilineal tradition and the preferences given to male heirs), but they cannot see the point of why women's organisations or feminists want to change the situation (the patrilineal tradition does not affect a woman's status in the husband's family). Interestingly, the civil servant is described by her daughter as being spoiled by her father and of being the keeper of patriarchal tradition. The gap between elite feminists and grassroots women is too huge to cross over. I am particularly interested to see how academic discourses on women's oppression neglect a huge group of women's 'real' life. I believe that it is more important to let grassroots women speak first and thereby start the conversation between themselves and the elite feminists. Some girls of my generation would share the same feeling that our mothers are actually the keeper and the guard of the 'patriarchal' tradition we critique. The women's movements advocated by female intellectuals are, more than often, critiqued and objected by *women* themselves.

Conclusion

Looking back into the history of women's movements in Taiwan, the voice of women is spoken by representative groups of elite women whose life experiences might be far removed from those of most grassroots women. The intellectual movement of feminism becomes a hegemony that oppresses the voice of other women. I hope, with this study of docudrama on Taiwanese women, to offer a new perspective on Taiwanese women and the patriarchal system in which they are living. As gender studies and women's studies are young in Taiwan, the literature on feminist theories tends to introduce the Western feminist school of thought. This could easily mislead the public and the grassroots women into believing that feminism is an academic product from the West which knows nothing about the daily reality of Taiwanese women. It is my intention to analyse the power dynamics of the patriarchy in Taiwanese society and to examine how women cope with or put up with the patriarchal oppression. Through examining and analysing Da-Ai Drama, women's roles in society and the family can be seen. The rapid social changes create generational differences, which offer the audience from different generations different meanings, be it religious or secular.

The above paragraphs have shown that Taiwanese women have broken the traditional boundaries between the private and the public sectors. More and more women are entering the public sphere and are more equally treated than in either the education systems or the labour force. Men are now aware of the 'outrageous' call for gender equality from women. Is it a gender-equal society? The statistics indicate that most of the managerial positions, decision makers, and policy makers remain in the hands of men. The increasing participation of women in the public sphere creates an illusion of a gender-equal society where patriarchal control is vanishing. Wang (1999) argues that to amend the laws is just a beginning of the revolution. Only when the public is properly educated in the concept of gender equality can a gender-equal society be realised (p.6). What remains questionable is the term 'gender equality.' How is the term 'equal' perceived in different cultural and social contexts? Finally, this question leads to a question of 'feminism' in different cultural and social contexts. Also, in a fast changing society, women's experiences change through the course of time in a fast-changing society.

Chapter 3

Religions and Buddhism in 20th Century Taiwan

Introduction

As Chapter 2 has provided the socio-historical background of twentieth-century Taiwan, this chapter will present the historical changes to religious activities in the same period. Both ordained nuns and lay women have played an important role in various kinds of religious activities in Taiwanese society. The large number of female participants in religious activities has created the success of the Tzu-Chi organisation. This chapter begins with a discussion of Buddhist Feminism, which often constructs a discourse of Buddhist women as victimised by their religion. After a brief review of scholarly discussions about Buddhist women, I will provide local examples of women's participation in various Buddhist activities in twentieth-century Taiwan²².

The second part of the chapter provides an example of a form of matriarchal institution, Zhai-tang²³ (Vegetarian Hall), which is a commonly found in the lay Buddhist tradition in early Taiwan (from the pre-modern era to the Japanese colonial period). To review this form of lay Buddhist institution it not only helps to understand the reason why women outnumber men in religious activities in Taiwan, but it also helps to see how a matriarchal institution is established independently within a 'patriarchal' society.

The folk feature of Buddhist activities was taken over by the systematic Buddhist institution after the KMT government took over the island. Alongside the KMT government came a modernised form of Chinese Buddhism, best known as

²² An official statistic released in 2011 shows that 35% of the population identified as Buddhists while 33% are Daoists. However, religious traditions are never exclusive to each other in Sinic societies. 80% of the population engaged in one or more forms of folk religious activities which refers to a mixture of Buddhist, Daoist, Confucian traditions.

²³ Zhai-tang is the gathering place of Zhai-jiao, a practice of folk Buddhism. Zhai [齋] means 'vegetarian diets' while jiao [教] means 'a sect of religions'.

'Humanistic Buddhism'. Instead of using the term 'socially engaged Buddhism'²⁴, I chose to use 'Humanistic Buddhism' to emphasise the local dimensions of contemporary Buddhist practices. The third part of this chapter introduces the scholarly discussions on Humanistic Buddhism, a contemporary trend of Buddhism in Taiwan. Its emphasis on 'this-worldly' salvation shapes the Buddhist environment in contemporary Taiwanese society. Several influential lay Buddhist organisations, including Tzu-Chi, place more emphasis on social services and charity works than meditation practices. The discussion of Humanistic Buddhism leads to the last part of this chapter, which starts with contextual information on religious activities in contemporary Taiwan, followed by a focus on the Tzu-Chi organisation. It reviews scholarly studies on the Tzu-Chi organisation from the perspective of Master Zheng-Yan's leadership, her interpretations of Humanistic Buddhism, the worship of Guan-Yin, horizontal ties among Tzu-Chi members, and the media approaches Tzu-Chi uses to spread its agenda. By providing a local example of Buddhist activity, this chapter reflects the variety of contemporary Buddhist practices and the role of female participants in these activities.

Buddhist Feminism

Knowing my thesis is on Buddhist women in Taiwan, one of my dad's friends asked me the reason why there are more Bhikkhunis than Bhikkhus in Taiwan. Scholars have noticed the important role women, lay women and nuns play in public religious activities in Taiwan (Weller, 1999; Devido, 2003). Although the question has little to do with my research, I got the impression that I was placing myself in a Buddhist context where female monastics are of great importance. These examples can best demonstrate the Buddhist context where this thesis is placed. It is a social context that I have never found in any of the Anglophone Buddhist scholarship. In fact, I had never experienced Buddhism as a patriarchy until I took a module in gender and religion for my MA degree. The module consisted of two parts: a) Christianity; and b) other religions, including Buddhism. Surprisingly, I found no difficulties in the first part which focused on gender issues in Christianity. When the debates led to gender issues in Buddhism, I was stunned by the gender inequality in the Buddhist world. Allow me to use Gross' words to express the cultural shock I experienced in that module: "...if I had

²⁴ The term 'engaged Buddhism' was coined by Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist teacher. He was inspired by Humanistic Buddhism advocated by Master Tai-Xu and Master Yin-Shun. In the West, the term 'engaged Buddhism' is used more often than its origin, 'Humanistic Buddhism.'

to be a Buddhist woman under the conditions that exist in most parts of the Buddhist world, Buddhism would not be my religion of choice” (1993 p. 135). Gross’ knowledge of Buddhism grants her an advantage to argue for Buddhist feminism in a textual tradition. However, her neglect of social and cultural contexts in most of the Buddhist world makes her argument for Buddhist feminism too idealised to be practical. Situating Gross’ work in the Protestant history in North America, Koppedrayer (2007) criticises Gross’ work as “part of a longer history of forays into Asian religions that reflect the interior and individualistic preoccupations of North American seekers” (p.125).

During my writing process, I have discussed Master Yin-Shun and Master Zheng-Yan’s interpretations on Humanistic Buddhism with my father. He is a man of great knowledge on Buddhist canons and admires Master Yin-Shun a lot. In one of our discussions, my dad surprised me by saying that Master Yin-Shun was a woman. (This kind of mistake can only be made in the linguistic context where female and male pronouns do not exist.) Even when I told him that Master Yin-Shun was a man, my dad would not believe it. Yes, he thought I was joking! Later on, he told me the reason why he mistook Master Yin-Shun for a woman: “Because he [Master Yin-Shun] ordained Master Zheng-Yan.” In a Buddhist society where Bhikkhunis outnumber Bhikkhus, I could imagine how my dad naturally assumed Master Yin-Shun to be a woman. The achievement of Bhikkhunis in the Taiwanese context sets an example to Buddhist women in other parts of the world. Compared with Buddhist women in other parts of the world, Taiwanese Bhikkhunis have enjoyed many more benefits, such as the ordination system and the educational system.

An understanding of the historical legacy and the current situation of women leads to two questions. How do women experience feminism (differently) in various cultural and religious contexts? This section will show how feminism influences the studies of religions and how the scholars reflect upon feminism. Before we get into the issues of what a feminist Buddhist means, I shall bring up the second question. Is there any difference between Western Buddhism and Eastern Buddhism? If so, which Buddhism are we talking about? It is not my intention to elicit an East/ West binary in the thesis. The convenient terms of East and West are used to identify the cultural and contextual differences. In Li’s (2002) review of studies on the Bhikkhunis, she argues that the way Taiwanese Bhikkhunis practise Buddhism is different from the Western way. Li points out that the stereotypical image of the Western Bhikkhunis is that the monastic should live in a poorer material life in order to pursue spiritual transformation. Some of the Bhikkhunis from the West prefer meditation in an isolated cave on the Himalayas

because it is thought to be the right way to practise Buddhism. Meanwhile, the Taiwanese way of practising Humanistic Buddhism via social services and charity work is criticised for being materialistic. Li's observation points out the different ways of seeing Buddhism and practising Buddhism in the East and the West.

Analysing the images of Bhikkhunis in the eyes of Western scholars, Chen (1998) argues that Paul (1985) and Tsomo (1988) assume a superior Western point of view to victimise Buddhist women in Asia, ignoring the subjectivity and agency of Asian Buddhist women. Instead of seeing Third World women as active subjects, these writers describe them as passive objects (p.320). That is, Third World Buddhist women's choice of monastic life is a way to passively escape from patriarchy such as Confucianism. As differences of women exist in different cultures, patriarchy works differently across various cultural contexts. Rather than seeing women's choice to religious life as a passive escapism, scholars could look into Taiwanese Bhikkhunis. To bring the socio-cultural context into consideration, Chen (2002) conducted an empirical study to examine how contemporary Taiwanese Bhikkhunis establish non-traditional paradigms on themselves.

Kwok (2002) argues that Western scholars often construct victimised Chinese women who are oppressed and subjugated under Confucian patriarchy. Assuming a higher position, these white, middle-class women victimised Third World women and suppressed their voice. Kwok's radical accusation lies in the fact that Asia is a religious pluralist world where people "believe the truth is more than a few propositional statements" (King 1994 p. 69). King's explanation of the differences between Western symbolic logic and the Yin-Yang philosophy best describes the gender relationship in the West and the East. In the Western symbolic logic, A and non-A are exclusive to each other. That is, male and non-male (female) are two exclusive categories. However, in the Yin-Yang philosophy, A and non-A are interdependent and complementary. Based on the Western logic, the domestic sphere wherein women are confined is much inferior to the public sphere where men hold power. This dichotomy is challenged in the Yin-Yang philosophy because the domestic sphere is as important as the public sphere, for they complete each other.

Cosmology is understood differently in different societies. In Paper's study (1990) of female deities in China, he points out that ideology and cosmology in Confucian society are understood as complementary opposites. That is, masculine and feminine are

complementary rather than divided opposites. Seeing the worship of female deities under this cosmology, Paper argues that female deities are worshipped because the state ideology, Confucianism, represents the masculine spirit. That is, female deities complete the secular dominance of men. Paper's fieldwork experiences in Taiwanese religious activities reflect a more egalitarian perspective of religions in Taiwan. As I have been arguing, the social context is essential to the understanding of gender equality in Buddhism. Paper's work shows the importance of social context within which "European monastic misogyny need not be continued in the study of Chinese religion" (p.40).

Most of the major religions in the contemporary world are believed to be androcentric and the religious institutions are products of patriarchy. Feminist scholars such as O'Connor (1989) propose three ways to reread, re-conceive and reconstruct the religious traditions which are patriarchal. Feminist efforts to deconstruct androcentric religious traditions can be seen in their efforts to change the gendered symbol of God, urge for a balanced gender ratio in religious institutions, reread and reinterpret the canons, and rewrite the history of female practitioners in religious activities. Feminist concerns about religion start with Christianity and extend to other religious traditions. Major religious traditions are re-examined under the feminist framework and women's status in different religious contexts across the world are discussed.

Following the Western theologian tradition, scholars in Buddhism argue gender equality by seeking the representation of women in Buddhist texts (Paul 1981; Gross 1993). However, this approach is based largely on religious texts. Paul's (1981) analysis of sex transformation of celestial Bodhisattvas shows that the divine can be feminine. Using this example in Buddhism to illustrate the possibility of creating a divine symbol as feminine, Paul does not draw in the social context that grants these symbols meaning.

What needs to be done is to link the textual representation of women to secular women's experiences. The worship of female deities only makes sense when the practitioners are involved. A symbol of female divinity helps female followers to reflect on their gender experiences. However, it is not necessarily promoting the female status in a religious tradition. The following discussion on the Tzu-Chi organisation will show how a female Bodhisattva figure can be extended from motherhood, and how it can grant lay women agency via religious activities.

Paul and Gross' arguments ignore the diversity of women in various Buddhist traditions. Scholars have pointed out the problem of Buddhist studies in Anglophone academia. Anglophone Buddhist studies tend to be Protestant oriented which leads to a text-based and institutionally-oriented studies of Buddhism (Cooley 1990; Mellor 1991; Collet 2006).

Shneiderman (1999) criticises Western feminist Buddhists such as Klein, Shaw and O'Halloran for ignoring Asian Buddhist women's divergent experiences (p.222), because Western Buddhists expect "textual based, institutionally oriented forms of Buddhism" (ibid p. 224). Scholars from the Christian tradition unavoidably place less attention on the laity who practise Buddhism from a non-textual and non-institutional perspective (Cooley 1990). In an article accessing the debates on Buddhism and gender, Collet (2006) points out several issues about Western scholarship. First of all, the textually based study of Buddhism encounters linguistic problems. Not only is there taxonomy in the Pali and Sanskrit texts in Western scholarship, but there are also problems about the English translation. In her opinion, the limited amount of translation in English is not enough to examine Buddhist women in religious texts. What Collet notes is the limited sources on the religious representation of women. I would further argue that the textual representation of women and the textual guidance for women and female monastics might be massively different from Buddhist women's daily experiences in non-Christian contexts.

Kawanami (1996) points out that "Buddhist textual representations and social practices are often at odds" (p.69). She argues that social context and historical background are essential when discussing women in Buddhism. That is, the textual representation of women in canonical texts has to be discussed in the original Indian social context. The monastic tradition for female practitioners is an often-contested site for Buddhist scholars. Although Bhikkhuni tradition dies out in some Buddhist countries, it does not mean the tradition has died out in other parts of the world. Chen (2002) points out that the gender ratio of Bhikkhunis to Bhikkhus is 3:1 in Taiwan. Although the number of Bhikkhunis and the tradition of ordination remain alive in Taiwan, there are far less publications and studies on Bhikkhunis in Taiwan (Devito 2003 p. 2).

Apart from stating that women are victimised by androcentric religious traditions, is there another perspective for addressing gender issues? The reason for asking this is that in the past two millennia most of the women have been living in patriarchal societies, where androcentric religions have only played a small part (Li 2003 p. 4). The next section on Buddhist feminism will further discuss the interwoven relationships

between religious traditions and socio-cultural contexts when discussing Buddhist women in Asian countries.

The textually-based tradition is heavily Protestant-influenced. Schopen points out that Western scholars tend to look for 'real' Buddhism within texts. Collet (2006) further points out that there is "a Protestant-influenced evaluation of Buddhist texts [which] accounts for some of the misrepresentation of the textual record on women from ancient Indian Buddhism" (p.65). The canonical texts are not without questions. The validity of canonical texts needs to be checked (Derris 2008). Some of the canons that are popular in Chinese Buddhism were specifically written for a Confucian context. In this case, the popular canons are influential, but they are not essentially Buddhist canons based on the premise of textual tradition. To recontextualise the earlier texts and reposition them within their ancient setting, as Collet (2006) suggests, is therefore necessary. The 'sexist' canonical writings should be examined in the social context of ancient India. Furthermore, the practices might have changed with time. Neither should feminists nor the monastic cling to the 'sexist' texts in an ahistorical way.

To limit the analysis of gender in Buddhism to canonical texts is insufficient because "Buddhism cannot be abstracted from its cultural context as if it existed alone" (Lefferts 2000 p. 36). Tracing back its history, in most countries where Buddhism is popular, political power rarely interfered or combined with religious power. Most of these countries are strongly influenced by Confucianism, a dominant secular ideology. Born in South Asia, Buddhism has travelled to East Asia and Southeast Asia, and it has also transformed into plenty of Buddhist schools and practices in different countries. In Sinic societies, Buddhism is transformed under the influence of Confucianism, which is known as the domestication of Buddhism in China (Goodman 2008 p. 31). Buddhism, in both Mahayana and Theravada traditions, is complex and diverse; therefore, a textually based study of Buddhism fails to understand how Buddhism is experienced differently in various cultures around the world. Neither can a textually based tradition reflect the development of various schools of Buddhism in the past two millennia. Rather than being a fixed subject to be studied, women in Buddhism are adapting their religious beliefs with social changes, like modernisation or globalisation (Lefferts 2000). Scholars have to be clear of which school of Buddhism and in which context they situate their discussion of women.

Mellor (1991), examining the English Sangha who base their practices on Thai forest traditions, argues that Buddhism is a contestable and problematic category in the U.K., because Buddhist practices in a Protestant context are different from those in other Buddhist countries. He points out that the Buddhist 'Tradition' means Buddhist principles in an English context while Buddhist 'tradition' refers to observances, customs and so on in Buddhist countries. What I am arguing is that religion cannot be separated from culture; therefore, a Protestant-influenced Buddhism is a natural development as soon as Buddhism enters the Protestant context. I would say the Protestant-influenced Buddhism is a form of Buddhism, but scholars should bear in mind that Buddhism is a dynamic and multi-faceted religion. Its plurality and diversity cannot be ignored. When the issues of gender and feminism are drawn into the discussion of Buddhism, they should be clear about the form of Buddhism they are talking about and the flow of feminist thought they are using in the debate. Studies of the representation of women in the textual tradition create symbolic female figures that might not resonate among Buddhist women from other traditions. The neglect of contextual information ignores the fact that Asian Buddhist women live in a multi-cultural and multi-religious world. In most Asian countries, different religions coexist and the interfaith dialogue is intense. In China, the harmonious relationship among Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism is the best example. This thesis aims to present an example of how lay Buddhist women cope with the social context and their religious experiences. The rest of this chapter will provide contextual information in which Taiwanese Buddhist activities fit.

Pre-modern Days to Japanese Colonisation (1895-1945)

Taiwanese society underwent massive political changes in the first half of the 20th century²⁵. Japanese colonisation from 1895 to 1945 founded the basis of modernisation for Taiwanese society. In the 1930s and 1940s, Japan promoted the Kominka Movement which aimed to "Japanize" all colonised subjects by promoting Japanese culture and repressing Taiwanese indigenous culture, languages, religions, and so on. Temples that contained Chinese roots and Taiwanese features were destroyed while Japanese temples were erected. The following paragraphs introduce lay Buddhist activities, Zhai-jiao, which were actively participated in by lay women from

²⁵ Bingeheimer (2003) provides a detailed historical account on Buddhism in Taiwan from the Qing dynasty to modern days. His paper (in English) outlines important moments and crucial factors about Taiwanese Buddhism. This would be an introductory paper to understand different aspects of Taiwanese Buddhism, including the academic interests in Taiwanese Buddhism.

the pre-modern days to the Japanese colonial period. And it can be a good example of the way in which women form horizontal ties via religious activities.

Zhai-jiao

Devido (2003) points out several factors that have resulted in the huge number of Buddhist nuns and lay women in Taiwan. One of the factors is the Zhai-jiao tradition, which cultivated lay women before the arrival of Japanese government (most of these women were ordained during the Japanese colonisation and also, after the KMT arrived). These women who practised Buddhism in Zhai-tang were highly educated and became fully ordained either in the Japanese way or the Chinese way (p.3). Generally speaking, Buddhism was believed to have been brought into Taiwan between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, the folk type of Buddhism was brought in by Chinese immigrants in the early period. An elite tradition of Buddhism (proper Mahayanist tradition) was brought by the military troop led by Cheng (Dong 2008 p. 263). It was not until 1945 when the KMT government took over that the Mahayanist tradition of Buddhism gained great influence in Taiwan (Weller 2007 p. 345). That is, a mere study on the Mahayanist tradition of Buddhism in China and Taiwan does not reflect how ordinary people perceive and practise Buddhism on a folk level.

Although scholars like Jones (1999) criticise those lay Buddhists for their lack of knowledge on doctrines and scripture, I would like to argue that it is this kind of folk Buddhism that influences daily life greater than studies on the sophisticated language of Buddhist canons and scriptures. In the academia of religious studies, there are too many works on literary based debates on religious doctrines. Rather than limiting these studies to a mono-medium basis, religious studies should open up its scope to a multi-media environment and focus on how lay people practise religion. This section presents Zhai-jiao, a large and influential lay Buddhist movement in the Qing dynasty (1644-1919 A.D.), which is worth studying as it represents a lay Buddhist movement within which women play important roles. Master Zheng-Yan had spent her early days in Zhai-tang (Vegetarian Halls, believed to be the legacy of Zhai-jiao). So far, the studies on Zhai-jiao are limited and it is a confusing topic for Buddhist scholars because of its strong folk religion elements (Chiang 2001 p. 18; Weller 2007).

Zhai-jiao is a type of folk Buddhism, with a blend of Taoism, practised by lay Buddhists in Qing China and Taiwan. In mainland China, Zhai-jiao was seen as a pagan practice

by the Qing government and was, therefore, forbidden by officials (Chiang 2001 p. 19). Instead of leaving the family and shaving their heads, people who practised Zhai-jiao stayed at home and kept vegetarian diets. It can be seen as an alternative way to a monastic life. Seeing the corruption and dying tradition of Buddhism in late imperial China, the followers of Zhai-jiao criticised the impotency of the monastics. The followers emphasised its Zen tradition and regarded themselves (lay Buddhists) as superior to the monastics. Zhai-jiao organised institutions that owned Zhai-tang, its own hierarchy, rituals and so on. The practice of Zhai-jiao and the lay institutions of Zhai-tang can be a good example for Gross (1999), who expects to establish a non-androcentric institution for lay Buddhists to meditate in the Western world.

The example of Zhai-jiao shows that a lay Buddhist practice and a matriarchal lay Buddhist organisation are possible. The Zhai-tang has become a sacred place where women wish to have a celibate life as an alternative to (re)marriage. The tradition of Zhai-tang offers Buddhist women an alternative option to a monastic life for “Buddhist women’s relations with their family in Chinese culture may be flexible enough to avoid irreconcilable conflict” (Huang 2008 p. 36). By confining women in the religious field, the Confucian patriarchy provides an alternative way to establish these women’s gender role outside traditional familial relationships. As Confucianism emphasises the concept of “chastity”, either before marriage or in marriage, a woman who refuses marriage can be legitimised only in a monastic life that vows to be chaste. Somerville (2000) analyses religious women in medieval Europe and her argument is similar to the case of female monastics in the Chinese context. In her argument, there is a Christian discourse on sexuality which sees sex as dangerous to men in the medieval age (e.g. Mary Magdalene). On the opposite side, there is a discourse on women who are pure and deprived of sexuality (e.g. the Virgin Mary). The prevailing discourses on sexuality subordinated women to men and there was only one way out of the heterosexual family. Celibacy was an alternative to marriage and family. It is similar in Chinese Buddhism as well, especially for elite women, to live in celibacy in religious fields as an alternative option to traditional family life. Although it might seem to be an oppressive institution for women’s sexuality, it is undeniable that most of these women have reached remarkable success in the religious field (eg. Opportunities and access towards higher education).

Weller (2007) points out that “many of their [Zhai-tang] followers were women” and these women have played an important role in Taiwanese Buddhism (Devido 2003; Chiang 1997 p. 51). Chiang’s (1997) study shows that some of the female followers

were ordained under historical changes (Japanese colonisation and KMT control). Moreover, they have received higher education since the Japanese colonisation up to modern times. In Taiwan, Chiang points out that the percentage of Buddhist women both in monastic institutions and lay organisations is extremely large, let alone their contributions and achievements in Taiwanese Buddhism. Women have played an important role in Taiwanese Buddhism from the early era until the present time. The large percentage of female Zhai-jiao followers and women in leading roles in rituals of ancestor worship show that religion is a sphere, public and private, largely engaged by women.

KMT Regime (1945-1987)

“Japanization” was incomplete by the time that Taiwan was taken over by the Nationalist government (KMT government) from mainland China in 1949 (Jones 2003; Laliberte 2003 p. 161; 2004 p. 23-24; Xu 1998 p. 293-295; Weller 2007 p. 349-350). When the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took over mainland China, the KMT government was forced to retreat to Taiwan in 1949. Because of religious repression by the CCP government at the beginning of its rule in mainland China, many prominent sanghas²⁶ took refuge in Taiwan (Chandler 2006 p. 171; Xu 1998). They brought the traditions of Chinese Buddhism, including monastic systems, to Taiwan. Before their arrival, Buddhism in Taiwan had a strong folk feature and a hint of Japanese Buddhism. In Weller’s (2007) study of religious traditions and practices in Taiwan, he focuses on the formation of identity in Taiwanese religions. As many folk religious traditions are greatly influenced by Chinese folk religions, it would be difficult to distinguish an indigenous Taiwanese religious tradition from Chinese religious traditions.

As the refugee sanghas brought the monastic system to Taiwan and several of them became influential in contemporary Taiwan, Laliberte (2004) deemed it necessary to examine Taiwanese Buddhism under the tradition of Chinese Buddhism. The feature of folk Buddhism had been brought by earlier immigrants to Taiwan while the mainland refugees in 1949 brought more systematic and institutional Buddhism to Taiwan. Among the refugees from the mainland, Master Yin-Shun (1906-2005) is the most influential one; his influence writes a new page in the history of Taiwanese Buddhism. Master Yin-Shun revised Master Tai-Xu’s (1890-1947) terminology rensheng Fojiao

²⁶ The sangha refers to the community of Buddhist monks.

(rensheng: this life; Fojiao: Buddhism) to renjian Fojiao (renjian: among people; this world). Both are translated into English as “Humanistic Buddhism” or “this-worldly Buddhism” (Chandler 2006; Laliberte 2004). Although contemporary Taiwanese Buddhism is seen as a legacy from Chinese Buddhism, both of them claim that a unique Taiwanese identity is established during the process of expanding Buddhist activities in Taiwan. Master Yin-Shun’s call for Buddhist revival, Humanistic Buddhism, is followed by two prominent disciples, Master Xing-Yun and Master Zheng-Yan, in contemporary Taiwan.

Humanistic Buddhism

The vivid discussion of Chinese Buddhism came to an end in late imperial China. The May Fourth movement in the early twentieth century devalued the traditional values of Confucianism and Buddhism alike. Intellectuals criticised Buddhism for being passive and indifferent to “this-worldly” matters. What had been criticised most about Buddhism was its “other-worldly” concern and escapism. Despite various doctrines from different Buddhist schools, they all teach a sudden realisation of enlightenment to enter an “other-worldly” Pure Land (Fang 2001; Wang et al. 2005). After more than a thousand years of transformation, Chinese Buddhism had developed into various schools; among them, Chan and Pure Land are pre- eminent schools. At the beginning of the twentieth century, various Buddhist schools were in conflict with each other over the benefits of each school (Hurley 2004; Yang 1990). Fully aware of the corrupted and disorderly monastic systems, Master Tai-Xu called for a revolution of Chinese Buddhism. He proposed a reorganisation of the sangha system, hoping to train scholarly monks in a modern educational system (Yang 1990).

Master Tai-Xu. Master Tai-Xu was born in late imperial China invaded by Western colonialism. It was a time when intellectuals criticised Confucian and Buddhist traditions for being backward and urged for modernisation based on Western traditions. After several trips across Asia, to inspect Buddhist traditions in Asian countries, Master Tai-Xu called for a reformation of Chinese Buddhism. He constructed the theoretical framework of Humanistic Buddhism which was later revised and advocated by Master Yin-Shun. For Master Tai-Xu, Chinese Buddhism focused too much on the Buddha and Bodhisattvas. Rather than talking about the Buddha, Bodhisattvas or “other-worldly” concerns, Master Tai-Xu’s agenda of Humanistic Buddhism shifted the focus back to the world we are living in. That is, Master Tai-Xu urges for a shift from “other-worldly” deities to “this-worldly” human beings. The central idea of Humanistic Buddhism is to

build up a “this-world” Pure Land and the specific way of reaching this ideal is to practise the Bodhisattva path. In adhering to the Bodhisattva’s characteristics, human beings who practise the Bodhisattva path must be compassionate and merciful to all sentient beings that are living in suffering. This is what distinguishes Humanistic Buddhism from earlier Chan or Pure Land schools: earlier Chinese Buddhist schools focused on a sudden realisation of enlightenment or reciting of sutras to attain Buddhahood.

Monastic systems as well as lay Buddhist organisations had to be reorganised in order to survive the huge impact of modernisation. Centring on lay communities rather than the monastic sanghas, Master Tai-Xu encouraged lay people to purify their minds and their lives by following and practising Buddhist teachings. Through this process of purification, lay people practise the Bodhisattva path which leads them to the realisation of enlightenment (Chandler 2006; Yang 1990). Although Pittman (2001) sees Humanistic Buddhism as a modernised form of Chinese Buddhism, Humanistic Buddhism should be seen as a modern revival of original Buddhist spirits. Chandler (2006) approaches contemporary Buddhist activities from the debate of modernism and traditionalism. Using Fo Guang Shan and Tzu-Chi as representative organisations of Taiwanese Buddhism, Chandler argues that the modernist revival of Chinese Buddhism, advocated by Master Tai-Xu and Master Yin-Shun, “has been balancing modern techniques with traditional wisdom” (p.182). Although these Buddhist organisations are taking a modernised form, they are considered to be reviving the original spirit of Buddhism while modernising the institutions.

Chandler (2006) and Pittman (2001) believe that Humanistic Buddhism is a modern revival of Chinese Buddhism; however, Chiang (2003) believes that Humanistic Buddhism should not be seen in this way. For Chiang, Humanistic Buddhism is a return to the original Buddhist spirit (p.256). When explaining the Buddhist tradition in the teachings of Humanistic Buddhism, Shih (2001) defines tradition as a representation instead of a fixed existence. What can be termed as a Buddhist tradition is a doctrine that fits into all historical time and can be passed down from one time to another. Yang (1991) argues that both Master Tai-Xu and Master Yin-Shun advocated Humanistic Buddhism in the hope of reviving the declining Buddhist traditions and doctrines in late imperial China. The difference is that Master Tai-Xu’s advocacy of Humanistic Buddhism is more like a response to the social environment where traditional philosophies, Confucianism and Buddhism, were severely critiqued for stopping the nation moving towards modernisation. Therefore, Master Tai-Xu’s reformation of

modernised Buddhist institutions relies on the use of Westernised methods (i.e. the educational system). On the other hand, Master Yin-Shun advocates the subjectivity of Chinese Buddhism during the process of modernisation. The core value of Master Yin-Shun's teachings is to go back to the original teachings of Indian Buddhism. He tried to revive the Buddhist traditions by bringing back the original spirit of Buddhism which had been lost in the historical domestication of Chinese Buddhism (Chen, 2002). Master Yin-Shun expects his teachings of Humanistic Buddhism to fit into the modern era. Humanistic Buddhism should lead the trend but it cannot change the spirit to please the world, nor can it cause the decline and corruption of Buddhism.

Master Yin-Shun. Master Tai-Xu's reformation of Chinese Buddhism is a primitive form of Master Yin-Shun's Humanistic Buddhism. Master Yin-Shun was Master Tai-Xu's most famous disciple and the most influential figure in contemporary Taiwanese Buddhism (Pittman 2001). The two of them shifted the focus from the Buddha and Bodhisattvas to human beings. They encouraged the laity to focus on "this-worldly" welfare rather than "other-worldly" salvation. From Master Yin-Shun's point of view, earlier Buddhist schools became a self-serving Buddhism which is definitely different from what the authentic reading of Mahayana Buddhist doctrines teaches (Pittman 2001; Ng 2007; Yang 1990; 1991; 2000). The central idea of Master Yin-Shun's Humanistic Buddhism is to promote a Buddhism that is centred on the welfare of human beings rather than a faith or belief in deities. Master Yin-Shun (1989) believes that all Buddhas reach Nirvana in this world not in Heaven. Instead of seeing Buddhism as a faith, Master Yin-Shun believes Buddhism should be based on the welfare of human beings. Recitation and meditation do not play such a central role as they did before; what Humanistic Buddhism advocates is a real taste of daily life through work, for example in charity work (Chandler 2006).

Furthermore, Master Yin-Shun emphasises an "active participation in human society" (Chandler 2006 p. 186) and "charitable activity on the part of devotees" (Laliberte 2003 p. 177). Because Buddha nature is inside every sentient being, Master Yin-Shun believes that Buddhist practice should emphasise human Bodhisattvas rather than enlightened Bodhisattvas. To be a perfect human being is more important than worshipping deities. Moreover, he reminded his followers that the Buddha realised enlightenment in human society, in this world, instead of becoming enlightened in an "other-worldly" heaven (Shih 1999; Yang 1991). This is encouragement for lay Buddhists to practise Buddhism with concerns in this world that are closely related to them. In contrast to earlier beliefs that people with good karma will be relieved from the

cycle of reincarnation and enter Pure Land after death, Humanistic Buddhism believes in building a Pure Land in human society with collaboration among human beings, the Buddha, and Bodhisattvas (Yang 1991).

In the review of the history of Chinese Buddhism, scholars tend to emphasise the syncretisation of Buddhism and Confucianism as the major success of Buddhism in China. The lay characteristic of Mahayana Buddhism is seen as another factor in the success of Buddhism in China. Mahayana Buddhism places more emphasis on lay people and the Buddha nature in all sentient beings. There are scholarly debates on the theoretical framework of Humanistic Buddhism. Buddhist scholars trace back to Buddhist canons to interpret and explain the theoretical basis of Humanistic Buddhism. Yang (1991) analyses the differences between Master Tai-Xu's Humanistic Buddhism and Master Yin-Shun's Humanistic Buddhism. Yang (2000) argues that Humanistic Buddhism is based on humanism and compassion. Therefore, Humanistic Buddhism is a return to the original Indian Buddhism and early Mahayana Buddhism. In both articles (1991; 2000), Yang argues that Humanistic Buddhism is deeply influenced by Neo-Confucianism. That is, Buddhist doctrine is embodied in Confucian ethics. As Confucianism was the prevailing state ideology in pre-modern China, Mahayana Buddhist teachings did not contradict the familial ethics in Confucianism (Kang and Jian 1995). The interwoven relationship between Buddhism and Confucianism is an important element in discussing contemporary Buddhism in Taiwan.

Instead of seeing Master Yin-Shun's Humanistic Buddhism as the legacy of Master Tai-Xu's Humanistic Buddhism, Chiang (1989) sees Master Yin-Shun's theoretical framework as a critique against Tai-Xu's Humanistic Buddhism. The differences between Master Tai-Xu and Master Yin-Shun lay with their different standpoints. Master Tai-Xu aimed to modernise the monastic system which provided more "this-worldly" concerns for the laity, while Master Yin-Shun urged the laity to practise the Bodhisattva's path rather than worshipping the Bodhisattvas. Both Yang and Chiang are distinct scholars in contemporary Taiwanese Buddhism. Their great knowledge in Buddhist doctrines is the best basis for them to construct a theoretical framework for Humanistic Buddhism. The academic knowledge is essential to construct a theoretical framework; however, Humanistic Buddhism is a collaborate work of charismatic leaders and lay people. Most of the large Buddhist organisations mainly consist of lay people, especially the Tzu-Chi organisation. Not only are the followers lay people, but the CEOs of Tzu-Chi's different institutions are lay people, too. Scholarly debates on Buddhist doctrines are not enough to understand the current trend of Buddhism in

Taiwan. The gap between elite Buddhism and lay Buddhism can be widened if scholars pay less attention to lay people's understanding of Buddhist teachings.

Religious Activities from 1987 to the Present Day

The lifting of martial law in 1987 played an important role in the growth of religious activities in Taiwan. Many scholars have noted the importance of this because religious activities, while not as repressed as in China, had been monitored by the KMT government before the lifting of martial law (Chandler 2006 p. 176; Feuchtwang 2001 p. 239-240; Laliberte 2003 p. 163-164; 2004 p. 39-41). Along with rapid economic growth in the 1980s and 1990s, Buddhist organisations have prospered. As Weller (2007) pointed out, the fact that Taiwanese religious activities have grown fast along with growing economy is a unique phenomenon, as theorists of modernity expected a decrease in religious activities with the dominance of the capitalist economy. Among thriving religious activities, Fo Guang Shan, led by Master Xing-Yun, and the Tzu-Chi Foundation, led by Master Zheng-Yan, are the most prominent and largest lay Buddhist organisations²⁷. Both Master Xing-Yun and Master Zheng-Yan follow Master Yin-Shun's teachings on Humanistic Buddhism. As Master Zheng-Yan claims to follow the teachings of Humanistic Buddhism, it is necessary to examine the core values of Humanistic Buddhism when discussing the religious aspects of Tzu-Chi.

The fact that religious activities prosper with the economic growth and increasing democratic state raises scholarly interests in the relationships among religious organisations, the national economy and the modernised state. Scholars on religious activities in contemporary Taiwanese society treat the vibrant religious cultures as one of the results of economic growth and democratisation (Jordan 1994; Jordan & Overmyer 1986; Jones 1999; Laliberte 2004). Katz (2003) argues that the economic growth and political liberation strengthen the influences of local religions at a national level. Local cults of temples become the place where the state and the local religions interact.

²⁷ Fo Guang Shan is one of the leading Buddhist organisations in Taiwan. The organisation was close to influential political figures during the KMT period. Master Xin-Yun, one of the mainland refugees, was the first sangha who used TV broadcasting to spread Buddhist doctrines. On the other hand, the Tzu-Chi organisation is closer to lay Buddhists and Master Zheng-Yan is an indigenous woman who uses Taiwanese to appeal to the followers. Both of them are believed to follow the doctrine of Humanistic Buddhism.

By summarising the religious activities in Sinic societies in the contemporary world, Overmyer (2003) argues that the economic growth and modernity do not repress the appearance of religious activities in the public sphere. This is a unique feature of religion in Sinic societies. Overmyer observes that the economic growth does not repress the religious activities in Taiwan. Unlike the Western account where religious activities decrease in the public sphere in modern society, Taiwanese society is full of bright and vibrant religious activities, “including those of local temples, Buddhist monasteries, and charitable organisations, and a variety of new religious groups” (p.210). Analysing religious activities within the framework of modernity and economics, Overmyer portrays a vibrant religious culture in Taiwanese society. Adding to his observation, this thesis aims to discuss an aspect of media representation for this vibrant religious culture. Religious usage of media technology adds a dynamic dimension to the vibrant religious cultures.

Chiu (2006) conducts a large-scale quantitative study on religious cultures in contemporary Taiwanese society. His study shows that the most popular religious activities have heavy lay characteristics. The processes of industrialisation and urbanisation increase social mobility. With geographical mobility, the sense of insecurity increases. In the agricultural society, the religious activities were centered on local temples. Social mobility enables lay people to participate in new religious activities in the modern world. The variety and convenience of media help new religious organisations to spread.

Labiberte's (2004) study also shows that several large Buddhist organisations have heavy lay characteristics and that the charismatic leaders²⁸ are crucial in these organisations. As a later section will discuss, the agenda of Humanistic Buddhism is to emphasise “this-worldly” matters; contemporary Buddhist organisations break the boundary between the laity and the monastics. Furthermore, the leadership of charismatic leaders attracts more lay followers to practise Buddhism by entering the organisations and participating in social welfare work. In Chiang²⁹'s earlier book (1993),

²⁸ Julia Huang (2008) has studied Master Zheng-Yan's gendered charisma as a CEO of the Tzu-Chi organisation. Julia Huang has several publications (in English) on the Tzu-Chi organisation and Master Zheng-Yan's leadership.

²⁹ Chiang is one of the most influential and knowledgeable Buddhist scholars in contemporary Taiwan. Instead of focusing on the theories, his knowledge in Buddhist doctrines enables Chiang to analyse various aspects of Buddhist activities in the doctrines of Buddhism. Chiang (2003) discusses the history of Taiwanese Buddhism within the historical flow of pre-modern and modern Asia. He uses historical materials from Japan, China and Taiwan to approach the

he suggests that the prosperity of Taiwanese Buddhism is because of Humanistic Buddhism. Before 1971, Master Xing-Yun, the leader of Fo Guang Shan, promoted Buddhism through media (e.g. TV broadcasting) and changed people's minds about traditional Buddhism ("other-worldly" escapism, superstitions, corruptions etc.). Afterwards, the popularity of Tzu-Chi attracted more followers because of its charity work and medical concerns. Tzu-Chi's large appeal to the public is its easily understood interpretation of Humanistic Buddhism. Chiang (2003) and Lan (1993) share similar views with Laliberte, for Chiang sees several large Buddhist organisations as religious forms of "shopping centres". What they offer to lay people is an entrepreneurial institution that provides various religious services to satisfy the different needs of lay people (p.245). A later section will show a detailed analysis of the charismatic leader of the Tzu-Chi organisation.

The above mentioned studies show a tendency for scholars to focus on the political and economic aspects of religious activities. That is, the prospering religious activities are discussed on a national level rather than a personal level. Adding Chiang's (1993) comment on the prosperity of lay Buddhist movements in Taiwan, I will expand the discussion on the doctrines of Humanistic Buddhism in a later section. Also, the different interpretations, offered by those charismatic leaders of Buddhist organisations, are crucial to understand how Humanistic Buddhism works in different ways.

The Tzu-Chi Organisation

In order to contextualise the drama analysis and the audience responses in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, this section presents a scholarly discussion on the Tzu-Chi organisation and Master Zheng-Yan's leadership within the framework of Humanistic Buddhism. There are two major approaches to study the Tzu-Chi organisation. The first group of scholars approaches this from the angle of the marketing and managing strategies of the Tzu-Chi organisation as an international NGO; the second group of scholars focuses on the religious aspects of the organisation, the teachings of Master Zheng-Yan and how her followers follow her teachings. This thesis focuses more on the religious aspect of the Tzu-Chi organisation than the management strategies. The following section presents scholarly discussions on Master Zheng-Yan's leadership, her appeal to female followers, her interpretations of Humanistic Buddhism, and the media approach used by the organisation to spread its agenda.

topic from the points of view of the coloniser and the colonised. Therefore, this book fully explores the historical context and cultural legacy of Taiwanese Buddhism and added to this are his efforts to explain women's contribution and importance in Taiwanese Buddhism.

Master Zheng-Yan's Charismatic Leadership. Huang (2003) believes that Tzu-Chi is an embodiment of engaged Buddhism and it can be seen as a response to globalisation by a local Buddhist organisation. As an international organisation, the Tzu-Chi organisation manages to bring "Buddhist symbols to the global arena" (p.137). Christopher Queen (2000) proposes a scheme for "engaged Buddhism", and Huang tries to fit the Tzu-Chi organisation into this scheme. First of all, Master Zheng-Yan, the CEO of this international organisation, is seen by her followers as a living Bodhisattva³⁰.

Master Zheng-Yan interprets Humanistic Buddhism by telling daily life stories and concerns on contemporary issues. Therefore, it fits the first feature of "engaged Buddhism" for the leader is a reformer with strong Buddhist identity. Secondly, Master Zheng-Yan's publication and her new interpretations of the traditional Six Perfections³¹

offer a modernised interpretation of traditional Buddhist doctrines. Last but not least, the Tzu-Chi organisation is active in social services at the local level as well as the international level. The social service activities, as well as education, medical, media and so on are recognised as essential Tzu-Chi activities. Seeing the Tzu-Chi organisation within the framework of "engaged Buddhism," Huang points out that Tzu-Chi's international success depends on its central doctrine of universal compassion and its mission to relieve suffering which are core values of Bodhisattva's path. Huang's analysis focuses on Master Zheng-Yan's leadership and tries to fit Tzu-Chi into the trend of "engaged Buddhism" on an international scale. As the root of "Engaged Buddhism" came from Master Tai-Xu and Master Yin Shun, Huang's efforts to fit Tzu-Chi into the scheme of Western socially engaged Buddhism might not be appropriate enough to understand the nature of the Tzu-Chi organisation. King (2009) argues that socially engaged Buddhism is purely spiritual, nothing to do with politics and sociology. His view on engaged Buddhism reflects a Westernised way of figuring out spiritual experiences in a religious tradition other than Christianity. The large number of lay followers makes it important to involve social contexts in the discussion of Humanistic Buddhism. Instead of fitting Tzu-Chi into the global trend of "Engaged Buddhism," I would like to put my research and analysis within the framework of Humanistic Buddhism to see how the Tzu-Chi organisation uses different media to approach a broader public.

³⁰ The next few paragraphs will discuss how she is presented as a living Bodhisattva.

³¹ To become a Buddha, a Bodhisattva has to practise six perfections: a) the perfection of giving (dana-paramita); b) the perfection of morality (shila-paramita); c) the perfection of patience (kshanti-paramita); d) the perfection of energy (virya-paramita); e) the perfection of meditation (dhyana-paramita); f) the perfection of wisdom (prajna-paramita).

Huang (2008) explores Master Zheng-Yan's gendered charisma in leading the Tzu-Chi organisation. By presenting the experiences of three female volunteers in the organisation, Huang argues that Master Zheng-Yan's gendered charisma is endorsed by her followers, because Master Zheng-Yan chose a life that is different from ordinary women (i.e. which is a courageous decision). Master Zheng-Yan's gendered charisma relies on her ability to choose a lifestyle that is different from ordinary women's life passages (p.41). As I have argued in the previous chapter, "female gender" in Confucian society is constructed through familial relationships via heterosexual marriage. As an ordained nun, Master Zheng-Yan does not share the similar life passages with her believers, who are mostly heterosexual women, married for a long time. However, she chose a more difficult life and dreamt an almost impossible dream, of founding a huge Buddhist organisation. Her persistence in her life passage as a nun demonstrates women's potential outside the family. From her followers' point of view, Master Zheng-Yan's persistence in practising Buddhism through social services glorifies her leadership. Therefore, her life experiences offer her followers a "female agency as understood in the ordinary world of Chinese women in Taiwan" (Huang 2008 p.41).

The marginalised position of Bhikkhunis in imperial Chinese society is reversed by contemporary Bhikkhunis in Taiwan, because their contributions and efforts to social welfare affirm female agency which is beyond the limitation of patriarchal society (Chen 2002). In Devido's (2003) interviews with Taiwanese Bhikkhunis, they believe that feminine attributes play an important part as to why there is a large number of Bhikkhunis in Taiwanese Buddhism. Feminine attributes such as kindness, calmness, patience, and self-sacrifice match the Buddhist ideals. There are two ways of viewing the emphasis placed on feminine attributes by the Bhikkhunis. Some criticise the conservative attitudes towards women's gender roles and gender attributes without challenging it (Mei 1998). Some, like the Bhikkhunis in Devido and Chen's research and the interviewees in this thesis, interpret these attributes as a crucial key to the change of women's status in religious traditions and activities.

Putting Taiwanese Bhikkhunis under the socio-cultural context of Confucianism, the female agency of Bhikkhunis is seen as a religious way towards self-realisation. Chen (2002) examines their efforts and contributions to social services and charity work. Some contemporary Taiwanese Bhikkhunis set up a paradigm which enables them to

enter the public sphere. Compared with the traditional image of Bhikkhunis who cut off all their connections with the lay world, the contemporary paradigm of Taiwanese Bhikkhunis extends the self-realisation to the greater good of society (Chen 2002 p. 311). By examining Taiwanese Bhikkhunis under the framework of feminist thinking, Chen focuses on the bodily appearances of Bhikkhunis which forms a discourse that is different from the lay discourse on the female body as an object of male attention. What is emphasised in this discourse is the pursuit of mental and inner beauty rather than physical beauty (ibid. p. 323).

Master Zheng-Yan, a humble weak woman, contributes to society in a way that traditional women could not imagine. She inspires all her female members to act and work in social services. Huang's analysis of Master Zheng-Yan's leadership as gendered charisma enables the female followers to reflect on their gender roles, which are extended from the mothering role to serving the public good in society. That is, although Master Zheng-Yan chooses a life path different from her lay followers, her gender connects her closely to female followers. However, Huang's analysis does not question the concept of "female gender". As I have argued in Chapter 2, gender construction should be situated in the familial framework. Although Master Zheng-Yan is an ordained nun, her gender role is not constructed through marriage and the familial roles coming with it. Her bodily experiences as well as social experiences must be very different from those of her followers. A gendered charismatic leadership cannot be the only way that appeals to female followers.

In her recent work, Huang (2009) analyses the Tzu-Chi organisation and Master Zheng-Yan's leadership from the point of view of Master Zheng-Yan's charismatic leadership. The book starts with Master Zheng-Yan's biography to build up her image as a human Bodhisattva. Master Zheng-Yan's tales of becoming an ordained nun correspond to the tale of Guan-yin in China. Wang's study (2004) shows that legends of Guan-yin are strongly influenced by Confucian familial values. Guan-yin's filial piety towards her parents shows that religious pursuit is compatible with Confucian values of family. Master Zheng-Yan's tale of becoming an ordained nun is further glorified by Tzu-Chi's multimedia approach of retelling her life stories. Although Tzu-Chi is a well-organised bureaucracy³², Master Zheng-Yan is glorified not as a result of bureaucratisation, but as a result of her charisma. And this glorification creates Master

³² See Huang's book (2009) and O'Neill's book (2010) to know more about the organisation. Both studies show great detail in the bureaucratisation of the Tzu-Chi organisation as well as the voluntary experiences of the members.

Zheng-Yan as a vivid embodiment of a living Bodhisattva. She is, therefore, worshipped by her followers as a deity figure. Tzu-Chi's massive success on the local level as well as on an international scale is a result of Master Zheng-Yan's leadership and her vision. Huang's study shows Tzu-Chi members' experiences in various voluntary work and their performances in various rituals.

“Being a Tzu-Chi person seems to be less about what one believes than about how one behaves in the ebb and flow of daily life. Tzu-Chi people act out their identity by presenting the Tzu-Chi identity properly and in the right context, and by changing themselves through bodily discipline, emotional control, and morality--that is, the second body, the followers' body, in the local context” (Huang 2009 p.183).

The cult of Tzu-Chi is formed through Tzu-Chi members' actions and presentation of their identities in the proper context. Tzu-Chi members embody the Buddhist concept of compassion through participating in Tzu-Chi's voluntary work. Huang points out that “Cheng Yen is the key to understanding Tzu-Chi, not only because she is charismatic but also because all Tzu-Chi missions are very largely the result of her vision of Buddhism” (ibid. p.213). What Tzu-Chi has achieved today is a result of Master Zheng-Yan's charismatic leadership and her way of practising and interpreting Buddhism. Through various Tzu-Chi activities, the collective symbolism of Tzu-Chi and its members is reinforced. Therefore, Master Zheng-Yan's charisma is internalised in the followers' minds and their commitment to participate in Tzu-Chi's voluntary work. The collective identity is further reinforced by various media in the media age.

Huang's book offers a good understanding of the Tzu-Chi organisation and its bureaucracy, apart from the media aspect. Adding to her detailed studies on Tzu-Chi's bureaucracy, I would like to analyse the way Tzu-Chi uses mass media to communicate with its followers as well as the public. Huang's work and O'Neil's work does not place the Tzu-Chi organisation as well as Master Zheng-Yan's teachings within the framework of Humanistic Buddhism in a media age. The following section presents scholarly discussions on Tzu-Chi's interpretation of Humanistic Buddhism.

The Interpretation and Embodiment of Humanistic Buddhism via written media. Lu (2004a) uses narrative analysis to study Master Zheng-Yan's publication Still

Thoughts³³ and its impacts on her followers. Still Thoughts are written words that become alive through the followers' living experiences. Reading the words would not be effective enough for the followers. As soon as the followers practise the Buddhist teachings through voluntary work, they begin to comprehend the essence of those words. Lu's study shows that a religious sense of reality is constructed through the narrative of Still Thoughts and the members' life stories. The repeated acts of telling stories as well as practising voluntary work empower religious identity and reality. A Tzu-Chi identity is constructed and solidified via repeated performances of retelling life stories and studying Still Thoughts. Gradually, it reaches the goal of transforming the followers' minds and their behaviour. Lu (2004a) positively predicts the power of healing and transforming in reading and practising Still Thoughts and the sharing of life stories via media technology. Still Thoughts takes a verbal form at the beginning and it is circulated via the publication of these written works as well as the cassettes. A religious reality is constructed via different media approaches. Lu's analysis reveals that the religious narration in the Tzu-Chi organisation holds the healing power, reinforced through repeated acts of voluntary work. The narrative of religiosity is realised and actualised via personal experiences as volunteers in the Tzu-Chi organisation. This thesis extends the narrative analysis to Da-Ai Drama to see how this religious form of narration transforms the public's mind and thoughts on Tzu-Chi. The dramas show a similar narrative pattern of sharing members' life stories with several hints of Still Thoughts. The audience's response to Da-Ai Drama shows a similar pattern of retelling the life stories as a part of their religious experiences. Therefore, it can be argued that the Tzu-Chi organisation not only uses Da-Ai Drama as a way to spread Buddhist doctrines, but it also serves as a religious field that invites the audience to practise Buddhism as a part of the watching experience.

Further to her study on Master Zheng-Yan's publication, by studying Master Zheng-Yan's lectures and speeches, Lu (2004b) explains Master Zheng-Yan's concept of human Bodhisattva. Tzu-Chi's voluntary work enables members to experience Buddhist ethics on life and death. Compassion is an essential element in the Bodhisattva's path; therefore, Master Zheng-Yan's urge for charity work creates a new form of Dharma gate³⁴ for lay people to know Buddhism. Doing voluntary work in the

³³ Still Thoughts is a published collection of Master Zheng-Yan's teachings on daily life or human behaviour. They are read and studied by Tzu-Chi members and the selling of the books contributes to the major financial resources of Master Zheng-Yan's daily expenses.

³⁴ Dharma gates refer to different Buddhist schools or methods to study and practise Buddhism in order to reach Nirvana. It is believed that there are various methods and ways leading to

hospital enables the members to experience the teaching of “ever-changing”. To understand that life is short and “ever-changing” encourages the members to do good deeds in their limited lifetime. Different aspects of voluntary work offer the followers various contexts to experience and learn the path of Bodhisattva. The success of the Tzu-Chi organisation exemplifies the power of the grassroots network in religious activities. Lu’s article analyses the central doctrine of Humanistic Buddhism--human Bodhisattva and the path of Bodhisattva. It is embodied in Tzu-Chi’s various charity works. Mainly focusing on Master Zheng-Yan’s interpretation to link Buddhist doctrines with voluntary work, Lu provides little empirical evidence of the members’ interpretation of their voluntary experiences. These voluntary experiences and the horizontal ties among members create a powerful network that has influence beyond local communities.

Guan-yin Worship. Master Zheng-Yan puts great emphasis on a Mahayana Buddhist ideal--Bodhisattva (Guan-yin).



Fig. 3 Image of Guan-yin

Instead of chanting sutras as a basis for practising Bodhisattva's path, Tzu-Chi's members pay a lot of attention to action. Therefore, the Tzu-Chi organisation is not a textually-based Buddhist institution. Indeed, Master Zheng-Yan encourages her followers to do, to practise Bodhisattva's path by participating in social welfare and charity work (Huang and Weller, 1998). Bodhisattva, or Guan-yin, has been one of the most important and popular deities in Taiwan (Weller 2007). Guan-yin is an embodiment of the Mahayana Buddhist ideal. As an enlightened being, Bodhisattva chooses to stay in this world out of compassion and perseverance in order to save all sentient beings that are suffering (Reed 2003 p. 199; Weller 2007 p. 356). A previous

section shows how Master Zheng-Yan is seen as a living Bodhisattva (Huang 2009). This section will briefly show the importance of Guan-yin worship as a basis of understanding the legends and images of Guan-yin.

Huang and Weller (1998) relate Tzu-Chi's appeal to women and Master Zheng-Yan's gendered charisma to several goddesses popularly worshipped in Taiwan (Guan-yin, Mazu, and the Eternal Venerable Mother). Also, they point out Taiwanese women's deep involvement with religious activities both in daily ancestor worship and other religious activities such as attending temple. When talking about Master Zheng-Yan's leadership, Huang and Weller use a narrative of Guan-yin to inscribe a traditional blend of filial piety and Buddhism. The argument goes on to emphasise women's roles as mothers. Women in Confucian ideology become respectable when they take on the role of a mother by fulfilling their husbands' filial duties to bear male heirs. Guan-yin herself, although unmarried and never having been a mother, is often shown holding a baby. This is not just to show that she will help to deliver sons, but it also sums up, in a single icon, the idealised position of women in China; a devotion to the salvation of all through the image of motherhood (p.382). The nurturing and caring nature of motherhood is similar to the compassion of Bodhisattvas. Chapter 5 will show the media representation of motherhood and the way Tzu-Chi blends Buddhist doctrines in Confucianism.

Bodhisattva grows in importance with the development of Mahayana Buddhism. In early Indian Buddhism, it was impossible to imagine a female form of Bodhisattva. However, in the later development of Mahayana Buddhism Bodhisattva is explained, in the canon, as embodying both female and male forms depending on which one best suited the situation. Among all celestial Bodhisattvas, Avalokiteshvara is the most popular deity in East Asia (Harvey 2000 p. 130). Avalokiteshvara— Buddha-maker—who helps others to attain Buddhahood but remains the Bodhisattva forever (Dayal 1970 p. 44), has become a cult of half of Asia, as Tay (1976) describes him, known as Kuan-yin (Guan-yin) in China; and Kwannon or Kannon in Japanese. Although Avalokiteshvara was a male Bodhisattva in scriptures, he transformed into a female figure in Chinese folk tradition. In India and Tibet, the most popular Avalokiteshvara is seen as male while in China, known as Guan-yin, she is a female deity who is an all-compassionate "mother-goddess" (Harvey 2000 p. 365-366).

There are many stories about his female transformation and there are many different forms of his female figure (Yu 1990). The scriptural authority grants Avalokiteshvara the ability to appear in various forms (Williams 1989 p. 232) because celestial Bodhisattvas are seen as lacking in material elements. As they are spiritual beings, they are capable of appearing in various forms, male or female, for the convenience of educating or saving lay people (Paul 1985 p. 248). One of the most popular feminine forms is known as the “Buddhist Madonna” because of her ability to grant sons to women who desperately need male heirs to carry on the familial blood for their husbands (Tay 1976 p. 147; Williams 1989 p. 231). Avalokiteshvara transforms into a mother-goddess probably because Guan-yin’s relationship with all sentient beings is like a caring mother. The above discussions offer a scriptural understanding of Guan-yin. The following section shows Guan-yin worship in folk religious traditions.

Guan-yin worship is seen as an important part of the domestication of Buddhism in China. Its female form in folk Buddhism is seen by the religious scholars as a part of the secularisation. The wide popularity of Guan-yin does not only come from the canonical tradition but also from literary works (Lin 2004). Guan-yin is a perfect embodiment of mercy and compassion because she vows to delay her Buddhahood until all sentient beings are saved from suffering. In the cult of Guan-yin, she is said to have the ability to save all sentient beings as soon as they call upon her. Yu (2001) argues that the worship of Guan-yin offers the best explanation of Confucian values which results in its popularity in Taiwanese society.

Li (2007) has a detailed review of studies on Guan-yin worship. For him, the studies of Guan-yin worship (in mainland China) are approached from historians, religious scholars, literary scholars, ethnographers, archaeologists and so on. It is obvious that the studies of Guan-yin worship are situated in the context of imperial China. These studies are largely textually based, either on Buddhist canons or on literary legends. In Taiwan, scholars examine various canonical texts to study Guan-yin worship. There are scholars who focus on the artistic forms of Guan-yin in history. No matter which subject area this issue is approached from, the scholars tend to focus on the canonical texts and historical texts to construct a thorough understanding of Guan-yin worship. What I see from these approaches is a lack of contemporary practitioners’ voices. How much does an ordinary lay woman know about the origins and the sexual transformation of Guan-yin? How deeply does an ordinary lay woman know about Guan-yin, or Avalokiteshvara, in the canonical texts? From a sociologist’s gender point of view, the worship of Guan-yin as a female form is worth discussing because of its

female symbol and its popularity among lay women. From a sociologist's point of view, what concerns me is how Guan-yin worship has now transformed into a philosophy of action in the Tzu-Chi organisation. Guan-yin has stepped down from its celestial status to a secular field. This will be further discussed in the next two chapters.

Reed's (2003) studies on Guan-yin narratives show that people who encounter chaotic disasters always call upon Guan-yin in the hope of saving them from famine, drought, fire, flood, illness, war and so on. Reed further proposes a "counter-narrative" of Guan-yin used by Master Zheng-Yan to encourage her followers to sort out their own problems in order to help other suffering people. Because Avalokiteshvara is a compassionate incarnate, what concerns him is not just enlightenment but all sufferings in everyday life (Williams 1989 p.232). There are many tales circulated among lay people that tell about miraculous experiences of being saved by Guan-yin. These folk images of Guan-yin make him/her an iconographic figure in Chinese Buddhism (Yu 1990).

Looking back in the Buddhist canons, Li (2007) points out that Guan-yin unites the secular and the celestial. Although Guan-yin is a celestial Bodhisattva, it has various secular forms. Instead of manifesting in front of the lay believers as a god or goddess, Guan-yin appears as an ordinary person. He/she is also an embodiment of mercy and cruelty. Guan-yin can be seen as a loving mother as well as a harsh father. Li points out that the philosophy of Guan-yin is constructed in three ways. Firstly, it is recorded in Buddhist canons, including Indian originals and canons written for China, Japan, and Korea. Secondly, it is constructed by the Guan-yin miracles passed down by believers (Reeds 2003). Thirdly, Guan-yin legends are manifested in literary works and paintings. The last two traditions belong to folk Buddhist religions. Despite the fact that the last two traditions construct Guan-yin differently from traditional/ original Buddhism, their influences are much stronger and powerful among lay people.

Yu (1995) studies the vernacular commentaries written in imperial China to show how Guan-yin worship is consolidated by these sutras. She points out that although these sutras were not from the original Indian Buddhism, the spirits remain Mayahana. What makes these vernacular commentaries popular is their close connection to the local experiences (i.e. Confucian traditions). vernacular commentaries and miracles retold by lay people contribute to the domestication of Buddhism in China as well as the

popularity of Guan-yin worship. It can be concluded that the worship of Guan-yin is an interwoven net between elite Buddhist traditions and lay Buddhist traditions.

Sun and Sun (1995) believe that it is meaningless to discuss the female form of Bodhisattva because the canons acknowledge it as a basic principle that it manifests in both forms. Sun and Sun argue that studies on the female form of Bodhisattva are influenced by secularisation and the study of the arts. Based on Buddhist canons, there is no problem with Bodhisattva's female form. The form of Bodhisattva is a landmark of the secularisation and domestication of Buddhism in China. Sun and Sun argue that the beginning of Guan-yin worship corresponded with the public needs for a harmonious and peaceful society in war time (Sui Dynasty, 581 A.D.- 619 A.D.). In the mid-Tang Dynasty (618 A.D.- 907 A.D.), Guan-yin becomes an icon that grants children to its followers. This belief is enhanced by the Confucian tradition of placing emphasis on male heirs. They look into the historical and social background of imperial China in order to see why Guan-yin became a female form and can never change back to the male form in folk Buddhism. Once her female form was established, she became a goddess that had little to do with the original Bodhisattva in the Buddhist canons. The argument is not whether Avalokiteshvara is male or female. The underlying theme of this gender transformation demonstrates what "emptiness" teaches all Buddhists: Avalokiteshvara, representing the Buddha-nature, is neither male nor female, but both male and female. The nature of the Bodhisattva ideal, emptiness, is a perfect argument for gender equality in Mahayana Buddhism. The gender transformation of Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara into a mother-goddess shows the importance and highly-elevated status of motherhood in Chinese society. This highly respected status of the mothering role will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Women's Horizontal Ties. Interested in the religious impact on the formation of communal relationships, which is a crucial value in Confucianism, Schak (2009) explores newly-risen Buddhist groups and their impact on the formation of communities in Taiwan. Schak describes Tzu-Chi members as having developed their own cults, such as a specific way to greet each other and the philosophy on DOING. Although Tzu-Chi members have developed their own cult, Tzu-Chi's activities are not exclusive; they are open to other religious groups and religious activities. Different Buddhist groups are not exclusive to one another because of the different strengths and teachings. As a result, lay people are free to choose religious groups which suit them best (p.179). This can be understood as the concept of various Dharma gates. Buddhism should adjust its way of teaching and spreading its doctrines according to

different people; therefore, Buddhist schools or groups are not exclusive to each other. Schak positively sees these Buddhist groups as a powerful way to generate communities that are declining in an industrial society. It has been a tradition in Taiwan that religious places and temples were centres for communal activities. Nowadays, the newly arisen Buddhist groups offer lay people more choice. His study reflects a need for communities centred on religious activities in contemporary Taiwanese society. Communal ties before the age of industrialisation consisted of a strong patrilineal communal system which was generated around patrilineage. Although lay Buddhist groups cannot replace the familial bonds, they answer the need for a community in the modern world. Instead of basing his study on the Buddhist canons, Schak uses empirical data to study different facets of Taiwanese Buddhism and its impact. Further to Schak's discussion would be the strong women's network built up in the Tzu-Chi organisation.

Weller (1999) notices the Tzu-Chi organisation's huge success among housewives in Taiwan. Master Zheng-Yan appeals to her followers by telling members' life stories to arouse sympathy and self-reflection among her audience. Familial disputes are the most common theme in stories told by Master Zheng-Yan. Weller points out that Tzu-Chi teaches its followers to accept their problems, gives them a supportive group of friends, and offers new interests that give them a feeling of worthy accomplishment. It defuses the domestic problems inherent in being a Chinese wife and mother by reducing them to karma or fate (*yuan*), and by offering them charitable actions as the way to improve karma (p.98).

Instead of challenging and critiquing the existing ideology, Tzu-Chi uses media to provide a new interpretation on the existing ideology. The next section on media will show how Tzu-Chi uses media to reverse the prevailing ideology without challenging it. Since Tzu-Chi emphasises action rather than philosophical teachings, the easiest way to act as a Bodhisattva is to extend women's roles within the family to society. Therefore, many members or followers find it easy to practise Buddhist teachings simply by extending their mothering roles to a public sphere. Weller (1999), thus, concludes that "it confines women in their family roles, yet also extends them beyond the family itself for the first time" (p.98). Although Tzu-Chi does not challenge the existing Confucian ethics, it does not mean the Tzu-Chi organisation does not critique traditional gender roles and familial values. Weller believes that the moral teachings in the Tzu-Chi organisation are "more traditionally Confucian, urging people to act as filial children and as moral exemplars in their dealings with others" (ibid. p.99). I would like

to further this discussion by stating that it is easier for members to approach Buddhism through familiar Confucian discourse.

As leaving the family to enter monastic life has traditionally been an alternative option for women in China and Taiwan, Huang and Weller (1998) believe that Tzu-Chi offers a better alternative, because it is an international organisation that provides a larger scale of activities for women to participate in. Instead of encouraging women to enter monastic life as an escape from their problems, it encourages women to solve their familial problems in daily life. By tracing back women's participation in religious activities in late modern China, and comparing women's participation in social service oriented religious activities in the West, Huang and Weller argue that these religious charitable activities allow women to participate in a larger scale of activities by emphasising "higher morality of both religion and family" (p.393). What I am arguing in this thesis is that Tzu-Chi's success in Taiwan is because of its intimate relationship with Confucian ethics. The teachings seem to be no different than those of Confucianism; however, Tzu-Chi indeed reinterprets Confucian moral values in a Buddhist way. The blurry line between various religious traditions is the unique feature of Taiwanese Buddhism. It is not appropriate to negate Tzu-Chi's teachings as Confucian in nature. This thesis sees Tzu-Chi as constructing its own teachings and moral values for women as well as familial values through media representation.

Media Approaches. Chang and Leung (2005) study body donation in a health communication approach which shows how Tzu-Chi uses media to re-interpret the existing social discourses on body donation³⁵. Instead of analysing the media content, Chang and Leung focus on the strategies Tzu-Chi uses. By analysing Tzu-Chi's campaign on body donation, the authors aim to see how it succeeds in re-interpreting the traditional values of preserving the whole body after death.

"It is worthwhile to examine the message strategies that were employed by Tzu-Chi to counteract such resistant forces and to instill a modified (if not new) value system in its target audience" (p.101).

³⁵ The Tzu-Chi organisation sets up the body donation programme for educational purposes for its own medical schools. The donation of the whole body is contradictory to the social ideal of preserving the whole body. Tzu-Chi succeeds in advocating the body donation programme by adding religious meanings via various media promotion.

The authors analyse several publications from the Tzu-Chi organisation to see the media strategies Tzu-Chi uses to convince its target audience. Chapter 6 will show how a similar pattern of Tzu-Chi strategies are applied to Da-Ai Drama as a part of the campaign. There are three ways for the Tzu-Chi organisation to communicate with its target audience: by “modifying the existing and traditional value system”; “instilling confidence and motivation within the individual³⁶”; and “humanising the treatment of cadavers” (ibid. p.102-103).

Tzu-Chi’s campaign on body donation has an “implication of the findings for health communication”. It “strategically confront[s] value systems” by “re-framing as a means to enhance the acceptance of recommended practices”. Also the campaign “instill[s] confidence and motivation” and “increase[s] the message relevance to the target” by “highlight[ing] the impact of positives” (ibid. p.103-104). Tzu-Chi’s campaign of body donation best exemplifies how Tzu-Chi uses media to approach its target audience without challenging the existing value systems but re-frames them in order to enhance more acceptance. As a Buddhist organisation, Tzu-Chi cleverly links each individual act to Buddhist DOCTRINES and makes these acts relevant to the earthly “path of Bodhisattva”. By building up the confidence and emphasising the positive side of these acts, Tzu-Chi’s campaign uses media to approach the target audience. Chapter 5 shows that the re-framing discourse Da-Ai Drama provides on women’s role as a daughter is the first step to confront the audience about traditional values because:

“...confronting one’s value system across contexts may provide an opportunity for an individual to re-examine his or her beliefs and attitudes, and may be conducive to behavioural change” (ibid. p.104).

Da-Ai Drama highlights the impact of positives as well. Instead of encouraging women to divorce their abusive husbands, Da-Ai Drama emphasises how women become stronger and tougher through the misery in their lives without passing any judgement on their husbands. Generation differences play a crucial role here because the therapeutic discourses brought by Da-Ai Drama offers women from older generation a

³⁶ In part, the authors mention that the campaign corresponds to Tzu-Chi’s message of “the path of Bodhisattva”; therefore, the campaign empowers the individual by telling the audience that the body donation is a way to self-actualisation. The authors see this strategy as “emphasis on self actualisation and the fulfilment of one’s goal that transcends both life and death gives Tzu-Chi’s campaign for body donation a special touch in terms of its message appeal”(p.103).

religious comforts. For women in younger generation, Da-Ai Drama offers a didactic function (see Chapter 5).

Within Chinese literature, there are a few dissertations on Da-Ai TV or Da-Ai Drama. Wu (2001) uses narrative analysis to examine Da-Ai Drama as well as interviews with the production end to understand how Da-Ai Drama is produced. Wu concludes that Tzu-Chi is represented as a “helper” or “assistant” in the leading characters’ lives. Through helping the leading characters out of their difficult times, Tzu-Chi reaches its goal of practising Buddhism in daily life. Different from her findings, this thesis based the analysis on Reed’s (2003) study of Guan-yin narrative and the counter-narrative proposed by Master Zheng-Yan. Wu’s (2001) research focuses on the production end and how the dramas are produced while this research focuses on the audience end and how the dramas are perceived.

Lee (2007) also bases his research on the production end, aiming to examine the process of producers. Instead of seeing it from the view of religious broadcasting, the author sees its purpose as providing moral disciplines and familial education to the audience. Similar to Wu’s study (2001), Lee (2007) does not provide the response from the audience’s end. Yu (2002) studies Da-Ai TV from the marketing point of view. Her study suggests that Da-Ai TV should adjust itself to a broader public rather than limiting its audience to Tzu-Chi members. However, my fieldwork experiences show that most of the audience are not Tzu-Chi members. Bai (2009) studies plot, characters, dialogue, theme, settings and music in *Cao Shan Chun Hui*, one of the most popular Da-Ai Drama. Her study demonstrates several disciplines of Da-Ai Drama. Responding to Tzu-Chi’s teachings of purifying human minds and teaching the public about the brighter side of humanity, Da-Ai Drama avoids scenes on conflicts and strong language; instead it produces dramas based on daily life and avoids preaching. By interviewing the production team, Bai’s study shows the interaction between the production end and the cult of the Tzu-Chi organisation. These dissertations show a tendency of studying Da-Ai Drama from the production end. Also, the dramas are not understood in the context of Humanistic Buddhism. Therefore, these researches lack a religious orientation in their arguments.

Conclusion

Placing the studies of Bhikkhunis within the framework of global studies on Buddhist women, Li (2002) points out a problem with the studies on Bhikkhunis in Taiwan. Most of the scholars who had studied or published works on the Bhikkhunis had had experiences of studying in European or American countries. This is similar to the leaders of the women's movements in Taiwan, as discussed in Chapter 2. It is good to start discussing women's issues and the situation of Bhikkhunis in Taiwanese society. However, as they are a more privileged and educated group of intellectuals, scholars should re-examine their perspective. It is a risk that scholars will implant Western theories of feminism in the local context because their scholarly experiences cannot fully reflect local women's daily experiences. Although it is impossible to eliminate the influences of Western or Eurocentric theories on feminism and women's studies, it is crucial to situate the studies of gender within the specific socio-cultural context where the subjects live. Furthermore, gender issues should not be limited to women themselves. Male gender is also constructed by society.

Whether in institution-oriented religious traditions or different traditions, religions are activities that come into being with joint efforts of the canonical texts, the monastic system and lay people. From the literature reviewed in this section, there are far more studies on the canonical texts concerning the theoretical framework. An ahistorical analysis of canonical texts fails to locate the texts in their historical and social context. The textually based tradition to study religious activities neglects the diversity and variety of daily practised experiences of the monastics and the laity. As for Buddhism, there are far too many traditions and canonical texts to generalise it as a 'sexist' religious tradition. To study Buddhist women means to locate them in a specific cultural context and a specific Buddhist school. The prosperity of Taiwanese Bhikkhunis sets an example to other parts of the Buddhist world although there are gender-equality debates among Taiwanese Buddhists. A religious tradition is a pyramid within which the canonical texts and the monastic system stay on the top while the bottom of the pyramid consists of a larger group of lay people. To study lay people's religious experiences means to engage the socio-cultural context in which they live into the discussion. Similar to the argument in Chapter 2, neither women in Buddhism nor women in Confucianism should be seen as powerless victimised women. The texts of Buddhism and Confucianism might be 'patriarchal' and 'sexist'; however, the practices vary. Chapter 2 presents a different perspective on interpreting gender construction in Confucianism. As lay women's religious experiences cannot be separated from the social-cultural context, the discussions in Chapter 2 are essential to the analysis and understanding of Buddhist women in Taiwan.

This thesis aims to examine lay people's practices by examining the media representation of lay women's stories in the media, Da-Ai Drama. Also, the study of Da-Ai Drama offers a way to study Tzu-Chi's media strategies on the existing discourse of gender. The religious use of media is less discussed in the studies of religions. I would argue that it is necessary to open religious studies to multi-media based tradition rather than a textually based tradition. By focusing on the media approach used by the Tzu-Chi organisation and the lay people's experiences, this thesis hopes to present a new approach in studying religious experiences.

Chapter 4

Religion and Media

Introduction

The last two chapters have shown how women are constructed differently in the textual tradition of Buddhism and Confucianism. However, traditional forms of religion are facing challenges in a media age because religion can be circulated through various media: written; visual; audio and so on. Society has become more and more dependent on mass media communication and computerised communication technology (Hoover and Lundby 1997 p. 4). Religious institutions worldwide find their use of digital and electronic media a convenient tool and they make use of various media formats: TV; cassette; radio; video; film and lately, the Internet. Nowadays, religion can be circulated through more media than just written or published books; therefore, it is necessary for scholars to switch their focus from written traditions to the multimedia environment.

In order to contextualise Da-Ai Drama, the first part of this chapter provides factual information on the Da-Ai TV network as well as the TV industry and environment in Taiwan. Not only is it important to know the local context of the Da-Ai TV network, it is also important to locate both the Taiwanese TV industry and the Da-Ai TV network on a larger scale in Asia. Although there are diverse and various cultures in Asia, Moeran (2001) points out that Asian media industries produce media products with “specifically ‘Asian’ contents” (p.5). There is a “common culture” shared by Asians and it is constantly blending and mixing to construct “a synthesised ‘Asian culture’” (p.13). A Pan-Asian identity is formed via the circulation of media products. Whether religious identity could be formed through media products remains an unknown issue; however, it is worth taking this form of media globalisation into account.

The second part of this chapter discusses the relationship between religious studies and media, starting from early scholarly debates on televangelism in the Christian context. The earlier debates of televangelism pave the way to recent studies on the relationship between media and religion. The circulation of media products creates religious symbols available in the public sphere. Religious use of media products complicates the studies of religious institutions, religious practices, and religious experiences. In the media age, religious activities are jointly associated with canonical

texts, the monastics, the lay people, and media products. The third part of this chapter presents the discussion of dramadoc/ docudrama which is used by Da-Ai Drama. The discussions are focused on the debates around 'truth' and 'fact' in the genre of dramadoc/ docudrama. Although ordinariness is one of the emphases in Da-Ai Drama, the 'ordinariness' in Da-Ai Drama is different from scholarly debates on 'ordinariness' in celebrity studies and reality TV.³⁷ Therefore, debates on 'truth' and 'fact' will be the focus of this part.

Taiwanese TV Industry

Da-Ai TV Network. The Da-Ai³⁸ TV Network belongs to the Tzu-Chi organisation. Da-Ai TV was established in 1998 under the instruction of Master Zheng-Yan, hoping to bring a purifying flow to the commercial media environment. As Master Zheng-Yan said at the launch of the Da-Ai channel: "With the convenience of high technology in modern society, it would be easier to let more people know about Buddhist teachings" (Tzu-Chi Monthly, vol.374). With the intentions of purifying a chaotic and corrupt society³⁹ through Da-Ai TV; of inspiring the bright side of humanity; and of passing down the better parts of the culture to the next generation, Da-Ai TV is a non-commercial TV channel which is financially supported by the audience's donation and profits made by Tzu-Chi's environmental works. Da-Ai TV is not the first religious TV network in Taiwan. Master Xing Yun was the first person to use TV programmes to spread Buddhist doctrines in Taiwan (Chiang 1997).

In Taiwan, there are five or six religious TV channels,⁴⁰ depending on the subscription to different cable TV providers. Different from other religious TV channels, the scheduling of the Da-Ai TV network is similar to commercial TV networks. It provides news, in Mandarin (official language), Taiwanese (indigenous language), and English (most learned second language); documentary programmes that record Tzu-Chi's voluntary work and Tzu-Chi members; medical programmes with professional information; cartoons with Buddhist doctrines; talk shows on various topics and so on. There are programmes of Master Zheng-Yan's lectures on Buddhist doctrines but they do not constitute a large proportion of the scheduling time. On most religious channels, lectures on Buddhist doctrines are heavily scheduled; however, the scheduling of the

³⁷ Brundson et al. (2001) and Taylor (2002) discussed the appeal of 'ordinariness' in reality TV in a contemporary U.K. context. Bennett and Holmes (2010) studied the 'ordinariness' of TV stars and distinguished it from the cinematic tradition.

³⁸ Da-Ai means 'Broader Love' in Mandarin Chinese.

³⁹ Modernised society, individualism, capitalism and natural disasters create an image of a chaotic ending of the world.

⁴⁰ Only one of these channels is a Christian channel while the others are Buddhist channels.

Da-Ai TV network shows that it is run more like commercial TV networks. The following paragraphs will briefly contextualise the TV industry in Taiwan.

Terrestrial TV Channels and the Public TV Services. The TV industry began with the “Old Three TV Networks” period from 1962 to 1997, during which only three terrestrial TV channels were legally licensed and TV programmes were strictly monitored. With martial law lifted in 1987, the restrictions and controls over media were loosened. Therefore, the illegal cable TV period (1976-1992) was terminated; meanwhile, the fourth terrestrial TV network was founded in 1997. The illegal cable TV period helped in the widespread popularity of cable TV across the island. Nowadays, around 3.8 million households, among the estimated 4.5 million households, subscribe to cable TV services. A short review into the earlier stages of the TV industry would be essential to understand the current scheduling of TV programmes. Not until 1962 did Taiwan have its first TV programme broadcast. Taiwan Television Enterprise (hereafter, TTV), started broadcasting at seven o'clock in the evening on October 10, 1962. At the early time of Taiwanese TV industry, the Japanese government as well as the private sector helped in training the staff and setting up the equipment. The signals did not cover the whole island until 1971. Shortly after TTV started broadcasting, another two terrestrial TV networks (CTV and CTS) began broadcasting in 1969 and 1971.

Because of martial law, people were not allowed to fully enjoy the freedom given by the Constitution Law. Three terrestrial TV networks: TTV; CTV; and CTS were strictly monitored and controlled by the KMT government. Although the major stockholders of TTV, CTV and CTS were not from the public sector, they were partially controlled by the KMT government. Being monitored by the government does not make it public service broadcasting. At this time, people had poor material lives, and the physical presence of TV sets was rare. Extra costs, like license fees for viewing TV programmes, were not charged. As long as a TV set was provided and signals were detected, people were free to watch TV programmes. The government started preparing for a public TV channel from the 1980s, aiming at producing educational programmes without interruptions from TV advertisements. It took the government two decades to set the law and prepare the equipment. Before the official broadcasting of the Public TV channel in 1998, the committee of Public TV had produced TV programmes and had had its trial broadcasts on terrestrial TV networks. Nowadays, there are five TV channels, targeting different ethnic groups, belonging to the Public TV Networks. Similar to terrestrial TV networks, Public TV Networks are free of charge.

TTV, CTV and CTS had monopolised the TV industry for three decades, as media for governmental agendas, before the appearance of FTV in 1997. FTV is a terrestrial TV network founded by the largest opposition party at the time, DPP.⁴¹ During this period, Taiwanese society had developed from a poor agricultural society to a rich industrial society. TV sets, which used to be luxurious, had become affordable for almost every household at the end of the era of “the old three TV” networks. Before martial law was lifted, the KMT government had control over the media industry, including the TV industry, film industry, publishers and so on. The strict monitoring of the media industry could not stop the public’s needs. Thus, the illegal cable TV services came into being.

Cable TV Systems and Programme Scheduling. In the eighties, the suppliers used cable to provide financial news or foreign films within small communities. However, it was not legitimised until 1993. The Cable TV Act was passed in 1993 to ensure the rights of subscribers and the selection of TV programmes that were broadcast. During the illegal cable TV (pirate TV) period (1976-1992), most suppliers offered package services which meant that the subscribers paid a certain amount in monthly fees (500-600 NT dollars, equal to £10) to have free access to every channel provided by the supplier. To attract more subscribers in a competitive cable TV market, the suppliers had to offer more channels without adding extra costs to the subscribers. The audience benefited from this competitive market because more than 85% of the households subscribed to cable TV services. As each household had access to more than ninety channels from the subscription, the competition among channels was ferocious which led to a heavily commercialised and rating-oriented TV environment.

The following classification is my summarised reading of several TV schedules in the newspapers. Currently in Taiwan, there are approximately 100 to 140 cable TV channels which can be classified into 13 categories (the numbers in the brackets are the numbers of channels in the category which are subject to changes depending on the cable TV suppliers.): comprehensive channels;⁴² news channels (6);⁴³ knowledge and leisure channels (11); Japanese channels (4);⁴⁴ variety shows and music channels

⁴¹ Not until 2000 did the Democratic Progressive Party win the presidential election. Before 2000, the DPP remained the largest opposition party (to the KMT government) in Taiwan.

⁴² Comprehensive channels refer to channels that provide various genres of programmes, including dramas, films, cartoons, talk shows, variety shows, news and so on, without a specific theme. The old three TV networks are typical comprehensive channels.

⁴³ CNN news and NHK news are included.

⁴⁴ Being colonised by Japan in the first half of the twentieth century, Taiwan remains in a close relationship with Japanese society. Therefore, these channels are comprehensive channels that broadcast various types of programmes imported from Japan.

(4); financial channels (6); TV shopping channels (5); Western film channels (9);⁴⁵ Chinese film channels (5); cartoon and animation channels (6); children's channels (2); sports channels (6); and religious channels (6). The religious channels are financially supported by donations from religious followers and do not aim at making a profit. Therefore, religious channels are different from commercial TV networks that produce commercialised products for viewers (Chen 2001).

As the comprehensive channels make up the majority of channels in cable TV, I would like to take a look at the TV scheduling so that the readers can understand the similarity in the scheduling pattern between the Da-Ai TV network and other commercial TV networks, particularly that of the comprehensive channels. Although Da-Ai TV is categorised as a religious TV channel in most of the TV channel listings, the variety of programme genres and the programme scheduling are closer to the category of comprehensive channels. The comprehensive channels start the day with an hour of morning news, followed by melodramas that have been broadcast years ago or repeats of evening dramas. At noon, there is an hour of news, followed by the repeat broadcasting of the prime-time dramas broadcast the day before. Four or five o'clock in the afternoon is the slot belonging to children; most channels broadcast cartoons from Anglophone countries or animation from Japan. Following the cartoons is an hour of news. After the evening news, are the most important TV programmes of the weekdays -- prime-time dramas at eight o'clock. It is a time when the family gather around to watch TV together after work and school. Following the two-hour broadcasting of prime-time dramas are talk shows or melodramas. Da-Ai TV and commercial comprehensive channels share a similar pattern of scheduling.

Idol Dramas and the East Asian Media Industry. For weekend TV scheduling, prime-time dramas are usually replaced by variety shows. At the turn of the century, a new battlefield was explored. A genre of dramas, idol dramas,⁴⁶ started to be broadcast on weekend nights. The first Taiwanese idol drama, *Meteor Garden*, was broadcast in 2001. It was the big hit of the year and the distribution rights were sold to most of the East Asian countries, including China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Philippines, Japan and so on. Since then, idol dramas that are broadcast at weekends have become another competitive market. Taiwanese idol dramas are largely exported to Chinese speaking regions as well as Japan and Korea. The genre of idol dramas is believed to be a

⁴⁵ This refers to film channels like HBO etc..

⁴⁶ It can be termed as a weekend version of melodramas, apart from the fact that it attracts a younger audience. Most of the idol dramas are urban romances acted by young and stylish actors.

legacy of the Japanese 'trendy dramas' which depicted urban lifestyle and love stories. Idol dramas produced in Taiwan usually have good-looking young actors and actresses in the leading roles. Each drama consists of no more than twenty episodes. These dramas involve collaboration between one of the "old three TV networks" and one of the cable TV channels. The premieres of idol dramas are scheduled on Friday nights to Sunday nights on terrestrial TV channels, and cable TV channels that help with production repeat the episode a week later on weekend afternoons. In the past decade, idol dramas have become a major battlefield for commercial TV networks from Friday nights to Sunday nights. A poll in 2008, shows that the top ten most popular TV programmes of the year are prime-time dramas and idol dramas. Daily based talk shows come next to dramas in popularity. The major difference between prime-time dramas and idol dramas is the target audience. The monopolised genre of prime-time dramas targets the older generation while idol dramas target the younger generation, from teenagers to thirty-year-old people.

Idol dramas are where popular culture develops in and beyond Taiwan. The multi-flow of drama exportation among East Asian countries, Taiwan, Japan and South Korea, forms a unique Asian pop culture and identity based on the circulation of media products. Most literature, when discussing media globalisation, focuses on the influences of English speaking TV programmes (mostly from the States). It is not to say that English speaking TV programmes are of no significance and influence in Taiwan; however, it is important to consider how East Asian and Southeast Asian countries develop a unique form of media globalisation. The cultural proximity enables the circulation of cultural products in East Asian countries (Liang 2003). For Iwabuchi (2005), it is the unique form of East Asian modernity that attracts the audience. The political friendly environment between China and Taiwan has increased the cooperation and capital flow in the media industry. Not only is there a unique form of East Asian modernity (Tu 1996), there is a unique form of East Asian popular culture that needs to be studied. This brief discussion of East Asian popular culture is to show that the circulation of media products in East Asian countries is vibrant. As the Da-Ai Indonesian TV network was established in 2007, the success of Da-Ai Drama might have the potential to establish a new tradition for religious broadcasting in East Asian countries as well as Southeast Asian countries. Not only are idol dramas sold to other Asian countries, one of the most popular Da-Ai Drama, *Cao shan chun hui*, was broadcast on NHK, the Japanese public broadcasting service. The unique form of East Asian popular culture shows there is great potential for Da-Ai TV to expand its territory in East Asian countries. Indonesian Da-Ai TV was set up in a Muslim country with a large population of Chinese diaspora. Indonesian Da-Ai TV follows a similar scheduling

pattern to the Taiwanese one, while using local languages. Da-Ai's success in Indonesia has proved that commercialised, as well as non-commercialised, media products circulate around Asian countries.

Da-Ai Drama and Prime-time Dramas. The most watched and popular programme in the Da-Ai TV network is Da-Ai Drama. From 2005, Da-Ai Drama has beaten other prime-time dramas in terms of ratings. It has generated attention from the audience as well as the media industry. Da-Ai Drama is broadcast daily at eight o'clock for forty-five minutes. Different from other prime-time dramas in Taiwan, Da-Ai Drama broadcast at weekends and on weekdays alike. Not only is it different in broadcasting schedules, but the format of Da-Ai Drama is different from other prime-time dramas. Insisting on providing real stories which could inspire the brighter side of humanity, producers of Da-Ai Drama choose a docudrama form to stress the realism of the stories. The claim of realism is what appeals to the audience which has a chance to experience other individuals' lives in dramas that consist of about fifty to sixty episodes. I will return to the discussion on the docudrama form later on in this chapter. The following paragraphs provide a summary of prime-time dramas that will initiate my discussion on audience responses to Da-Ai Drama in Chapter 6.

CTV was the first TV channel that launched daily prime-time dramas at around eight o'clock in the evening and which established the prototype of prime-time dramas in Taiwan. During the era of "the old three TV" networks, the tradition of broadcasting prime-time dramas at around eight o'clock was firmly established. This is the slot that attracts most viewers and is therefore the most important time for advertisers to market their products. Before the legalisation of cable TV, prime-time dramas on terrestrial TV channels were the major source of TV entertainment for the Taiwanese audience (this was long before the popularity of the Internet). Before FTV was founded, most TV dramas, especially prime-time dramas, were Mandarin series because the KMT government forbade the usage of the Taiwanese language (mother tongue for most Taiwanese before the KMT government set up Mandarin as the official language). As a part of the opposition party's agenda, FTV produced Taiwanese speaking dramas which attracted people from the older generation or people with strong local identities. In order to keep the audience, FTV started to lengthen the broadcasting time. The prime-time dramas were extended to two hours and ten minutes. It has now become normal for each prime-time drama to exceed one or two hundred episodes.

As the prime-time slot is crucial for the survival of a TV network, FTV produces prime-time dramas which lead to incredibly high ratings. Seeing FTV's huge success in the Taiwanese speaking prime-time dramas, a cable TV network, SET TV, started to adapt similar genres and broadcasting strategies. Despite the many choices in cable channels, the prime-time dramas produced by FTV and SET TV have now monopolised the prime-time market.⁴⁷ The prime-time dramas produced by FTV and SET TV are called 'grassroots dramas' as they tend to reinforce a local Taiwanese identity. As other commercial TV channels are unable to beat FTV and SET TV in the prime-time market, they have chosen Korean dramas or Japanese dramas for prime-time broadcasting so that they can cut down on the production costs. Chapter 6 will show the audience responses to grassroots dramas which show how Da-Ai Drama stands out in the commercial environment with its unique genre. From 2008, there have been Mandarin speaking prime-time dramas which have successfully beaten grassroots dramas in the ratings.⁴⁸ Compared with Da-Ai Drama, the success of these Mandarin speaking prime-time dramas is more random than regular.

Religion and Media

Religious teachings and practices have been passed down through written traditions for a long time. However, written words as well as electronic and digital media are media for communicating religious symbols. That is, religions could be transmitted via different media to lay people before the media age. As early history of Christianity shows, written texts were understandable among small groups of literati; therefore, holy teachings, as received by ordinary people, were dependent on holy fathers' verbal preaching and explanations. Written texts were a primary source that holy fathers relied on, whereas ordinary people relied on their verbal explanations. Religion, as an important part in human culture, should be considered as an important topic in media and cultural studies, especially in an era when religion adopts new technology (Meyer and Moors 2006).

Entering the media age, Babb (1995) sees religious traditions from an unusual perspective when speaking of media influences on religion:

"It is possible to say that if one takes an extremely inclusive view of what a religious tradition is -- a view, that is, that includes its total range of manifestations in belief; patterned behaviour; written records; ceremonial

⁴⁷ Another group of audience chose Korean-imported as an alternative for prime-time dramas.

⁴⁸ These Mandarin prime-time dramas carry a strong nostalgic sense.

performances; iconography; traces in human memory, and so forth -- then one can visualise any particular religious tradition as a sort of “system” that retains and transmits information. The information is encoded in the form of symbols that can be propagated in various media: speech; writing; ritual gesture; iconography; and others” (p.1).

If we regard religion as a symbol system circulating through various means of media technologies, then it is a system that “is not only socially reproduced but also altered” (ibid. p.2). Take Buddhist studies as an example: an apparent bias in Buddhist studies is its focus on textual doctrines in Buddhist sutras. Chinese literature on Buddhist studies has largely drawn upon philosophical debates and arguments on Buddhist sutras. Studies of Buddhism have equated with textual Buddhism, for scholars focus on literature (Schopen 1991). The previous chapter has shown that the Tzu-Chi organisation is different from traditional forms of Buddhist institutions. To study religion in an age of media needs a different approach to redefine the term “religion”. Lay people might not have a chance to read or comprehend all the Buddhist sutras; therefore, the agenda of Humanistic Buddhism fits in the gap between lay Buddhist experiences and literary tradition. This is not to say that studies on written texts or artworks in Buddhism are of minor significance, but it is hoped that more and more scholars will explore other forms of media adopted by religions.

Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis have demonstrated the shortcomings of textually based traditions of religious studies as well as gender studies in religious traditions. It is important for religious studies to open up to multi-media approaches because a media-biased study or mono-medium approach might be “ill-suited to the variety of phenomena which make up this complex and diverse media tradition” (Arthur 2004 p. 22-23). Society has become more and more dependent on mass media communication and computerised communication technology; however, studies of religion are deemed insignificant by mainstream studies of media (Hoover 1997 P. 4). Although cultural studies are popular in academia, religion is a rare topic of study compared to gender, sexuality, race or class. Religion is deemed as belonging to a separate field. Sociologists of religion have largely left out the influence of media on religions and how religions have changed in the media age. There are several aspects in studies of media and religion. The relationship between media and religion aroused scholarly interest in the 1980s when televangelism became popular in the United States.

Televangelism. The 1950s era was the heyday of religious television in the U.S.A.. Conventional studies on televangelism assume that mediated religious activities threaten “authentic” religions, which ignore changing patterns of society and culture. Not only is it a threat to “authentic” religions, televangelism is seen as a ridiculous or conservative usage of media because it ‘brainwashes’ the audience with religious messages (Harding 1994). The following sections will briefly review scholarly debates on televangelism.

Horsefield’s study (1984) shows that, from the late 1960s in the U.S.A., there was a rapid growth of Christian evangelical and fundamentalist programmes which purchased airtime from local stations. There was a trend in the 1960s that evangelical organisations started to establish their own TV stations and began to produce their own programmes. Horsefield’s study on religious television in America provides an understanding in the religious usage of the television industry and the social power of television itself. His study was initiated at a time when people believed the rapid growth of religious television was closely related to political power and served the interests of political elections. He has provided an empirical understanding of the American audience and to what extent it was influenced by televangelism. Later, Hoovers’ case study on the 700 Club (1988), one of the most well-known US religious programmes, proves that only a few were converted through viewing religious television because most of the viewers were already believers.

Most of the studies conducted on religious television examine Christian evangelical programmes in the United States, including the political power of religious broadcasters and the impact of mass evangelism. Bruce (1990) shows that different broadcasting policies between the American government and the British government led to religious television prospering in America (p.48-53). Another crucial element for the existence of televangelism was “a large Protestant milieu” (p. 234) which proves that religious TV was broadcast for existing believers. Earlier studies on religious programmes focused on the audience (especially for televangelism), and on governmental policies regarding religious programmes. Bruce broadens his study to Christian evangelical programmes in the Third World. Gunter and Viney (1994) have done a research on religious television in the U.K. to examine how government policy regulates and affects religious broadcasting. While exploring the relationship between political regulations, producers and viewers, Gunter and Viney’s study is aware of religions other than Christianity. The research is concerned with religious and ethnic minority groups in the U.K..

Although Abelman (1987) acknowledges that various TV formats are used in religious TV programmes, scholars tend to treat it as a generalised category without examining the differences between different religious TV formats. A previous section has mentioned that Da-Ai Drama appeals to the audience by using a docudrama form. Recent scholars have a broader interest in the relationship between religion and media. It seems that earlier studies on televangelism treated it as a specific phenomenon in the U.S.A. and the Christian world. The prospering use of media technology broadens the discussions on the religious use of media in terms of various religious traditions⁴⁹ and various technological platforms.

Media and Religious Studies. Adopting electronic and digital media, religious discourses and practices are transformed. Adoption of electronic media blurs the line of “sacred” and “mundane” which brings a new force into religious development. The above studies, especially the studies on American Puritanism in the public sphere remind us that the re-articulation of religions into the public sphere is contrary to the modernist narrative of the decline of religion in the public sphere (Meyer and Moors 2006 p. 6). Although religions are assigned to the private sphere in a postmodern world, the public sphere of media has become a sacred place (Martin-Barbero 1997). The public presence of religions worldwide is not a return to the repressed past; instead, globalisation helps to rearticulate religion and media. The religious adoption of electronic media is a new form of religious mediation (Meyer and Moors 2006). Meyer and Moors (2006) accept the religious adoption of electronic media as a new way of religious practice of mediation, for religion is “a practice of mediation” (p.7). If a religious tradition is understood as a system, or reservoir of symbols, including “manifestations in belief, patterned behaviour, written records, ceremonial performances, iconography, traces in human memory, and so forth” (Babb 1995 p. 1), it would be worth discussing the religious use of new technology. Religious symbols float in media we encounter every day; therefore, media becomes a virtual altar for the laity.

Recent studies on media and religion can be discussed in several aspects. There are studies of religious representations in secular media. The religious meanings can be extracted from the various forms of cultural products. For example, Mckee and Pardun (1999) used focus groups to see how viewers extracted or read religious images in secular music videos. Robinson and Skill (1994) looked into several prime-time dramas to examine their portrayals of religion and religious groups. These studies show that

⁴⁹ There are studies on the religious use of media in the Middle East (Abdollahyan and Yeganeh, 2009; Rai, 2000).

religions do not retreat to the private sphere in the modern world. Instead, religion shows its public appearance in electronic and digital media when it “finds technology” (Biersdorfer 2002). The religious meanings float around secular cultural products. For example, after the shocking 9/11 terrorist attack in the States, scholars re-examined American Puritanism in public discourse such as news media and journalism. Their studies show how Islam is constructed in American news media and journalism and how this construction implicitly conveys a strong Puritan ideology (Scheufele et al. 2003; Winston 2007).

Representations of religions in secular media reflect the underlying ideology of a particular society. Searching for religious meanings in secular media products is not exclusive to the Christian world. *Media and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia* (1995) is a collection of essays that examines religious meanings in secular media in India. Talking about different influences various media have on religions, Babb (1995) believes that:

“...a televised performance of a religious drama may well adhere to traditional performance conventions to an impressive degree, but it will inevitably abstract the performance from the social and ritual contexts that, in traditional settings, invest the experience with its full range of meaning to audiences” (p.4).

The whole volume looks into various media representations of religious symbols from printed images to moving images and audio recordings in South Asia. Although there is a section on visual media, it focuses more on Indian-made feature films and examines religious symbols in these films. In certain Bollywood films, there is a strong implication of Hinduism because the narrative pattern is similar to stories of Hindu deities.

Mitchell and Marriage's *Mediating Religion* (2003) is a collection of essays on relationships between media and religion. Not just an analysis of TV representation of religions but also magazines, publications, cassettes and the Internet. However, it puts a lot of emphasis on Christianity and Islam. This book focuses on the audience's reception of religious media and how the audience forms its religious identity through electronic media. Scholarly discourses of media and religion seem to ignore the fact that other religions could have great influence in their region. The previous chapter has shown the international nature of the Tzu-Chi organisation. With its clever usage of media, Tzu-Chi's agenda is reaching out to the world. Although Huang (2009) argues

that it is limited to the communities of Chinese diasporas, a sizeable diverse group worldwide.

Hoover (1997) has focused much on the symbolic production process as well as on the consumption and interpretation processes (p. 6). The study of media and religion has contested the theory of secularisation in the West (Warner 1993). The previous chapter has shown the contemporary trend of Buddhism in Taiwan is strongly linked with secularisation; therefore, Chiang (1997) has argued that the applicability of the theory of secularisation should be carefully considered. Media and religions alike are social practices in terms of the production process and the consumption process. According to Hoover (2006), earlier studies on media and religion are more “medium” oriented because the scholars focus on how religious activities in media-based groups threaten “authentic” religion. Not until recently have scholars started to discuss the convergence of religion and media within contemporary culture. Therefore, he suggests a meaning-oriented approach because modernity has changed the meanings of “traditionally defined religion.” In a postmodern world, religious experiences and practices are subject to individual engagements and access to various media.

“This means that analysis and interpretation of contemporary religion depends more and more on accounting for both the practices individuals engage in, and their own definition of the object of their engagement in cultural meaning” (p.36).

Meaning-making, or, the practices of media consumption, should be put into a larger context. Hoover (2006) offers a perspective which is different from traditional religious scholars. Rather than focusing on religious doctrines or religious institutions, Hoover switches his focus to the practitioners (the laity). Hoover’s study looks into different religious traditions in the United States. His study provides an insight into how individuals negotiate between different religious traditions and within a certain tradition. Hoover has moved from the earlier focus on religious programmes to the meaning-making processes from the audience’s perspective. His study is about how the meaning of religion has changed in the media age, for there are multi-faceted aspects of media. Religious practices and customs become loosened in the modern world, compared with the traditional definition of religions. Therefore, he argues that “it seems more likely that the ‘nonreligious’ contexts of media would influence religion, than vice versa” (Hoover 2006 p. 233). Examining what religion means and what it comes to mean in the media age, Hoover discovers that people find spiritual comfort in various types of media. As he concludes: “...this was in part a function of the emergence of a

media sphere that could increasingly define the nature of religion, spirituality, and religious meaning in late modernity” (ibid. p.234).

Following Hoover’s vision in examining religious meanings in secular media products, this thesis aims to examine how the public sees TV dramas with a strong religious agenda (see Chapter 6). The relationship between media and religion has changed with the proliferation of digital media available to religions worldwide. The question is no longer confined to whether media usage could convert its audience or whether religious institutions would be threatened. Conversation between scholars in cultural studies and scholars in religious studies is important to understand what religions mean in the media age. Using electronic and digital media to spread religious teachings, “traditional” and “authentic” religious institutions provide spiritual comfort across geographical and cultural barriers. Religious studies can no longer be limited to a textual tradition because religion takes various forms in the media age. With religion entering the public sphere, the modernist dichotomy of personal and public spheres is challenged.

Dramadoc/ docudrama

Da-Ai Drama, based on Tzu-Chi members’ life stories, takes a docudrama form. Chapter 6 will discuss the production process and how Da-Ai Drama emphasises the realism reconstructed in the drama. This section briefly shows the current debates on docudrama to highlight the discussion in Chapter 6. Docudrama is one of the genres under the grouping of factual TV programmes. There seems to be a dichotomy between ‘serious’ tradition and ‘entertainment’ forms when debating the values of factual TV programmes. From Dovey’s (2000) observation, there seems to be a binary argument when discussing the change of factual TV programmes--from its earlier serious role in public service broadcasting to a more recent popular entertainment genre. Therefore, a binary opposition between “the elite” and “the popular” lies within the debates of factual TV programmes.

The Griersonian and public service broadcast traditions assume that documentary is a serious genre that provides its audience with serious information. Criticising scholarly discussion on factual TV programmes as a generic hybrid, Dovey (2000) believes there is too little research on the audience’s perspective. The arguments have a premise that factual TV programmes should take a ‘serious’ angle instead of an entertainment role (p. 95-96). Corner (2001) adds a new function to documentary typology, which is “documentary as ‘popular factual entertainment’”. As Corner further illustrates, in the

age of “post-documentary”, documentary is no longer a ‘serious type’. The following paragraphs will show that a newly raised trend of documentary becomes a space where the public and the private spheres meet. The ‘ordinariness’, that appeals to the audience in these new forms of factual TV programmes, creates a blurry line between public issues and private matters. The popular factual entertainment programmes have transformed the media discourse on ordinariness and everyday life (Brunsdon et al. 2001; Taylor 2002). The following section will firstly review how scholars define docudrama/ dramadoc. After the debates on the definition of docudrama/ dramadoc, the section will continue to present the debate on ‘fact’ and ‘truth’, as presented in docudrama/ dramadoc.

Definition. McBride (1999) and Paget (1990; 1998) argue that there are many definitions of drama-documentary. There are many terms to describe this genre of televisual form such as dramatic documentary, dramadoc, semi-documentary, faction, fact-fiction drama and so on. Paget (1990) sees documentary dramas as a serious cultural product that promise ‘factuality’ and ‘documentariness’ (p. 162). Paget (1998) chose the terms docudrama or dramadoc to note the significance of this genre as Corner (1999) insists on using ‘dramatised documentary’ to clarify the production process.

Paget (1998) divides the academic debate of dramadoc/ docudrama into two traditions. In the U.S. tradition, as Rosenthal (1988) argues, docudrama is ignored in the academic debates and documentary status in docudrama genre is often challenged. On the contrary, dramadoc in the British tradition is acknowledged for its cultural importance by Goodwin (1983). Examining the history of American and British drama documentary, Paget (1998) comes to the conclusion that “dramadoc is ‘a very British’ genre and the docudrama ‘a very American’ one” (p.195). Docudrama dominates dramadoc in contemporary debates because of the “attenuation of the directly documentary, paralleled with increased accommodation to drama” (p.195).

To analyse the development of British TV drama documentary, Corner (1999) divides the genre into two parts, “dramatised documentary” and “documentary drama”. For Corner:

“... ‘dramatised documentary’ begins with a documentary base or core and uses dramatisation to overcome certain limitations and to achieve a more broadly popular and imaginatively powerful effect” (p.35).

'Documentary drama' is, in Corner's definition, "essentially a form of *play*," which refers to "specific real events" or simply "because of its manner of depiction" (ibid.). His division reflects the binary nature in the discussion docudrama/ dramadoc tradition. The debate on docudrama/ dramadoc swings between the documentary tradition and the drama form. The debates between the documentary tradition and the drama form become tense when the recent development of drama-documentary adds a broader range of styles from fictional films. The changes of the drama-documentary style raise several questions: a) the "referentiality" issue: whether a drama is "based on" or is a "reconstruction"; b) the "representation" issue: how the drama is represented and the number of documentary elements in it; c) the "manipulation" issue: how much the power of the "documentary" form influences the audience; d) the "thematic" issue: how the drama links to the "official" point of view (ibid. p.45).

Let us look at Da-Ai Drama when it is put into these categories: a) Da-Ai Drama's claim of realism is based on the real events and it attempts to reconstruct the scenes as faithfully as possible. b) Through the narrative of Da-Ai Drama, the representation of the events and the protagonists are not merely an "imitation" act. The fictional actors and actresses and the presence of the production team are acknowledged. Therefore, the performance is quite fictional although it claims to be faithful to the real events. c) It is for sure that Da-Ai Drama aims to provide a truth status to the viewers and the dramatic elements should be powerful enough to "install accounts in the mind of the viewer with force and depth" (ibid.). Chapter 6 will show how the audience perceive the 'truth' status in Da-Ai Drama. d) In this issue, Corner (1999) aims to discuss how the political agenda is embedded in the drama documentary as well as the topics or debates raised in the dramadoc. In the case of Da-Ai Drama, the "official" positions and attitudes are essentially Tzu-Chi's spirits. Dovey (2000) mentions the other characteristic of docudramas: "the combination of commentary, editing and camera style which work together to create an ideal, unified point of view for the audience" (p. 142). The familial issues are the problems in Da-Ai Drama that are most frequently raised. There are a lot of Da-Ai Dramas that are produced to meet the needs for promoting Tzu-Chi's activities, such as body donation, Tzu-Chi's hospitals, international volunteers, Tzu-Chi's schools and so on. Therefore, the production of Da-Ai Drama indeed aims to highlight certain aspects of Tzu-Chi's agenda. The discussion of Da-Ai Drama's narrative pattern and political agenda can be seen in Chapter 5.

As Paget (1998) argues, 'drama-documentary' and 'docudrama' tend to conflate with each other. Roscoe and Hight (2001), following Paget's definition of drama-

documentary, argue that it is the absolute truth through the association with documentary that matters. Insisting on using the term “drama-documentary,” the authors see the drama-documentary as an “attempt then to secure a position within an assumed fact-fiction continuum that is closer to documentary than to fiction” (p. 44). Paget (1998) is cautious of the term used to describe this particular genre. I will, in my thesis, use the term docudrama as it describes “documentary dramas as plays with a close relationship to their factual base--a twentieth-century extension of the historical drama or the *piece a these*” (Paget 1998 p. 110). The following section shows how scholars argue the realism in docudrama narrative.

Facts Versus Truth. Gripsrud (1998) points out that television functions as: a) a window of the world; and b) a mirror of the world. There are constant debates on whether reality TV represents, or mirrors, reality fairly (Bignell and Orlebar 2005 p. 107). Although Da-Ai Drama takes a docudrama form, the procedures or the way they establish “realism” is unusual. The audience is aware of “realism” in dramas whilst being fully aware of its fictional forms like soap operas. When talking about drama-documentary, Bignell and Orlebar (2005) believe that this hybrid genre retells recently-happened events, familiar to the audience, to review or celebrate them (p. 110).

Scholars tend to derive their discussion of docudrama from the film study tradition. Although it is a genre evolved from documentary, it does not necessarily link it to the cinematic tradition in its later development. Kerr (1990) sees drama-documentary as a “historically specific controversy” rather than “a universal or a historical programme category” (p.76). Instead of discussing the documentary mode in television dramas as a programme category, Paget (1990) sees it as a debate. The scholarly debates on docudrama derive from the “naturalistic fallacy that to be real is to be true” (Paget 1990 p. 24). Does the fact equate with the truth? This is the debate raised by scholars of docudramas. Anglophone studies on docudramas put this debate within the framework of naturalism. Sometimes, it links to the political situations and class structure in British society. Before a short review of scholarly debates on the fact and truth in docudramas, I would like to point out that Da-Ai Drama is a docudrama that runs on a regular basis. Da-Ai Drama is not just a docudrama; it is a religious broadcast that uses docudrama form to approach a broader public. What the readers should bear in mind is another issue. In countries or regions where documentary does not have such a long historical tradition, or where cultural studies are not as flourishing as those in Britain, how can the debates in Anglophone academia benefit scholarly discussion?

Paget's analysis of documentary drama is to examine how *reality* is mediated through this particular genre. The represented reality is the central concern of Paget's discussion. The mechanism in docudramas constructs a verifiable discourse of facts. A verifiable discourse, manipulating truth status to the audience, in the documentary drama is enabled by the "rhetorical strategies of voice-over, captions, charts and statistics, and direct ('talking head') address of the camera/ audience" (1990 p.5). For example, in his study of captioning in docudrama, Paget (2000) examines the usage of captions and voice-overs as a verifiable discourse of facts. The dramadoc/ docudrama captions:

"...characteristically invoke an interior reality to the acted events-on-screen with more force than the ordinary, dramatic, caption. Their primary purpose is to make this connection, and to encourage viewers to hold two orders of event in their minds simultaneously"(p.198).

Because the docudrama manages to represent real events by using "accurate" costume, settings and so on, Paget (1990) argues that "the resultant 'documentary' and 'dramatic' mixture are collapsed into a concept of 'truthfulness to life-past', which in turn is collapsed into a universalised concept of 'truthfulness to life'" (p. 5). The verifiable discourse and the ideology of the docudrama are to show 'what actually happened'. Paget (2000) suggests that docudramas, as a semi-factual form, leave facts "elsewhere" (p.201). As the scholarly debates on docudrama are largely influenced by cinematic documentary tradition and public television service, the audience seems to be vulnerable under the attack of re-presented and re-created reality in docudramas. However, the seeming reality represented in docudramas is not perceived unquestionably by the audience. Woodhead (1999) argues that the audience is "more sophisticated and suspicious than either broadcasters or authorities often allow" (p. 109). Although Woodhead admits to the limitation of the audience's interpretation of the re-created reality, he is positive that "an audience will be aware that they are watching the producer's best approximation of what happened" (ibid. p.109). Hill's (2005) empirical study on *Big Brother's* audience shows that the audience is aware of the "staged reality" manifested in the show. Chapter 6 will demonstrate how the audience perceive the re-created reality in Da-Ai Drama and how the representation of reality influences their watching experiences.

Myers (2009) argues that the audiences, broadcasters and producers are "obsessed with reality at the expense of truth" (p.245). That is to say that "in producing a version of reality that they deemed audiences wanted, many programme-makers have masked

and distorted the essential integrity of their programmes" (p.245). Myer's argument shows a typical flow of scholarly debate on reality TV as well as docudrama. The central debate around docudrama is its focus on 'reality' and 'truth'. What I am questioning is how you define truth and reality. The scholars might underestimate the abilities of audience to interpret the media products. Even if the audience watches news in the journalist tradition, it cannot be guaranteed that they believe in whatever they see on the screen. There is always an interpretation of the facts, and different 'reading positions'.

Roscoe and Hight (2001) point out that the drama-documentary debate relies on the fact/ fiction dichotomy because it is believed that the "documentary television can deliver the 'facts' whilst drama can only deliver 'fiction'" (p.43). The authors point out that the intention of making the drama-documentary "is to operate within the expectations of factual discourse and to produce a text that is historically accurate" (ibid. p.44). Therefore, the documentary tradition is used to reinforce the sincere representation of reality. The genre "highlight(ed) the 'reality' of the text, rather than the drama, and in doing so asked viewers to consider the representations as 'truthful' rather than imaginary" (ibid. p.45). Roscoe and Hight argue that it is the discourse of factuality that matters in the discussion of drama-documentary because it is "opening up access to spaces usually denied to documentary" (ibid. p.46). In their point of view, the audience:

“...approaches drama-documentaries with similar expectations to those of documentaries, in the sense that they are viewing a truthful (if heightened) reality which is based on a familiarity with factual discourse and is associated with codes and conventions” (ibid. p.50).

That is, the audience expects the narrative to be 'real'. Roscoe and Hight (2001) believe that "the closer drama-documentaries get to the genre itself, the greater is the reinforcement of factual discourse" (p.52). It is true that Da-Ai Drama reinforces the reality presented in the dramas to the audience. However, I do not believe that the audience would believe in whatever is represented in the dramas. As Chapter 6 on the audience response to Da-Ai Drama demonstrates, the audience doubt the parts that are too perfect or incredible for them. Although it is true that docudrama is produced to emphasise the "truthfulness," it does not mean the representation of constructed reality is actually blurring the truth. Scholars who see the docudrama as a debate rather than a programme genre have a blind spot to the impact on the audience.

Although Roscoe and Hight believe that docudrama provides reality for the audience, Nichols (1991) holds an opposite opinion. Nichols clearly distinguishes the tradition between documentary and fiction. He argues that documentary offers a sober discourse which has a "make-believe" feature for the audience. In this definition, docudrama has lost its "truth value" because of its documentary/ drama hybrid. The fictional drama devalues the 'truth' claim of the documentary form. Although docudrama loses the "truth value" of the documentary, its strong resemblances to the actual materials "persuade us with a logic of motivated iconicity" (Lipkin 1999 p. 371). The "based-on" or "re-constructed" reality in docudrama works to refer the audience to the "actual" events. Because of the references to the actual people and events, "the docudrama imagery combines characteristics of iconic and indexical signs, creating what amount to indexical icons, signs with direct, strongly motivated resemblances to their actual referents" (ibid. p.372). The icons and signs which manipulate the "reality" status in docudrama reinforce the "make-believe" discourse. To conclude, Lipkin (1999) sees the docudrama narrative as a melodramatic code that refers to actual people and events.

The docudrama narrative reminds the audience about the previously happened events as well. Hoffer and Nelson (1999) define docudrama as "a television re-creation based on fact even though it relies on dialogue, actors, sets, and costumes to re-create an earlier event" (p.65). Different from Lipkin's point of view, Hoffer and Nelson (1999) are not positive about the *realism* provided by docudramas, because there are a lot of recreations in the production process and the results of the recreation can be influenced by "factors such as budget and production time" (p.65). That is, the reality or the fact has been lost during the production process. The docudrama form appeals to the writers, the producers and the audience for different reasons. The new docudrama form appeals to the writers because "they could espouse controversial ideas in relatively safe historical formats." It appeals to the producers because "many contemporary docudramas were already presold by heavy news coverage on the events and the personalities." It appeals to the audiences because "there was a good story linked to nostalgia or an insider's view of newsmakers depicted in human terms" (ibid. p.71). Hoffer and Nelson's article puts the discussion of docudrama within the framework of public good and political benefits. Therefore, the account of accuracies and the social and political benefits are much emphasised. In the concluding remarks, the authors argue that the influence from the public television on docudrama is overlooked in the scholarly debates; however, the authors expect docudrama to "serve as a catalyst in identifying public issues" (ibid. p.74). This, again, places more

emphasis on the *reality* mediated through the drama form than focusing on the dramatic narrative.

The docudrama that Hoffer and Nelson (1999) discuss is the genre that re-creates historical events or news events. A docudrama like Da-Ai Drama could bear some controversial issues in the contents, but the stories re-presented in the dramas are ordinary people's lives. The appeal of Da-Ai Drama is more similar to Kilborn's (2000) opinion on docu-soap. He defines docu-soap as a hybrid genre which "combine[s] features associated with 'classic' observational documentary with structuring techniques that are regularly deployed in soap-opera narratives" (p.112). The reality represented in docu-soaps appeals to the audience; it offers its viewers a sense of pleasure when they voyeuristically encounter ordinary people and the difficulties they encounter in "real-life" and it also satisfies the audience's curiosity about people's intimate lives (Kilborn 2003 p. 103).

McBride (1999) divides the docudrama into two categories: 'drama-documentary' and 'dramatisation based on a true story' (p.113). McBride is more positive about the dramatic form which enables the discussion of controversial issues. For McBride, the dramatised documentary offers the audience "philosophical and political issues as big as totalitarian oppression" (ibid. p.115). That is, the dramatic elements enable the audience to "see the places where the camera cannot go and to hear and witness the truth when the real people cannot speak" (ibid. p.114-115). Da-Ai Drama enables the audience to see the familial issues of other families: i.e., a bit of voyeurism into other people's families and lives. More than being just entertaining voyeurism, Da-Ai Drama provides the audience with a window to see how people in the world solve problems or overcome difficulties in their lives. Seeing the popularity of dramadocs in the contemporary world, Kuehl (1999) believes that "all such productions tell lies about real people, the current popularity of dramadocs means that more lies are told about more real people than ever before" (p.119). Kuehl is affirmative that dramadocs cannot tell the truth; however, what is the truth? Dramadocs are problematic because of the muted representations, invented dialogue, false gestures and appearance, and so on. Kuehl concludes that "dramadocs are stories based on real events but crippled by their lack of reality" (ibid. p.122). He is critical of the truth claim of dramadocs and believes that there should be a clear line between the history and the fiction (ibid. p.124).

All the scholarly debates on the docudrama/ dramadoc, struggle between two traditions; the tradition of documentary and the tradition of fictional dramas. Therefore, the truth claim is essential in the discussion while the dramatised features are closely examined.

The debates on naturalism and realism are problematic if we question what reality is. A simple fact can be perceived and interpreted in different ways. Therefore, there are various interpretations of a simple fact. The media's re-presented or re-constructed reality is one of the possible interpretations of an historical event, not a definitive one. Through watching the docudramas, the audience establishes its own interpretation of an event. When scholars examine how reality is mediated through docudramas, they forget to question 'the fact' itself. A long-past, or just-past, event can never be mediated 'fairly'. Any mediation of an event requires editing, presenting as well as watching. The process of mediating an event, even in the journalist tradition, does not provide an absolutely accurate version. As soon as the event is mediated, the 'mere fact' has gone. What is left of the 'mediated' event is the audience's interpretation. The theoretical debates about the truthfulness and the dramatic elements are solely a discussion on the format itself. Although there are several discussions around certain dramadoc, there are way too few studies from the audience's perspective. How do the viewers see the dramadoc and how does it reflect on their lives? This could help the scholars to understand more easily how 'real' the audience thinks docudramas are.

Conclusion

As the literature above shows, studies on media and religion in the Christian world have moved from a certain type of religious media—televangelism—to various forms of secular media. However, research on religious broadcasting related to Buddhism has not been done in Anglophone academia. It is important for scholars, both in media studies and religious studies, to work across the field because religious practices and meanings are experienced differently by individuals in the media age. Religion, as an important part in human culture, should be considered as an important topic in media and cultural studies, especially in an era when religions adopt new technology. Taking a different perspective on studying women in religious traditions, this thesis hopes to join together in discussion media, gender and religion, in order to broaden the width of the issues of religion and women in the contemporary world. This research examines the society re-presented and re-constructed in Da-Ai Drama to understand Buddhist women in Taiwanese society (see Chapter 5).

The narrative analysis in Chapter 5 helps the reader to understand how Tzu-Chi embeds its agenda in the docudrama form. Instead of focusing on how Taiwanese society and Tzu-Chi members' stories are mediated through the docudrama form, the analysis in Chapter 5 aims to explain why the *reality* is mediated in a certain way.

Chapter 6 will show how this form of mediation influences the audience. A sheer examination of Tzu-Chi's use of Da-Ai Drama is not enough to know how people experience religion differently in the media age; therefore, several in-depth interviews of audiences and discussions from online forums help to understand the reception and negotiation of meanings. The production process of Da-Ai Drama includes the Tzu-Chi members retelling their life stories. After hearing these stories, the production team works on retelling the stories in a visual way. When they are broadcast, the audience read the stories and start to share their own stories. From the production side to the audience, Da-Ai Drama involves many layers of telling and retelling. What the truth is, is no longer a problem. The only thing that matters is how the real people, Tzu-Chi, the production teams, and the audience reflect upon these *facts*. These ways of retelling the stories and reflecting upon personal experiences provide a "therapeutic discourse" (Biressi and Nunn 2005). Biressi and Nunn have studied the significance of therapeutic discourse in reality TV's confessional nature because the reality TV focuses more and more on personal traumas. Confession and self revelation on reality TV become a supplement to religious services (p.103). This is similar to Da-Ai Drama which focuses on individual's traumas. Their telling and sharing of life stories is similar to confession in religious services.

Although I believe that confession is more important in Christianity than other religions, the therapeutic discourse in Da-Ai Drama is worth discussing. This thesis on Da-Ai Drama aims to see Da-Ai Drama as a new field for Buddhist practices where the audience learns religious teachings through watching prime-time dramas. An adoption of digital and electronic media does not necessary mean a threat to "authentic" religions but could mean a helpful tool for "authentic" religions. Examining contents of Da-Ai Drama helps to understand the underlying religious meanings which offer the audience a new field for religious practices. As a type of dramadoc/ docudrama, Da-Ai Drama provides the audience with fictional dramas that offer realism.

Chapter 5

Drama Discussion—*LIFE IS A PLAY*

“All the world’s a stage,
 And all the men and women merely players;
 They have their exits and their entrances;
 And one man in his time plays many parts,
 His acts being seven ages.”

--William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, 2.7.139-43

Introduction

This chapter is lengthy partly because it resembles the narrative structure of Da-Ai Drama. After this introductory paragraph, the chapter is presented in the form of the manuscript of the play *Life is a Play*. By presenting the drama analysis in the form of a play, the readers who have never watched Da-Ai Drama grasp a closer sense of what Da-Ai Drama is about and how it is often structured. The visual biography presented in Da-Ai Drama is a good field to observe gender construction and Buddhist women in Taiwanese society. Before I get to the analysis of the dramas, the following sections offer plot summaries and a few facts about the three dramas analysed in this chapter. Before the play starts, readers will see a brief comment on the docudrama form of Da-Ai Drama and brief summaries of the three dramas analysed in this chapter.

What Da-Ai TV does is to provide a media environment with righteous views and righteous language. The analysis of the narrative pattern in Da-Ai Drama heavily embeds the Buddhist teachings of the Four Noble Truths⁵⁰. In Da-Ai Dramas and Master Zheng-Yan’s teachings, life is often said to be a pool of bitterness, and human beings are born to suffer in this world of bitterness. Putting this concept into the narrative pattern of Da-Ai Drama, I argue that the first and the second parts of the leading characters’ lives reveal the concept of suffering to the audience. Although the first stage of their childhood is happy and carefree, the joy and happiness do not last long. This is what Buddhism teaches about the ever-changing world. Happiness and bitterness are ever-changing. Encountering the Tzu-Chi organisation and Master Zheng-Yan is the way to understand the origin of all the suffering. Having suffered a lot

⁵⁰ See Appendix F. on the Four Noble Truths.

in life, the leading characters see more suffering in their voluntary work. Gradually, they realise that life is a pool of bitterness and the way to get rid of suffering is to “let go”. In Da-Ai Drama’s narrative pattern, the first two stages are for the leading characters to understand that life is bitterness and human beings are born to suffer. Gradually, they understand their sufferings do not come from others but from themselves. The next chapter will show that Da-Ai Drama and Tzu-Chi create a dual opposition between material wealth and spiritual happiness. The latter is prioritised. The reason why Da-Ai Drama emphasises life as being a pool of bitterness is that only by understanding the causes of sufferings can an individual “let go” of his/ her cravings and reach the ultimate state of Nirvana.

Da-Ai Drama as Docudrama

The agenda of Da-Ai Drama is to record Tzu-Chi members’ life stories and, therefore, Da-Ai Drama becomes a type of visual canon for the Tzu-Chi organisation. Da-Ai Drama tries to present Tzu-Chi members’ life stories as closely as possible to reality. Before dramas are filmed, the production team spends two to three years interviewing Tzu-Chi members whose lives will be adapted for TV dramas, and their friends and families as well. Da-Ai Drama can be categorised as docudrama because it is a fictional duplication of a real individual’s life story.

Da-Ai Drama is a fictional duplication of Tzu-Chi senior members’ life stories; therefore, after the interviews with the members in the preparation period, the production team works on the script based on the interviews. As Kilborn (2003) notes, docu-soaps are softer than conventional documentaries so organisations or enterprises are more willing to let in the cameras. Organisations and enterprises are aware of the performative nature of docu-soaps (p.105-106). Rather than letting in cameras from other media the Tzu-Chi organisation uses its own media platform to produce a softer kind of documentary that appeals to the broader public. Da-Ai Drama intersperses documentary footage and archival footage to engage the audience in the leading characters’ participation in Tzu-Chi’s activities. The senior members whose stories are broadcast are active participants in the Tzu-Chi organisation but their participation is (re-)acted and (re-)constructed by actors and actresses in the real scenes in the Tzu-Chi headquarters, hospital, or other institutions. The fictional persona acts and interacts with Tzu-Chi members in the real setting. Similar to historical dramas or docudramas, Da-Ai Drama represents and reconstructs a longer time span. Therefore, the directors usually use significant historical events to map out the geographical and

historical context in which the leading characters lived. This is why the production teams try their best to reconstruct reality and to represent reality as closely as possible.

The format of Da-Ai drama has a strong emphasis on the *realness* which is reinforced in the interview session after each episode in the *Da-Ai hui-ke-shi* (Da-Ai Guest Room). Not only is *realness* emphasised in the interview session, but also *generational differences*. The ten-minute interview takes the form of a talk show. A host, who used to be an actor, interviews the actors and Tzu-Chi members whose stories are broadcast. The interviews satisfy the curiosity of the audience by asking the members to reflect on certain events and for the actors to talk about their performances. Da-Ai Drama is like a collection of Tzu-Chi members' visual biographies in which the audience sees how an ordinary person gets through a difficult time and finds spiritual comfort in the Tzu-Chi organisation. Starting from an ordinary person's point of view, we are able to see Taiwanese society in a grassroots sense rather than seeing society from a certain political or textbook point of view.

Plot Summaries

- *MING-YUE ZHAO HONG-CHEN* (hereafter, *Ming-yue*) [明月照紅塵]

Context

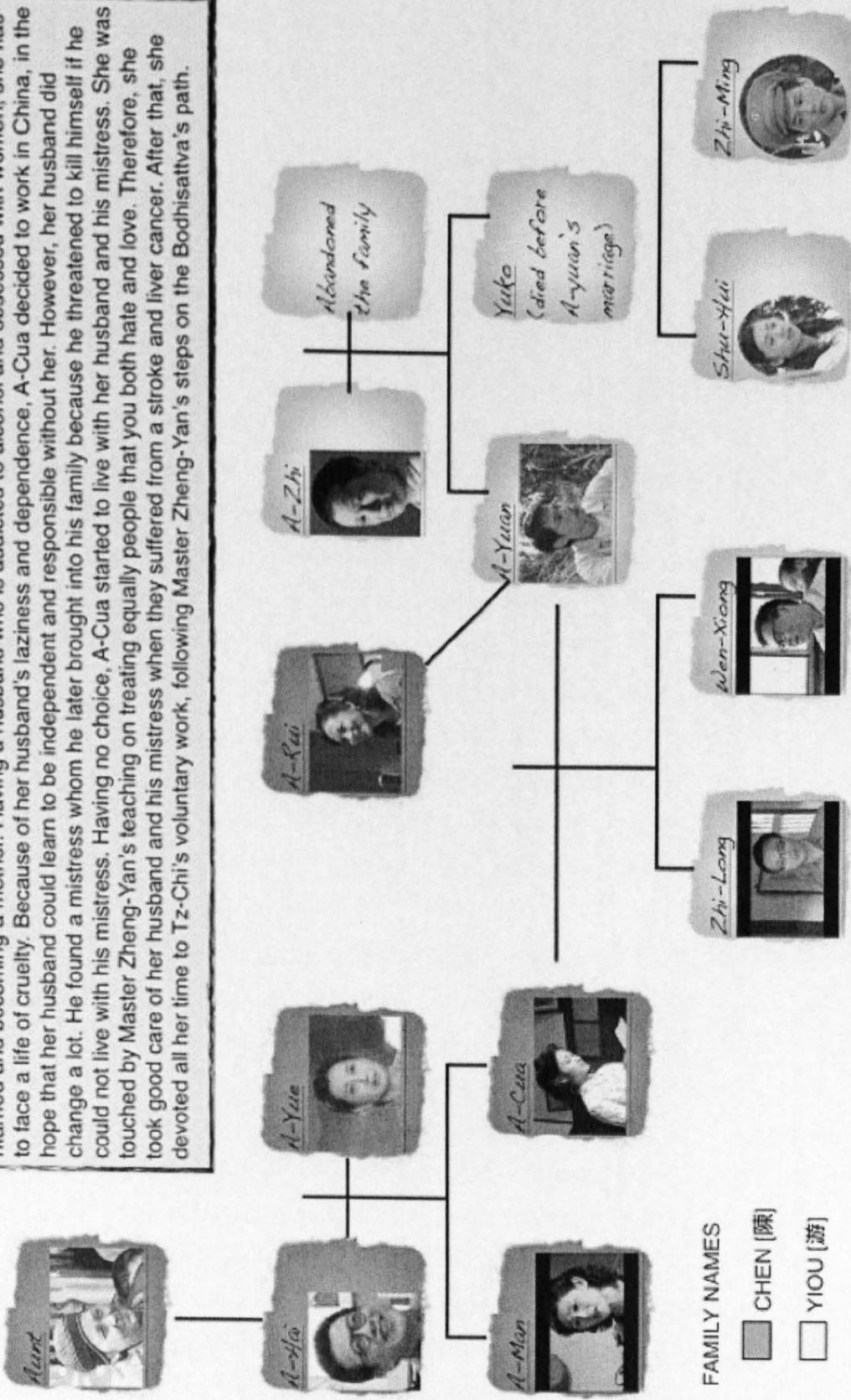
This is a sixty-six episode drama broadcast from October to December 2005. Before this, *Cao shan chun hui* (hereafter, *Cao*) [草山春暉] was one of the most famous Da-Ai dramas. *Cao* was the first commercial success that the Da-Ai TV network had had in the ratings, defeating other prime-time dramas from commercial TV networks. *Cao* was sold to NHK, the Japanese public broadcasting network and other TV networks in Taiwan. From then on, Da-Ai the TV network began to sell popular Da-Ai dramas. *Ming-yue* is one of the Da-Ai dramas that has been sold to other commercial TV networks because of its high ratings in premiere broadcasting. At the time of its premiere broadcasting, this drama's ratings reached the top three among prime-time dramas. The story is about a woman who tolerated her abusive husband and earned a living for the family when in need. It is an impressive story which has been mentioned by almost all my interviewees, and even my friends have talked about this drama. Its popularity among the viewers drove them to start drama campaigning like commercial TV networks do. Actors, actresses and the real person joined promotional tours. They

made appearances in several major cities and the leading character shared her experiences with the audience.

Ming-yue [明月] means shining moon; Zhao [照] is the verb “shines”; Hong-chen [紅塵] means this world. There is a famous Buddhist saying using “moon” as a metaphor to illustrate the “nature of Buddha” that sheds light equally on every sentient being on earth. The title of this drama symbolises the spirit of the leading character: her selflessness and a warming personality. The leading actor and actress were famous singers in the late 80s and early 90s in the Chinese-speaking world. Other actors and actresses are representative of the history of Taiwanese film history. Some of them have been in the Taiwanese film industry from a very early stage; some of them played important roles in popular Taiwanese films in the 80s. Seeing these actors on the screen is like watching Taiwanese film history. For people in my parents’ generation, this choice of actors reminds them of the excitement when seeing the first colour film.

SYNOPSIS of MING-YUE

A-Cua enjoyed a happy and carefree childhood from her birth. She was spoiled and much cherished by her grandaunt and she helped a lot in her father's business. However, A-Cua has to earn her family's living after getting married and becoming a mother. Having a husband who is addicted to alcohol and obsessed with women, she has to face a life of cruelty. Because of her husband's laziness and dependence, A-Cua decided to work in China, in the hope that her husband could learn to be independent and responsible without her. However, her husband did change a lot. He found a mistress whom he later brought into his family because he threatened to kill himself if he could not live with his mistress. Having no choice, A-Cua started to live with her husband and his mistress. She was touched by Master Zheng-Yan's teaching on treating equally people that you both hate and love. Therefore, she took good care of her husband and his mistress when they suffered from a stroke and liver cancer. After that, she devoted all her time to Tz-Chi's voluntary work, following Master Zheng-Yan's steps on the Bodhisattva's path.



FAMILY NAMES
 ■ CHEN [陳]
 □ YIOU [游]

Plot Summary

The protagonist is a woman, A-Cua, who was born in the 1920s, in Japanese-colonised Taiwan. As the first child in her family, she was named "Cua" in the hope of bringing more heirs, especially male ones, to the family. Being born in a businessman's family, A-Cua's childhood was better than most children's, especially girls. Being a female child in the family, she received no less attention and care than her male counterparts. At the time, Taiwan was an agricultural society in which most people were illiterate. Unlike most girls, who stayed home in their childhood, A-Cua went to primary school where she received a Japanese education and her father gave her Chinese education at home. She received primary education as well as knowledge of how to run a business from her father. Her father also taught her the importance of zhong (忠; loyalty) and xiao (孝; filial duties) which influenced her a lot in her life.

At the age of seventeen, she was ill and fell unconscious. Although her parents sought help from many doctors, her illness was incurable. Fearing that A-Cua would not receive worship from her decedents, her parents arranged a marriage for her according to a superstitious tradition. Strangely, A-Cua recovered from this weird disease. Knowing that she was engaged to a stranger, A-Cua was unwilling to marry at first but her parents insisted on keeping their promise. After marrying at seventeen, she had to learn how to do household chores which she had never done before. This lack of experience caused tension with her mother-in-law. Before she realised how irresponsible her husband was, A-Cua's first challenge appeared. A-Yuan's older sister died, leaving two children behind. A-Cua took on the responsibilities of raising these children and began to realise her husband's lack of responsibility for the family. A-Cua's happiness with her husband, A-Yuan, did not last long because A-Yuan went out to a hostess club (juo-jia)--a place where businessmen talked about business and drank with beautiful girls. Instead of working hard to support his family, A-Yuan spent most of his time in hostess clubs or with sex workers. Consequently, in order to support her family, A-Cua had to pawn her dowry because A-Yuan spent almost every bit of his salary on hostess clubs and the sex trade.

After World War II, A-Cua started an illegal business in order to raise her two children and the two children left by her sister-in-law. At the same time, her husband stayed home and did nothing but drink, while her mother-in-law did some handicrafts to earn a small income. Regardless of A-Cua's hard work in supporting her family by doing all kinds of jobs, the tension between A-Cua and her mother-in-law increased because her mother-in-law insisted that women should stay at home. Cua In order to let her husband

learn to be responsible, A-Cua went to China and learnt how to run a business there. She met a man who loved her but she decided to go back to her children and her family. Soon after she had returned from China, she opened a factory with her husband. Having grabbed the chance to talk business, A-Yuan had another opportunity to look for more women and spent even more time in hostess clubs than before. He soon found a mistress, A-rai, on a business trip and insisted on bringing her back home.

A-Cua had no choice but to accept A-Yuan's mistress and her disabled brother. Having a concubine at home did not motivate A-Yuan to work harder to support the family but gave him more chances to entertain himself with his mistress and to drink more than ever. No sooner had he brought back his mistress than the factory was in crisis because A-Yuan had not managed his money well. In 1954, A-Cua divorced her husband (divorce was rare in 1950s Taiwan and was seen as a shameful thing then). At the time of her divorce, her husband and his concubine did not live with the family. Although she got her divorce, her mother-in-law insisted that A-Cua should remain living in the family with her mother-in-law and her children. In order to support her mother-in-law and her children, A-Cua started a small business in another city, hoping that she could earn enough money to support her children's education.

When A-Cua's children grew up and established their own families, A-Cua (in her sixties) seemed to be rid of the economic burden. She had bought houses for her children and herself, and was beginning to enjoy her retirement. However, A-Yuan suffered a stroke and A-Cua's mother-in-law insisted that A-Cua should help him from medical services to religious rituals. Furthermore, A-Cua's mother-in-law hoped that A-Yuan could move back to live with her and A-Cua. Almost at the same time, she began to know Tzu-Chi and to start on her Bodhisattva's path. She had done many voluntary tasks in Tzu-Chi and even when she knew about A-Yuan's liver cancer, she was willing to cover the expenses and take care of him. The story ends with her realisation that life is painful, and she continues her way along the Bodhisattva's path.

- *XI-GU A-MA* (hereafter, *Xi-gu*; Love from the Valley) [矽谷阿嬤]

Context

“She was the beloved youngest daughter of 文山茶行

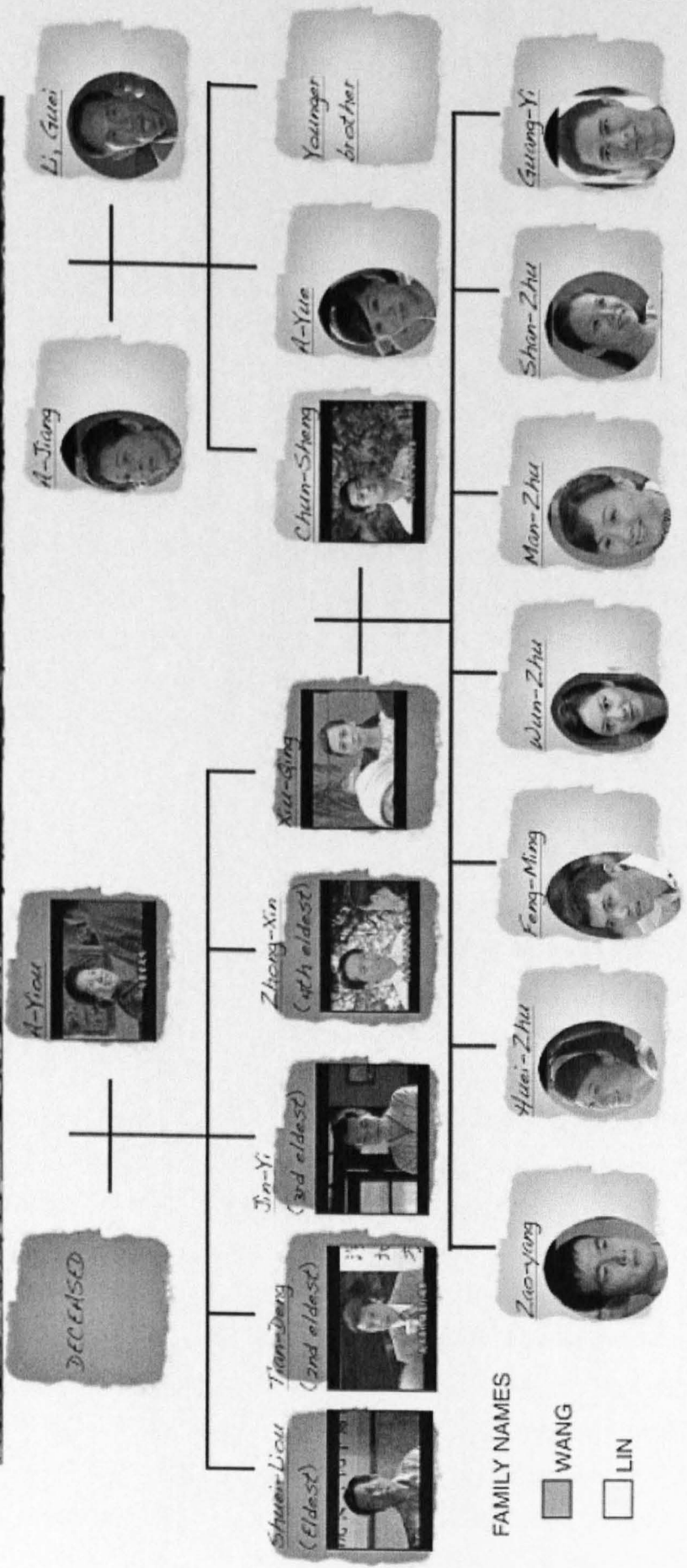
She had experienced World War II and her life had changed ever since.

At an old age, barely speaking English, incapable of driving, half-blinded, she introduced Tzu-Chi to a group of IT engineers in the Silicon Valley.

And, she was a living dictionary in their minds.”

Love from the Valley, (*Xi-gu A-ma*, meaning grandma from the Valley), was broadcast in September-November, 2008. Directed by Deng An-ning [鄧安寧], who directed one of the most famous and popular Da-Ai dramas, *Cao* in 2005, *Love from the Valley* tells a story about one of the very first Tzu-Chi members in the United States of America, Xiu-Qing, whose life story spans the twentieth century. Deng is an award-winning director and he is famous for producing quality dramas. In one of the Da-Ai interviews, he was praised by the host for producing quality dramas for the Da-Ai channel. In order to attract a broader group of audience, the leading actor is an idol actor and singer while the leading actress is a TV award winner. Both actor and actress are young but experienced in performing. Added to that is a cast of experienced actors and actresses as supporting characters and special guests. The actors and actresses are from all kinds of performing industries: some of them are from musicals; some of them are idols; some of them are models; and some of them are famous in commercial prime-time dramas. Because the story of Xiu-Qing begins in Taiwan and finishes in the States, it is unavoidable for the filming crew to fly to the States. The drama depicts a global flow of religion that is different from the scholarly imagination of globalisation as imperialism. The drama was broadcast five years after Xiu-Qing's death but her spirit has continued to live in many American Tzu-Chi members. This drama has been chosen for analysis because it shows the international perspective of the Tzu-Chi organisation as well as its local concern.

Being born in a well-off family into the 1920s, Xiu-Qing enjoyed an advantaged life as a young lady. Not only did she receive education but she also studied in Japan. Xiu-Qing's eldest brother ran one of the largest tea companies in Japanese colonised Taiwan. Her second eldest brother was a fighter for democracy who was arrested and never returned home when the KMT government took over the control of Taiwan (from Japan). Her third eldest brother was one of the founders of an asylum. Surrounded by her philanthropic brothers, Xiu-Qing gained experiences that ordinary girls of her generation would not have had a chance to learn. Amusingly, as she described, during World War II and the Chinese Civil War, Xiu-Qing experienced life as a beggar. Face with many difficulties in life, Xiu-Qing overcame them hand-in-hand with Chun-Sheng. Unfortunately, she lost her beloved husband at the age of 52. Thereafter, she spent her life in the U.S.A. with her children. On a trip back to Taiwan, Xiu-Qing got in touch with the Tzu-Chi organisation and started her Tzu-Chi career in San Jose. Being the second Tzu-Chi member in North America, Xiu-Qing marks an important page in Tzu-Chi's history in North America.



Plot Summary

Born in 1917, Xiu-Qing was the youngest daughter, with four older brothers, of a big family which ran one of the biggest tea trading businesses in Taiwan. Growing up under Japanese colonised Taiwan, Xiu-Qing and her brothers received a Japanese education and most of them received a higher education in Japan. Her third oldest brother was one of the first people to set up an asylum for poor people. Her fourth brother was a voluntary doctor in rural areas in Japan but he died on a voluntary clinical trip. Surrounded by a group of brothers who shouldered the responsibilities of intellectuals and worked for public welfare, Xiu-Qing dreamed of doing charity work from her adolescence. In an era when people were not used to marriage based on romantic love, Xiu-Qing followed her heart and married Chun-Sheng who was from a peasant family but had fought his way to study in Japan. In 1937, soon after her marriage, she moved with her husband to Da-lian, in China. Ten years after living in Da-lian, Xiu-Qing had given birth to five of her children and enjoyed her life there with her husband and her third oldest brother. The next year, 1948, civil war broke out in China; Da-lian was attacked by Japan and Russia. On their journey, whilst fleeing back to Taiwan, Xiu-Qing and her family experienced life as beggars and saw the darker side of humanity.

Starting life in Taiwan from nothing, Chun-Sheng struggled to make money through running businesses while Xiu-Qing found a way to support the family and her children. Working cooperatively, Xiu-Qing and Chun-Sheng managed to bring up their children, each of whom received higher education and most of them emigrated and worked in the United States. At the age of sixty-one, Chun-Sheng died of heart disease, leaving his beloved wife, then fifty-three years old, in deep sorrow. Not willing to see Xiu-Qing's indulgence in lamentation, her daughters encouraged her to do voluntary work for charity groups. She emigrated to the United States in 1977, and came across Tzu-Chi on a trip back to Taiwan in 1984. On her trip to Hua-Lian, Xiu-Qing visited the Tzu-Chi headquarters and was invited to have a private chat with Master Zheng-Yan who assigned to her the duty to "do" Tzu-Chi in the United States. Xiu-Qing started her Tzu-Chi career as soon as she arrived in the States. Living in North California, Xiu-Qing started recruiting members from her network of Taiwanese immigrants and students. Tzu-Chi's branch in North California started from nothing and was founded under Xiu-Qing's diligence and leadership. She was respected as everyone's "grandmother" because of her generosity and kindness to others. And so ended her story; ten years after the establishment of the branch in San Jose.

- HUANG, JIN-XIAN (hereafter, Huang) [黃金線]

Context

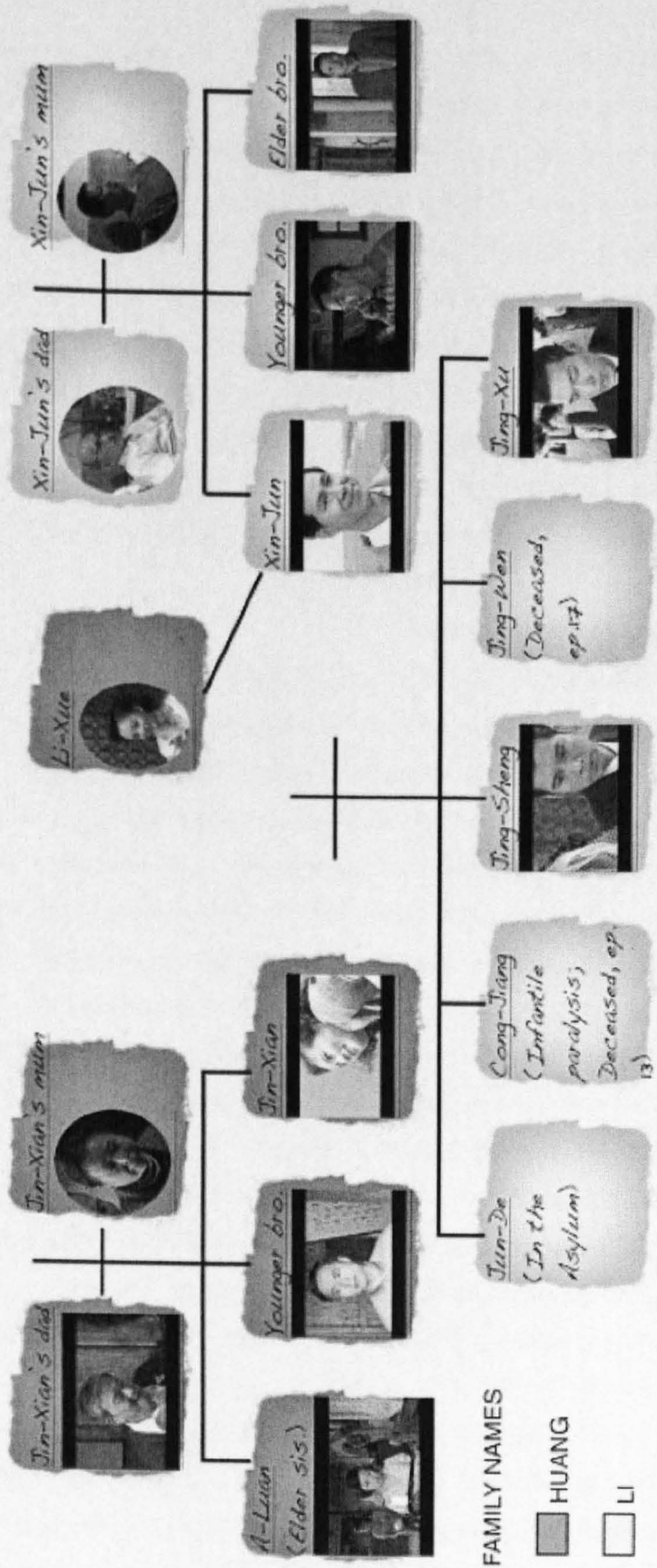
Compared with the other two dramas, *Huang* is a short one, with 17 episodes. The drama was broadcast at the beginning of 2008 and won the director a 2008 Golden Bells Award in Taiwan (UK counterpart, BAFTAs). *Huang* is categorised as a *jian dao suei* (撿稻穗, literally means “picking up rice spikes”) series, named by Master Zheng-Yan, which consists of seven mini dramas to celebrate the toughness of Taiwanese women. This is a series of dramas telling stories of Taiwanese women who never give up in difficult situations. Beginning their dharma life in Tzu-Chi, these women are well rid of their previous difficulties and suffering in life and start to enjoy their lives by using the metaphor of harvesting. The promotion for the book of the *jian dao suei* series reads:

The act of picking up rice spikes requires the person to bend down in order to enjoy the harvest. In the *jian dao suei series*, there are seven women who step into recycling work in Tzu-Chi after experiencing difficult times in their lives and a confusion about the meaning of life. Whilst they are bending down to pick up recycling bottles and to fold recycling papers, they are bending down to continue their dharma life and to enjoy the harvest of their lives. (My translation. Da-Ai TV, 2008.)

Originally, Huang’s story was shot as a documentary (by the same director) for another TV programme, *cao gen pu ti* (草根菩提, literally means, grass-rooted Bodhi), in the Da-Ai network. *Cao gen pu ti* is a programme documenting Tzu-Chi volunteers who do recycling work. *Huang* was picked as one of the *jian dao suei* series to be remade and broadcast in prime-time Da-Ai dramas.

SYNOPSIS of HUANG

Jin-Xian is the youngest daughter of the family; therefore, she is the pearl of her parents. Never had she worked before her marriage and she married a well-off businessman. The future seemed to be a most delightful and promising one for Jin-Xian. Unfortunately, Jin-Xian's eldest son was mentally disabled while the second suffered from infantile paralysis. Unable to face Jin-Xian and the children, her husband, Xin-Jun started to have affairs. Jin-Xian's bad luck did not stop with more children to come. Only one out of her five children was mentally and physically abled. When Xin-Jun failed in his business, Jin-Xian moved to another city with Xin-Jun and his mistress. However, after several fights Xin-Jun never returned to Jin-Xian's place. Jin-Xian was left with the responsibilities and duties of bringing up all her children. Two of her children died several years later whilst one was sent to an asylum. Jin-Xian is now doing voluntary work for Tzu-Chi with her youngest son who is mentally disabled.



FAMILY NAMES

■ HUANG

□ LI

Plot Summary

In *Huang*, *Jin-Xian* is the name of the main character. Born in a well-off family in 1930, Jin-Xian enjoyed her childhood and adolescence under her parents' protection. Unlike most girls at the time, Jin-Xian received a primary education and did not have to get a job to support the family. She was an obedient girl who entered a marriage arranged by her parents at the age of twenty. Her husband, Xin-Jun, was from one of the wealthiest families in her hometown--Tainan. Xin-Jun was recruited to the army while Jin-Xian was carrying their first child. During Xin-Jun's service in the army, Jin-Xian gave birth to two children and took care of the household. No sooner had Xin-Jun finished his two-year service in the army than his second child was diagnosed with infantile paralysis, a prevalent disease among children in the mid-twentieth century. Unfortunately, their first child was found out to be mentally disabled. With two disabled children and more children to come, not knowing the state of their health, Xin-Jun found comfort in alcohol and women. As a businessman, Xin-Jun had to socialise with business partners in private clubs where the services of women and alcohol were offered. While Jin-Xian was busy seeing one doctor after another, Xin-Jun took a mistress, Li-XueLi-Xue. In 1959, Xin-Jun's business was at risk. In order to start a new business, Xin-Jun and his families: Jin-Xian, her five children (among which only one was a healthy child); and Li-XueLi-Xue and her children, moved from Tainan, in the southern part of Taiwan, to Hua-LianHua-Lian, on the eastern coast of Taiwan. From Xin-Jun's point of view, his older brother had three wives as he saw both Jin-Xian and Li-XueLi-Xue as his wives.

After moving to Hua-LianHua-Lian, Xin-Jun showed less and less concern for Jin-Xian and their children. Running out of choices, Jin-Xian pawned valuables that had been given to her by her natal parents. In order to support the family, Jin-Xian started to earn a living for herself and her children. Xin-Jun ran off with Li-XueLi-Xue after several fights with Jin-Xian, leaving Jin-Xian and her children in Hua-LianHua-Lian. In the meantime, Jin-Xian lost her sixth child. Staying in Hua-LianHua-Lian was pointless because Xin-Jun had moved to another city and Jin-Xian could scarcely support herself and five children on her wages. She went back to her natal family in Tainan. From then on, Jin-Xian brought up five children on her own and Xin-Jun seldom visited them, even when they underwent difficult times. A-Shang, the only healthy child, helped with household chores and taking care of his brothers after school. After more than twenty years of marriage, Jin-Xian got her divorce in order to place her second child, the one with infantile paralysis, in a sanitarium. The first child was under Xin-Jun's custody after the divorce.

Her second child died in the sanitarium three years later. Several years after this, A-Shang got married and set up his own family. Although A-Shang remained in contact with his father, Xin-Jun, Jin-Xian never saw Xin-Jun again after their divorce. Jin-Xian's life seemed to be easier from then on and she started to do Tzu-Chi's voluntary work since she did not have to worry about her own or her children's lives. Two of her disabled children died of diseases; one was in the sanitarium; and one presently does Tzu-Chi with Jin-Xian. The story ends with Jin-Xian on a train to the Tzu-Chi headquarters in Hua-LianHua-Lian. She is no longer confused about her suffering.

LIFE IS A PLAY

The Cast

MING-YUE, A-Cua's life

XI-GU, Xiu-Qing's life

HUANG, Jin-Xian's life

MARRIAGE, obstacles and difficulties

TZU-CHI ORG., saviour figure

P, the commentator

The scene: P's thesis

ACT I

PROLOGUE: Narrative Structure *Enter P.*

P

There is a narrative pattern in the three dramas discussed here. The narrative structure can be divided into three phases. The first phase is their carefree childhood; the second stage is their marital lives; and the third is their careers in the Tzu-Chi organisation. The first turning point for the leading characters is marriage because their gender roles multiply and there are more tasks given to these multiple roles (wives, daughters-in-law, mothers etc.). Chapter 2 has shown that Confucian society can be seen as a compulsory heterosexual matrix that requires all individuals to step into marriages. The drama analysis shows a similar life passage of women apart from their participation in the Tzu-Chi organisation in the third part of their lives. Traditionally, women are seen as belonging to the private sphere--the family. The analysis of these three dramas will examine the leading characters' participation in the public sphere and their efforts in the private sphere along with the chronological line of their life passages.

Overcoming the difficult time in marriage, the leading characters find a spiritual salvation in the Tzu-Chi organisation, which marks the beginning of the third stage. The Tzu-Chi organisation plays a saviour figure in this narrative structure. After being saved by the Tzu-Chi organisation, the leading characters become devoted Tzu-Chi members in order to help other people. There is an obvious example in *HuangJin-Xian* where the female voice-over, belonging to the older Jin-Xian, states that she has three names in her life. The first one is the Japanese name, Kiku, used by her natal family as a nickname; the second one is the Chinese name, Jin-Xian, given to her by her father;

and the third name, Lu-fu, is the religious name given to her by Master Zheng-Yan (Huang, ep.1). The first name signifies her happy and carefree childhood; the second symbolises her difficult time in marriage; and the third name is a religious salvation for her. I will discuss these three dramas in this narrative pattern and explore the meaning behind this structure. It is often said that life is a play and their lives have indeed become plays broadcast on TV. In this play, I would like to explore how their lives are retold and reconstructed as a visual biography that expresses the hidden agenda of the Tzu-Chi organisation, as well as a history of Taiwanese women from a grassroots point of view.

Scene 1: Opening Scenes *Enter A-Cua, Xiu-Qing, and Jin-Xian.*

P

Looking at the opening scenes of these dramas helps us to understand how the directors map out the historical and geographical context in the first episode. To parallel significant historical events helps to convince the audience that the story is real and the leading characters are living among us. The opening scene of *Ming-yue* is Xian-tang Lin [林獻堂], a democracy fighter in Japanese occupied Taichung, having a secret meeting on the day of A-Cua's birth (Ming-yue, ep.1). In real life, Mr. Lin had nothing to do with the leading character, A-Cua, but the director uses this significant figure in Taiwanese history to show the audience under what geographical and historical background A-Cua was born. In *Ming-yue*, ep.12, A-Cua's fierce fight with her husband is cleverly paralleled with the breakout of the war at Pearl Harbour on the other side of the Pacific Ocean. To mention certain historical events helps the audience to map out the timeline of the story as well as being a recall of memories for the older generation. The realness created by the parallel of historical events reminds the audience that these are real stories from the past. The opening scenes also help to construct the realness for the audience.

Ming-yue

The audience sees an elderly woman sitting in an empty theatre watching an old film at the beginning of *Ming-yue*. The antiqueness takes the audience into an ancient past.



FIG. 4 Ming ep.1

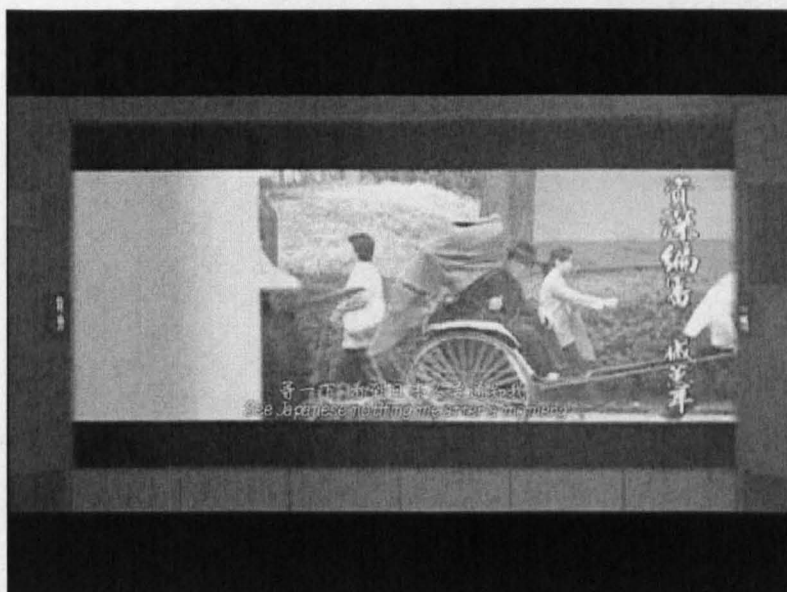


FIG. 5 Ming ep.1

Although the audience has no idea who this old woman is, the audience in front of the TV is in the same position as the old woman and watches this old film with her. The film begins with Xian-tang Lin [林獻堂], a democracy fighter for the Taiwanese under Japanese colonised Taichung, having a secret meeting, paralleling with a scene of A-Cua's mother suffering in childbirth. A female voice-over, taking a third-person point of view, guides the audience through A-Cua's birth. The insertion of a third-person narrator makes the drama like a real documentary film. Although the third-person narrator takes an objective point of view, she leads the story from different female characters' positions. Later in the interviewing session, the audience finally knows that the old lady in the opening scene is the real A-Cua herself. The audience grasps the idea that A-Cua is watching and reviewing her life, as life is like a play. The film is fictional as well as the drama itself but A-Cua is real and all the events presented in the dramas are real. The line is blurry between the dramatic elements and real-life events

because life itself can be unreal as well. In addition to the appearance of the real A-Cua in the opening scene, the usage of Xian-tang Lin immediately brings the audience back to Japanese colonised Taichung. Therefore, the audience easily finds their position as an audience. This is a fictional documentary of A-Cua's life that is going to span across the entire twentieth century.

Xi-gu

Xiu-Qing, accompanied by her best friend Ms. Lin (whose voice narrates the story), stands near the Golden Gate Bridge of San Francisco trying to see the other side of the ocean where her homeland, Taiwan, is.



Fig. 6 Xi ep.1

A montage of Xiu-Qing's life plays whilst the voice-over says that "Life is a play." The narrator, Ms. Lin, proceeds to tell the audience a brief history of Chinese immigrants in the United States. The audience finally realises that the leading character, Xiu-Qing, is also a part of this history and her story marks a new page in the religious perspective of this history. After the scene beside the sea, Xiu-Qing buys tea leaves in a tea shop. Throughout the conversation, the audience is told the reason why she is called "A-ma" (grandma), and her Mandarin-Chinese accent reveals her previous life experiences in China. Smelling the tea leaves, Xiu-Qing's memories are brought back to Japanese colonised Taiwan. And so the story begins with a teenaged Xiu-Qing playing in the front yard of one of the biggest tea companies in Japanese colonised Taiwan. The beginning scene of *Xi-gu* unusually begins in a foreign country, the U.S.A., and briefly tells the audience that this is a story that includes three different countries: Taiwan, China, and the States. Unlike an ordinary documentary, the voice-over by Ms. Lin in *Xi-*

gu is not a third person who narrates the story from an objective position. As one of the closest friends of Xiu-Qing, Ms. Lin guides the audience from a more intimate point of view. The voice-over of Ms. Lin adds to the realness of the story and the more emotional feelings of Xiu-Qing. The audience is guided through Xiu-Qing's life by taking a closer and more intimate position as if it is a life story that has happened to a friend of the audience's. This is a closer view of Xiu-Qing's life story.

Huang

Huang Jin-Xian begins on the eve of Jin-Xian's wedding day in southern Taiwan in the 1920s. In the opening scene, Jin-Xian's mother does *wan-mian* (挽面) for Jin-Xian, a traditional way of removing facial hair on the eve of the wedding day in order to help the application of make-up. Whilst helping Jin-Xian to shave her face, her mother tells her the story of a dumb daughter-in-law in order to teach Jin-Xian how to behave properly as a daughter-in-law. A voice-over, belonging to the actress playing the older Jin-Xian, begins the story with a statement that she has three names in her life. Using the first-person point of view, the drama looks like a memoir of her life. Sitting face-to-face with each other, Jin-Xian and her mother are doing *wan-mian* and her mother is telling her the story. In the background, Jin-Xian's married older sister helps Jin-xian in her wedding preparations. At the end of this scene, Jin-Xian and her family members (parents, older sister, and younger brother) gather together, showing her close and intimate relationship with her natal family.



FIG. 7 Huang ep.1

The director chooses the eve of the wedding to begin the story because the day of Jin-Xian's wedding is the most unforgettable day for her. By narrating the story from Jin-

Xian's point of view, the audience can delve deeper into her happiness as well as her suffering.

P

The opening scenes of these dramas show the audience the current situation of each of the leading characters and then bring the audience back to the leading characters' pasts. All these dramas begin in Japanese colonised Taiwan. Using a flash-back technique, the audience sees the dramas as the leading characters' memoirs or biographies. Rather than being ahistorical, like most popular prime-time dramas or idol dramas, Da-Ai Drama insists on historical accuracy. Therefore, the "realness" is reinforced by taking the audience back to the past they had lived in or to the past they have read about in textbooks. The audience can see the generational differences in the dramas as well. Historical events or historical figures are used in the dramas for the purpose of pinpointing the timeline of the story so that the audience can get the historical sense of the leading characters' lives. It helps to reconstruct the realness. Not only are significant historical events used but the dramas also reconstruct the street scenes that represent its historical setting.

As in conventional documentaries, voice-over is used in the dramas. The use of voice-overs helps the audience to get closer to the inner world of the leading characters. Taking Corner's (1999) questions on docudrama, the use of voice-overs resembles the presentation of documentary films. The intimate connection between the audience and the leading characters is strengthened by the ordinariness of the leading characters.⁵¹ The ordinariness is another way to construct the realness of the stories. The opening scenes also tell the audience that these are not stories about significant people. On the contrary, the historically significant figures are background figures to map out the leading characters' lives. Being ordinary, the leading characters could be one of us and their life experiences could have happened to any one of the audience. Corresponding to Tzu-Chi's agenda, Da-Ai drama aims to tell stories of ordinary people who are able to do extraordinary things. As the Tzu-Chi organisation began with a humble group of housewives, the agenda of Tzu-Chi aims to inspire the humble power of ordinary people and gather them into a great force to change the world. To document these ordinary stories corresponds to Tzu-Chi's emphasis on simplicity. Ordinary and humble as the leading characters are, the dramas turn them into shining stars in their life-as-a-play roles. By celebrating the strength of ordinary people, Da-Ai Drama shows amazing

⁵¹ Brundson et al. (2001) and Taylor (2002) discussed the appeal of ordinariness in lifestyle TV in a contemporary U.K. context. Bennet and Holmes (2010) studies the "ordinariness" of TV stars and distinguishes it from the cinematic tradition. Gregg (2007) examines the linguistic use of "ordinary" and its connection to the discourse of empathy.

stories of tough and brave women. What differentiates the “ordinariness” in Da-Ai Drama and the “ordinariness” in cultural studies is that Da-Ai Drama is not “reality TV”. It is fictional drama based on ordinary people’s lives.

SCENE 2: Childhood *Enter A-Cua, Xiu-Qing, Jin-Xian and their families.*

P

After the opening scenes, the dramas tell the stories in a chronological way. The first stage of the stories begins with the leading characters’ childhood or adolescence. All of these dramas show that being born as females does not deprive them of parental affection. Contrary to the prevailing ideology in society, the female leading characters are much cared for and cherished by their family members, especially those in a hierarchically powerful position. Although most of the leading characters are born in the early 1920s or 30s, their parents do not discriminate against them for being girls. Instead, they are protected and enjoy quite a lot of privileges in the family. The gender role of daughter is a minor position in Confucian hierarchy; however, these dramas reverse the discourse and show that being born female does not necessarily bring oppression.

Ming-yue

The drama begins with A-Cua’s birth. On the day, the whole family is nervous about her birth. Knowing that A-Cua is a girl, her mother apologises to her husband for not giving birth to a male heir after several miscarriages. But A-Cua’s father answers, “It does not matter if she is a girl because she is my child.” Being the first child in the family, A-Cua’s grandaunt, a hierarchically powerful person in the family, takes good care of her, hoping that A-Cua will bring more children into the family. At the one-month-old party,⁵² A-Cua’s mother prepares food with her neighbour in the kitchen. The one-month-old party is important but rarely celebrated for girls. Being the first child in the family, A-Cua’s grandaunt decides to celebrate it with neighbours (ep.1). Being cherished by the family, A-Cua is allowed to go to school even though she does it without parental permission (ep.2).

⁵² A-month-old party [滿月酒] is held by the baby’s parents to celebrate that the baby has survived the first month since birth. Traditionally, the parents prepare glutinous oil rice and red eggs to share among relatives and the neighbours.

There is a scene that shows how A-Cua's grandaunt spoils her. A-Cua feels like eating sugar cane but she cannot be bothered to chew it. Knowing that A-Cua wants to eat it, her grandaunt helps to chew it for her.



FIG. 8 Ming ep.2

Normally speaking, girls are asked to help with household chores at home. As a teenager A-Cua spends her time helping in her father's business. As a girl, she is brought up differently from other girls in the family. Her personal interests are supported and developed before her marriage. Entering adolescence, A-Cua's education stops for she needs to help in her father's business. Unlike her friends who have to earn their own living after primary school, A-Cua is free to visit friends or do things she wants (ep.5). Like a little princess at home, A-Cua does not have to help in the kitchen in the same way as her adopted older sister does. A-Cua's childhood is carefree and she is allowed to develop her full potential and interests in education and business.

Xi-gu

The story begins with teenager Xiu-Qing playing with her cousins in the front yard (ep.1). The camera takes a top-down position to let the audience see Xiu-Qing's smile.



FIG. 9 Xi ep.1

Xiu-Qing spends most of her time with her four older brothers, either doing business or charity work. Not only does Xiu-Qing help in the family business, she is also allowed to study in Japan where three of her older brothers and her husband receive higher education (ep.3). Being literate, rare for ordinary people, let alone women, Xiu-Qing admires a poetess, Li-Yu Shi [石儷玉] who bravely divorced her husband and remarried a man eleven years younger. Her admiration for Li-Yu symbolises her modernised thought towards women's liberation (ep.4). The director cleverly parallels Li-Yu Shi to Xiu-Qing to indicate that both of them are brave women who break the tradition. Xiu-Qing's brothers have been advocating the concept of modernised marriage, hoping to give girls an option to choose their own husbands (ep.5).⁵³ What differentiates Xiu-Qing from other girls is her braveness to pursue a romance-based marriage.⁵⁴ Unlike most women of her generation, Xiu-Qing enjoys a lot of freedom and liberty, education wise and marriage wise.

Huang

The director uses three names to symbolise the three different stages of Jin-Xian's life. Jin-Xian, used as the title of the drama, is the name given to her by her father, hoping that Jin-Xian would be the last female heir born in the family. It seems that her father's hope of having a male heir is conventional, but Jin-Xian's father is very protective of

⁵³ It was a common practice in early twentieth century Taiwan to have a "fostered daughter-in-law" [童養媳]. Usually, girls from poorer families were fostered by other families to become a future daughter-in-law. The poorer families could save struggling for a living while the foster families could have a girl to help with the family chores. When the fostered girls reached the correct age, they were married to one of their foster brothers. See Wolf's fieldwork studies in early Taiwan. She has detailed descriptions on the practices of the fostered daughters-in-law.

⁵⁴ For people of Xiu-Qing's generation, match-making was a common practice. That is, when an individual reached his/her age for marriage, the neighbours or relatives would look for someone who was suitable for them. Romantic love was seldom heard of but was not an exception.

Jin-Xianher. The first name the voice-over mentions is a Japanese name, Kiku, used in school and in the family. Born in a well-off family, Jin-Xian's father does not allow her to get a job after graduating from school. Instead, she spends time practising tailoring skills at home or goes out with her older sister. In episode 1, there is a scene where Jin-Xian sits with her father at night. Her father feeds her a piece of BBQ fish and tells her the proper way to behave.



FIG. 10 Huang ep.1

Although Jin-Xian does not enjoy full freedom as A-Cua and Xiu-Qing do, Jin-Xian is protected and cherished in a different way.

P

At the first phase, the leading characters take the gender role of daughters. The leading characters in these three dramas are females who are born in well-off families. Unlike most women of their generation, the leading characters have access to education and they do not have to worry about their living. In the first stage of their lives, the leading characters are protected and spoiled by the older members of the family. The main purpose of showing the audience how cherished and spoiled they are is to serve as a contrast to their suffering in marriage. Moreover, the dramas reverse the conventional gender hierarchy which prioritises male over female. As a modern approach to the ancient past, the concept of gender equality is carefully represented. Although the dramas try to show the audience that daughters can be loved and cherished in the family, the prevailing tradition of prioritising the male heir can be seen in the dramas. For example, A-Cua's name means to bring more heirs (male ones) to Chen's family while Jin-Xian is given the name in the hope of there being no more female heirs after her birth.

The gender role of “daughter” is not necessarily oppressive for women. Hierarchically speaking, “daughter” is put in a minor position in Confucian human relationships. In this case, the least significant position can be reversed to be the most precious one. The position of “daughter” is similar to that of “princess”. Unlike a princess whose power comes from a male authority, the King, the leading characters establish their status as the precious one through different reasons and the power comes from a hierarchically powerful person who is not necessarily male. A-Cua is spoiled by her grandaunt who is the hierarchically highest and most powerful person in the family. Xiu-Qing is spoiled by her mother and her older brothers. Jin-Xian is protected by her father who does not will his power for no reason. In the time span of an individual’s life s/he has to experience the minor position in Confucian hierarchy. After marriage, the gender roles multiply as well as the power dynamics. An individual starts his/her life from the minor position and climbs up to the higher one with more and more duties and obligations fulfilled. At this stage of the leading characters’ lives, their individuality is reinforced by education. All the leading characters are allowed to develop their potential through education.

SCENE 3: Public Sphere *Enter A-Cua, Xiu-Qing and Jin-Xian.*

P

The Confucian concept of *nei/wai* naturally appoints *nei* (the private) to the female and *wai* (the public) to the male. In the discussion of Confucian women, women’s limited access to the public sphere is considered to be one of the origins for women’s oppression in society.⁵⁵ In the dramas, the audience can see that the kitchen usually belongs to female family members whilst male family members usually work outside the family. However, at the first stage of the leading characters’ lives, they are not confined to the kitchen or the private sphere. Apart from access to education, the leading characters are shown in different public spheres. In the narrative structure of *Da-Ai Drama*, this part in the public sphere serves to explain the leading characters’ skills developed at a young age, later used in the Tzu-Chi organisation.

Ming-yue

A-Cua’s access to education shows that she is not completely confined to the private sphere. Although she is not able to attend school frequently in the last two years of primary school, she is helping in her father’s business. Unlike other women in the

⁵⁵ See Chapter 2 for the discussion on the public/ private debates.

family, A-Cua is taken to different business occasions by her father. She is allowed to learn the way in which to conduct business with her father, which means being a female does not stop her from learning the affairs of the public sphere (ep.3). Rather than learning how to manage the household and prepare herself to be a good housewife, A-Cua is allowed to learn how to do business. Being educated enables her to help in the family business.

Xi-gu

In the first episode, the audience sees Xiu-Qing meeting Chun-Sheng on her way to helping a poor family. The scene shows the audience that Xiu-Qing is not confined to the private sphere; instead, she is allowed to help other people. Having a brother, who is a fighter for democracy, Xiu-Qing does administration jobs in his office (ep.2). Having sisters-in-law doing chores in the private sphere, Xiu-Qing does not have to learn how to do household chores, and she is capable of helping in the family business. Being close to the female workers in the tea garden, Xiu-Qing modifies the way of counting the pay which encourages the female workers and reduces arguments about wages (ep.5). Brought up in such a special environment, her leadership is developed but never used until her participation in the Tzu-Chi organisation. After her participation in Tzu-Chi, her son realises what a great leader his mother can be.

Huang

After Jin-Xian finishes primary education, she is not allowed to enter the public sphere (i.e. to work). However, she is not completely confined in her natal family. Jin-Xian is shown going out with her older sister. Xin-Jun first saw Jin-Xian in a photography studio where Jin-Xian and her sister go for fun (ep.1). Jin-Xian's activities in the private sphere, such as in the kitchen, are not shown much apart from her working on her sewing machine.

P

Rather than staying home to learn the proper way to manage the household, the first phase of the dramas shows the audience the leading characters' activities in the public sphere. Women, unmarried women in this case, are not strictly confined to the private sphere. They are allowed to use what they learn at school to help in family businesses before getting married. The representation of these women is that the public sphere paves the path for their future careers in the Tzu-Chi organisation. Their individuality has been emphasised in the first stage of their lives, allowing us to see a different representation of women. It is the compulsory heterosexual marriage that subjugates women to the family, not necessarily kept and maintained by men.

Although there are a few exceptions here, they cannot represent all the women in Confucian society. The best example is the fear of spinsterhood which is shown in *Ming-yue*. When A-Cua falls seriously ill, her grandaunt and her father discuss her marriage, fearing that A-Cua might die as a single woman because a single woman is not allowed to be worshipped by any descendants⁵⁶ in Confucian traditions (ep.8). Therefore, even if A-Cua seems to be dying, her family insists on her marriage to A-Yuan.

As a later discussion on mothers-in-law will show, women are the active agents for keeping the patriarchal tradition. The oppression of women from compulsory heterosexual marriage can be seen in the tradition of “fostered daughter-in-law”. In *Xi-gu*, Xiu-Qing’s older brothers advocate a modernised and simplified way of wedding rituals so that fewer women would be fostered as daughters-in-law. The difficulty they encounter in the first place is when they use individual rights as an argument (ep.5). In a Confucian society, the (heterosexual) family is seen as an entity; therefore, when the individual rights threaten the family as an entity, the interests of the family come first (see Chapter 2).

The gender role of a “daughter” does not always subjugate women to the patriarchal figure in the family. An individual in a minor position can be the most precious and cherished person in the family. As the dramas show, the patriarchal figures help to reverse the discourse and they are not necessarily educated intellectuals like Xiu-Qing’s brothers. Although the purpose of constructing a carefree childhood is to be a contrast to the later suffering in marriage, their untroubled childhood and adolescence show a possibility for women to be themselves and to develop their potential before marriage. When they enter another patriarchal family after marriage, the oppression sets in and their individuality is subjugated to the new patriarchal family. It is where most oppression comes from. There are many women in the modern world who have similar experiences. In an age when gender equality is highly advocated, women enjoy more and more freedom before marriage. The high percentage of women in higher education and the labour market do not mean that women enjoy equal rights with men.

As women gradually step out of the realm of *nei* (private sphere), they are more likely to establish horizontal ties with other women. Since late imperial China, women from elite families are secluded more and more; however, women manage to get out of the

⁵⁶ There is a saying that a woman who dies single will have no one to worship. However, the tradition is beginning to change now and there are a few exceptions.

patriarchal control by visiting temples or joining sutra chanting groups (Weller 1999 p.34). Tzu-Chi is a good example of women's powerful informal ties. Putting its religious agenda aside, Tzu-Chi is a much more powerful matriarchal organisation than any of the feminist organisations or women's movements, Women can generate informal capital through their networks or ties with others (ibid. p. 35). It is true that the boundary between *nei-wai* is broken and becomes blurry. However, marriage still plays a significant role in women's lives. As the gender roles multiply, women are victims of the 'patriarchy' as well as the oppressor of that tradition.

ACT II

PROLOGUE: Wedding Days *Enter A-Cua and A-Yuan; Xiu-Qing and Chun-Sheng; Jin-Xian and Xin-Jun.*

P

As heterosexuality plays the central role in Confucian society, gender is manifested through different gender roles linked to heterosexual marriage. Gender is constituted through repeated acts of fulfilling duties and obligations given to different gender roles. In order to reinforce the power of the heterosexual matrix, Confucianism emphasises the importance of *fen* (obligations) given to different gender roles. Instead of seeing Confucianism as a source that authorises the ruler or the senior “rights” to rule over the ruled or the younger, “the Confucian ideal of ethocracy was based on the concept of duty or obligation instead of rights or power” (King 1996 p. 231). Rights and power are given once the ruler or the senior fulfils their duties given by heaven. The concept of *fen* is initially practised and realised in the familial relationships.

The first turning point in the dramas comes from the leading characters' marriages. The stories change their location from the leading characters' natal families to their husbands' families. In earlier times, marriage was the decisive factor for women's lives were dependent on their husbands. In *Xi-gu*, episode 6, Xiu-Qing's mother takes Xiu-Qing to a woman's house and shows her what a woman's life is like if she marries the wrong person. Xiu-Qing's mother says that the rest of a woman's life depends on whom she marries. In *Ming-yue*, the director cleverly puts a contrast between A-Cua and Mu-Lan, A-Cua's niece, who marries a good husband. In the image, Mu-Lan (on the right) who marries a good husband is dressed beautifully sitting at A-Cua's food stall. A-Cua who is divorced works hard at her food stall. The contrasting scene tells the audience about A-Cua's hard work. The underlying message of the scene tells the audience the importance of marriage and its impact upon women.



FIG. 11 Ming ep.35

A wedding is the ritual that marks the change of a woman's life, whether it is good or bad. For a woman in a Confucian society, to get married means to incorporate herself into another patrilineal family (Ebrey 2003). As Confucianism emphasises *li* (rituals), the most important ritual of entering a marriage is the wedding ritual. All the dramas show this important moment in their lives and the production team spends time on reconstructing the ancient wedding rituals carefully. At the time of their weddings, wedding rituals are taken in a traditional way. In this part, I would like to see how wedding scenes are presented in the dramas as it is one of the most remarkable moments in the leading characters' lives.

Ming-yue

When A-Cua is seventeen years old, she falls unconscious for a month. Medical technology is not advanced enough to heal her illness; therefore, her parents turn to folk religion for answers. It is suggested that A-Cua should get married so that good fortune could help to cure her illness. Worrying that A-Cua's illness might mean that she dies unmarried, her parents choose A-Yuan to marry A-Cua without A-Cua's consent. Miraculously, A-Cua is restored to health at the engagement. Waking up from unconsciousness, A-Cua is reluctant to marry A-Yuan. Therefore, the wedding scene is full of sorrow. In the scene where the bride and groom are photographed with their families, there are tears in A-Cua's eyes. She bursts into tears when kneeling down to say goodbye to her parents. When she finally leaves her natal family for A-Yuan's family, the voice-over says: "Getting married at the age of seventeen, A-Cua waves goodbye to carefree adolescence and steps towards an unpredictable life". Accompanied by the orchestral version of the theme song, the audience sees A-Cua sitting in the car with her husband driving them to an unknown future (ep.9). The

ending ritual of a wedding is when the bride's mother spills the water onto the ground, signifying that a married woman is never to return to her natal family.



FIG. 12 Ming ep.9

Performing this ritual at the end of the wedding, A-Cua's mother has a worried face. The water is like A-Cua's carefree childhood that will never again return. Despite her close and intimate relationship with her natal family, A-Cua never returns to her natal family, even after her divorce.

Xi-gu

Of these three leading characters, Xiu-Qing's wedding is different from the other two. Rather than following the tradition of wedding rituals, Xiu-Qing's family tries to simplify the rituals because Xiu-Qing's brothers believe in a modern way for weddings. Not only is the wedding ritual modernised, but also Xiu-Qing's marriage, which is based on romantic love. Xiu-Qing's mother objects to the marriage in the first place because it is believed that the husband decides what a woman's life should be like after marriage. Chun-Sheng is not from a well-off family. Therefore, Xiu-Qing's mother is afraid for Xiu-Qing's daughter's situation after marriage. Facing many difficulties and overcoming all the obstacles, Xiu-Qing finally marries Chun-Sheng and the wedding rituals are simplified (ep.7). The process of Xiu-Qing's marriage is a miniature exemplifying the process of modernisation in Taiwanese society. People nowadays keep a few significant rituals in the wedding whilst most of it is modernised. Xiu-Qing's extraordinary marriage signifies her personality as a ground-breaking woman.

Huang

As the drama begins on Jin-Xian's wedding's eve, the audience can see the importance of marriage in a woman's life. Jin-Xian is an obedient girl who lets her parents decide whom she is to marry after match-making. Jin-Xian's wedding is a traditional one. Feeling sad at leaving her natal family, Jin-Xian has her husband, Xin-Jun, holding her hand and promising her a happy future. The voice-over comes when the couple sit in the car heading to Xin-Jun's house: "If you asked me what was the most memorable day when I was twenty years old, I would say it was my wedding day" (ep.1).

P

Despite generational differences in the definition of marriage, marriages still play an important role in women's lives nowadays. The storyline of Da-Ai drama is simple. There is only one storyline focusing on the leading characters' childhood and adolescence. The supporting storyline mentioning their husbands and the family simply maps out their family backgrounds and serves as a preparation for the marriage which brings the drama back to the storyline of the leading characters. Therefore, the obstacles or worries about the leading characters' marriages are, functionally, a preparation for the first climax of the narrative structure--the wedding. Instead of stating the fact that the leading characters get married, the dramas portray and represent the wedding rituals in great detail, from how the brides and the grooms meet each other to the details of the wedding rituals. The detailed portrayal of the wedding rituals implies that marriage is important in an individual's life.

An individual's roles and duties multiply when s/he gets married. As we can see in these dramas, marriage is considered to be a turning point for women, rich or poor alike. As Tamney and Chiang (2002) argue, the Confucian emphasis on harmony and social order among different social groups begins with the family. For individuals living in Confucian societies, stepping into (heterosexual) marriage is a must, and divorce is not allowed (p.49). An individual, female and male alike, is born to fit into a heterosexual marriage. Obligations and duties come when an individual assumes different roles and positions in the marriage. The narrative structure of Da-Ai drama follows a Confucian tradition and acknowledges the landmark figure of (heterosexual) marriage in an individual's life. After the weddings, the real challenges of marital lives lie ahead for the leading characters. There are more and more obligations and duties appointed to the leading characters as they become daughters-in-law, wives, and mothers. Gender is constructed via the fulfilment of the different obligations and duties that come with these roles.

SCENE 1: The First Day in the Marriage *Enter A-Cua, Xiu-Qing, Jin-Xian and their mothers-in-law.*

P

The wedding day marks a switch from the carefree childhood to the difficulties and challenges of real life. At the second stage, the wedding scene is just a landmark that signifies the beginning of a new life in a different family. The first day in the new family is one of the important plots in the dramas. Being protected by the natal families, the leading characters seldom help with household chores. The first challenge of their new roles as “daughters-in-law” and “wives” is to do these chores. Therefore, the portrayal of the first day in the marriage usually describes how difficult it is for the leading characters to cope with daily chores. To show the first day in the marriages symbolises the difficulties of being incorporated into another family. Quah (2008) points out that the ideal form of Asian families is the “extended family” which includes at least three generations of family: parents, their married children, and their children’s children and spouses (p.2). Although society has changed, in that most of the married women do not live with their husbands’ families, the necessity to be incorporated into a new family is inevitable. The dramatic representation on the first day of the leading characters’ marriages focuses on their conflicts with their mothers-in-law who are the keepers of the patriarchal tradition in the new families.

Ming-yue

On the first day of A-Cua’s marital life, she gets up early in order to prepare breakfast for the family. Knowing nothing about preparing food and cooking, A-Cua’s mother-in-law takes over the job and teaches her step by step. After the meal, A-Cua tries to do the laundry. Again, she fails. The drama shows us how A-Cua learns to do household chores like an apprentice, with a voice-over telling the audience how frustrated A-Cua feels about doing household chores because she is only good at doing business and jobs that belong to the public sphere (ep.9). Although A-Yuan’s father is absent from the family, A-Yuan’s mother is the patriarchal figure because she is the one who is in charge of everything in the family. To teach A-Cua how to do household chores is a part of a mother-in-law’s job. Despite the fact that A-Cua is not good at doing household chores, the drama shows the audience her efforts at learning the proper way to manage the household. That is, she has done her best to fulfil her duties as a daughter-in-law and wife.

Xi-gu

Traditionally, a married woman should return to her natal family as a special guest on the first day of her marriage.⁵⁷ Although Xiu-Qing gets up early, trying to help prepare the breakfast, her mother-in-law has already done it. Being a kind mother-in-law, rarely seen at that time, she urges Xiu-Qing to visit her natal family as soon as possible. On her return visit to her natal family, Xiu-Qing sits at the dining table helping her sister-in-law to prepare lunch.



FIG. 13 Xi ep.7

Her sister-in-law shares her experiences as a daughter-in-law in Xiu-Qing's family. "What a daughter-in-law should learn is to develop a sense of responsibility towards the marriage," says Xiu-Qing's mother, who has been a kind mother-in-law as well. Although there is not a guide or manual teaching women the right way to act as daughters-in-law, women pass on their experiences as daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law with each other. Xiu-Qing is told to do her job as a daughter-in-law quietly, implying that the norm of a good daughter-in-law is to be obedient to her elders (ep.7). The first day of Xiu-Qing's marriage does not seem to be a challenging or a difficult one for Xiu-Qing. Unlike most married women who have conflicts with their mothers-in-law, Xiu-Qing's challenges come from her father-in-law (shown in the later episodes). The moral code of behaving as a good daughter-in-law is passed down from Xiu-Qing's mother instead of her mother-in-law.

Huang

⁵⁷ It is a tradition for the married daughter to return to her natal family on the first day of the marriage. On her return, the married daughter is no longer treated as the daughter. According to the tradition, she is treated as a guest of the family which signifies her departure from her natal family.

Waking up early in the morning, Jin-Xian goes directly into the kitchen to help her sister-in-law. Instead of preparing the meal, Jin-Xian's first job is to prepare warm water for her mother-in-law to wash her face in her room. The scene signifies a married woman's first challenge of incorporating herself into her husband's family.



FIG. 14 Huang ep.2

Having an authoritative and critical mother-in-law, Jin-Xian is told that whoever Jin-Xian was before her marriage, she has to let go of her individuality and learn the rules of being a member of Li's family. In the kitchen, Jin-Xian's sister-in-law shares her experiences as a daughter-in-law in Li's family and tells Jin-Xian that it is a hard job to do things right as a woman in Li's family. The kitchen also plays an important role in Jin-Xian's life as a daughter-in-law. A scene where Jin-Xian's sister-in-law gives her a brief induction in the kitchen shows that household chores are part of a daughter-in-law's duties. For Jin-Xian, the first day in the marriage is a demanding lesson; learning the proper way to act and behave as a member of Li's family.

P

The scenes of the first day of the marriage are shown in the kitchen which is the core of the private sphere. As women are in charge of this private sphere, the kitchen scene can be seen as representative of it. The kitchen is a place where they learn the proper way to incorporate into another family. The process of incorporating into another patrilineal family is the most important lesson for a married woman. During the process, the mother-in-law plays an important role as the keeper of the patriarchal family. This will be discussed in the next subsection. Entering a new family, the married woman starts from a humble and minor status in the hierarchy of human relationships in the family. The life passage of an individual starts from the lower and minor status in the

familial hierarchy and moves to the powerful and respected status over time. The dramas have shown that women's gender role as daughters does not always subjugate women in the family.

The dramas frankly represent this difficult time for daughters-in-law. To represent the first day of their marriages does not only mark the beginning of their suffering and challenges in marital lives. These portrayals and representations are to show the audience how a married woman incorporates into a patriarchal family. The challenges of marital life come from their gender roles, switching from mono-role as "daughter" to multiple roles as "mother", "wife" and "daughter-in-law." No matter how active they are in the public sphere or how individualistic they are before marriage, these women have to return to the private sphere and learn to fulfil their duties well. Their individuality symbolises who they are before marriage. The individuality of married women is seen as a threat to the new family as a whole. There are duties and obligations given to the gender role of "daughter-in-law."

SCENE 2: *Daughter-in-law Enter A-Cua, Xiu-Qing, Jin-Xian and their mothers-in-law.*

P

Among the multiple roles a married woman plays, the role of a daughter-in-law is the initial and minor status. What a daughter-in-law should do is to serve her parents-in-law and her sisters- and brothers- in-law. As a daughter-in-law, tension with the mother-in-law is unavoidable. For a mother-in-law, it is her duty and obligation to teach and discipline the daughter-in-law. Mothers-in-law, in a hierarchical higher position, used to be in the lower and minor position in Confucianism. Having incorporated into the family, a mother-in-law has to pass down the tradition to her daughter-in-law. Therefore, the role of "mother-in-law" switches from being oppressed to one of power.

On the first day of their marital life, the leading characters are shown in the kitchen learning how to do household chores. Apart from doing household chores, it is important that the daughter-in-law is obedient to family members, especially parents-in-law. That is, a good daughter-in-law should be able to learn the proper way to behave in her husband's family. Apart from all these, one of the most important duties for a daughter-in-law is to give birth to a male heir in order to continue the patriarchal blood lineage.

Ming-yue

On the first day of A-Cua's marital life, her mother-in-law teaches her how to cook and do the laundry. A-Cua's mother-in-law says to A-Cua: "A woman cannot be qualified to manage the household if she does not know how to do things correctly in the kitchen" (ep.9). Although A-Cua's mother-in-law is aware of A-Cua's status in her natal family, A-Cua is required to learn how to manage a household after getting married. As A-Yuan becomes lazier and lazier, A-Cua has to find a way to support the family financially. In episode 12, when the rent is due, A-Cua has to go to a broker to sell her marital gifts, given to her by her father. During war time, A-Cua starts a business in the black market. Although she spends most of her day travelling and doing business, she has to rush home to prepare meals for the family (ep.16). This is to show the audience how difficult A-Cua's life is but it also shows the audience about women's double work roles.

The audience sees how A-Cua travels from mid-Taiwan to southern Taiwan, walking and running away from the police. However, A-Cua's mother-in-law does not appreciate A-Cua's contribution to earning a living for the family. The tension between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law starts to appear here. Doing all the household chores and taking care of four children, A-Cua's mother-in-law complains about A-Cua's absence from the private sphere. When asked why A-Cua is never home to help with the household chores, A-Cua's mother-in-law answers: "She has been travelling on trains every day, leaving me to manage the household" (ep.17). The tension between A-Cua and her mother-in-law comes from their different perceptions of the gender role of "daughter-in-law". For A-Cua's mother-in-law, a daughter-in-law should stay at home and share her mother-in-law's burden. However, for A-Cua, to earn a living for the family is essential since her husband cannot be bothered to work. The tension and conflict between A-Cua and her mother-in-law come from A-Cua's absence and inability to share burdens in the private sphere. Earning money is never a woman's job even if her husband never works hard enough to support the family.

Too lazy to work, A-Yuan is an alcoholic who has enjoyed various extramarital affairs. After bringing A-rui home, A-Cua decides to live as a "daughter-in-law" and a "mother" (ep.28). As for the gender role of "daughter-in-law", A-Cua has done a great job. Although there are tensions between A-Cua and her mother-in-law at the beginning, their relationship becomes closer and closer as time passes by. As the children grow up and the financial burden is lessened, A-Cua tries to start a new business. By this time, A-Cua has already divorced A-Yuan. However, A-Cua has been taking care of her mother-in-law despite the fact that A-Yuan left home years ago. The relationship between A-Cua and her mother-in-law has become like mother and daughter. Knowing

A-Cua's plan to start a new business, her mother-in-law invests all the money she has saved, saying that they are mother and daughter now (ep.38). Being a daughter-in-law, A-Cua is more than qualified because she takes good care of her mother-in-law even after she divorces A-Yuan. In episode 55, the audience can see how patient A-Cua is towards her dying mother-in-law. At Cua's mother-in-law's funeral, A-Cua shows great gratitude towards her mother-in-law because she has spent all her time taking care of the family, leaving A-Cua enough time to work and support the family. Apparently, the drama tries to construct A-Cua as closely as possible to a saint by portraying her diligent care for her mother-in-law. Moreover, A-Cua exemplifies what a good daughter-in-law should do; for she takes care of her husband's family (her mother-in-law and her sister-in-law's children).

When A-Cua is pregnant, she hopes to give birth to a son. While she is pregnant, her mother-in-law is kind to her. After the first son is born, A-Cua's father visits her. Despite the fact that A-Cua's father does not care about his own children's gender, he says to A-Cua: "A daughter-in-law can only find proper ground on which to stand if she gives birth to a boy" (ep.12). Her duty is to keep the patrilineage by bearing male heirs. Later on, when A-Cua becomes a mother-in-law, she treats her daughter-in-law like her own daughter. Transforming all the suffering and mistreatment to a religious sense, the drama celebrates A-Cua's ability to put up with her mother-in-law. Furthermore, A-Cua reflects upon herself and becomes a mother-in-law who treats her daughter-in-law like her own daughter.

Xi-gu

Unlike the others, Xiu-Qing has a nice mother-in-law. Knowing Xiu-Qing's mother objects to Xiu-Qing's marriage with Chun-Sheng, Xiu-Qing's mother-in-law persuades Xiu-Qing's mother by promising to treat Xiu-Qing like a daughter. Having a nice mother-in-law does not mean Xiu-Qing's role as a daughter-in-law is easier than the others. On Xiu-Qing's wedding day, her mother tells her that what a daughter-in-law should learn is the sense of responsibility towards marriage. And it is important for a daughter-in-law to remain silent and to be obedient (ep.7). Xiu-Qing does not face the difficulties of a daughter-in-law until she flees back to Taiwan. Xiu-Qing's mother-in-law teaches her how to do household chores and she helps Xiu-Qing to cook while Xiu-Qing's sister-in-law helps her to do the laundry (ep.10). It seems that Xiu-Qing does not have problems with her mother-in-law; however, her father-in-law is not happy with Xiu-Qing.

Seeing Xiu-Qing's mother-in-law and sister-in-law helping Xiu-Qing with everything, Xiu-Qing's father-in-law sarcastically criticises her mother-in-law: "I have never seen a single person who treats a daughter-in-law like Mazu" (ep.10).⁵⁸ His sarcasm and dissatisfaction imply that a daughter-in-law should be strictly disciplined by her mother-in-law. The way to discipline and to incorporate a daughter-in-law is manifested in the way a daughter-in-law manages the household. Regardless of Xiu-Qing's father-in-law's dissatisfaction, Xiu-Qing's mother-in-law is proud of Xiu-Qing because she gives birth to three male heirs for Chun-Sheng (ep.10). When Chun-Sheng and Xiu-Qing run a stationery shop in town, Xiu-Qing's mother-in-law, knowing Xiu-Qing would have a double burden, moves in with Chun-Sheng and Xiu-Qing and helps them with the business and household chores (ep.16). Xiu-Qing's relationship with her parents-in-law shows us that the tensions or conflicts do not necessarily come from the mothers-in-law. In Xiu-Qing's case, the tension comes from her father-in-law who believes that a good daughter-in-law should do her best with household chores. But the tension or conflict between a daughter-in-law and her parents-in-law comes from the eagerness to incorporate a new member into the patriarchal family. As Xiu-Qing's father-in-law faces his death, Xiu-Qing kindly takes care of him.



FIG. 15 Xi ep.23

The voice-over comes in: "...although Xiu-Qing's father-in-law is critical of Xiu-Qing, she has never hated him". Their relationship is finally resolved in a good way as Xiu-Qing's father-in-law dies (ep.23). Again, the mistreatment by Xiu-Qing's father-in-law serves as a narrative function to portray Xiu-Qing as a saint-like figure.

⁵⁸ Apart from Guan-yin, Mazu is also one of the most worshipped goddesses in Taiwan. Tracing back to the immigrant history, Mazu is said to protect fishermen and travellers on the sea. There are several famous temples worshipping Mazu because she is believed to answer the believers' calls and save them from their suffering.

Huang

Jin-Xian learns a challenging lesson on her first day of marriage when her mother-in-law picks on her. Being good at household chores, Jin-Xian does not have much to be criticised for. At the beginning of their marriage, Jin-Xian usually goes out socially with Xin-Jun after dinner. Jin-Xian's mother-in-law is not happy with them going out all the time (ep.2). When Jin-Xian's oldest son cries at night because of illness, her mother-in-law is not happy with Jin-Xian's attitude as a mother (ep.3). To be a good daughter-in-law means to be obedient. Therefore, Jin-Xian has to do her best to satisfy her mother-in-law. In Jin-Xian's case, her mother-in-law who is the most powerful person in the family makes important decisions despite the fact that her father-in-law is still alive. In the scene where Xin-Jun's oldest brother proposes an economic split⁵⁹ among the brothers, Jin-Xian's mother-in-law is the one who objects to the idea. When Jin-Xian's father-in-law tries to persuade Jin-Xian's mother-in-law to agree to the proposal Jin-Xian's mother-in-law stares at him to keep him silent (ep.3). As a previous discussion shows, Jin-Xian's mother-in-law is the most powerful patriarchal figure in the family. Every decision made by the family members has to have Jin-Xian's mother-in-law's permission. Having such a scary figure in the family, Jin-Xian does not suffer much from the conflict between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law.

P

In these dramas, the audience can see how powerful mothers-in-law are, especially in *Ming-yue* and *Huang*. The conflicts between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law are often mentioned by married women and there will be a short discussion on this matter in the next chapter. For a mother-in-law, it is important to discipline her daughters-in-law so that they can incorporate into the family as soon as possible. Disciplining daughters-in-law is manifest in teaching them the way to manage the household. In *Huang*, Jin-Xian's sister-in-law is impressed at Jin-Xian's ability to remember the food preferences of all the family members. Therefore, Jin-Xian is said to be a good daughter-in-law (ep.2). More than the role of a trainer, the mother-in-law is a patriarchal figure that maintains and keeps the oppression of women in the patriarchal family. The words of Xiu-Qing's father-in-law show that a mother-in-law is responsible for disciplining a daughter-in-law. To discipline a daughter-in-law is to continue the patrilineal familial tradition. In Confucian human relationships, hierarchy is more important than gender. In the relationship between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law, the daughter-in-law, as a newcomer in the family, is posited in the lower

⁵⁹ Usually, the brothers live with the parents and share the economic split. The brothers split their share of inheritance after the parents die.

hierarchical place. Therefore, a daughter-in-law must listen to her mother-in-law. In order to incorporate the newcomer, the mother-in-law who has been through the process herself climbs to a more powerful position.

During the process of incorporation, the conflict is inevitable. Therefore, Da-Ai Drama reveals a different idea to the audience. Through presenting stories of mothers-in-law, Da-Ai Drama tries to tell the audience that mothers-in-law should treat their daughters-in-law like their own daughters. For daughters-in-law who are having problems with their mothers-in-law, Da-Ai Drama is saying that as long as they fulfil their duties as daughters-in-law well, the good karmas will bring them good results. By analysing the marriage system in the Song period, Ebrey (2003) notices that women actually played an active role in keeping the patriarchal system going (p. 13). Although women are seen as victims in the Confucian patriarchy, it is women themselves who guard the patriarchal machine. Seeing all women in Confucianism as victims is to misunderstand the power dynamics in the hierarchical human relationship in Confucianism. Gender is not the only factor that influences the power dynamics in human relationships. Women are not always in an inferior position because age and generation, especially in different gender roles, should be taken into consideration in the Confucian hierarchy. As we shall see more gender roles in the sections that follow, we will have a thorough understanding of gender construction through heterosexual marriages in Confucian society.

SCENE 3: Wifhood *Enter A-Cua, Xiu-Qing, Jin-Xian and their husbands.*

P

All the leading characters are being reminded about how to be good daughters-in-law instead of good wives as was the case before their marriages. It seems that being a good wife is included in the duties and obligations of being a good daughter-in-law. In these three dramas, the role of a wife can be seen in two ways. Firstly, in *Ming-yue* and *Huang*, the leading characters' husbands have extramarital affairs so A-Cua and Jin-Xian have to learn how to cope with other women in their marriages. Secondly, in *Xi-gu*, Xiu-Qing has a happy marriage and her story tells us how a good wife should behave. Of the three leading characters, A-Cua and Jin-Xian get divorced but never remarry; instead, their husbands remarry or spend the rest of their lives with other women, leaving all the children with the leading characters. The dramas do not judge or justify the behaviour and the extramarital affairs of the leading characters' husbands. Instead, the dramas emphasise and focus very much on the leading characters'

feelings and how they cope with their husbands' affairs. Through the role of "wife", the gender construction is understood more completely.

Ming-yue

A-Cua decides to abandon her gender role of "wife" as A-Yuan brings back A-rui (ep.28) and Cuashe gets her divorce in 1954 (ep.32). Before the divorce, A-Cua was tolerant of A-Yuan's numerous affairs. In the early stages of their marriage, A-Yuan usually went out to private clubs or looked for sex workers as soon as he received his monthly wages. Being a tough woman, A-Cua could not accept his behaviour. She went to the red light district to bring her husband home (ep.12). However, A-Yuan had fierce fights with her, because he A-Yuan believed that a wife should not interfere in her husband's business (ep.11). Having affairs became a common practice for A-Yuan. On his business trip to Japan, he met a girl and lived with her for a month. Knowing the Japanese girl was ignorant of A-Yuan's marital status, A-Cua showed some sympathy for her (ep.14). On numerous occasions like this, A-Cua showed her sympathy to the women whilst being mad with her husband. A-Cua's attitude towards these other women was praised by neighbours and family for being rational and sympathetic.

Acknowledging the wrongdoings of A-Cua's husband, the drama shows A-Yuan's bad ending A-Yuan as a moral lesson to the audience. Placing more emphasis on A-Cua's tolerance and generosity towards A-Yuan does not mean that his misconduct is in any way approved of A-Yuan. As I mentioned earlier, the drama tries to transform these secular difficulties into a religious discipline. A-Cua's suffering in her marriage paves the way to her career in the Tzu-Chi organisation, because she learns to treat everyone equally, whether they are good or bad. Seeing the world as a religious field in which to practise Buddhism, the drama is trying to tell the audience that difficulties can be overcome by bearing Buddhist doctrines in mind.

A-Cua stays in the marriage for the family, and particularly for her children. It is the children, not the husbands, who force women to be tolerant of their husbands' misbehaviour. On a visit to A-Cua's place, A-Cua's father tells her not to be quick-tempered because the harmony of a family is the basis for a prosperous future (ep.24). Not only is she required to stay in the marriage but she is also required to think about the whole family before thinking of herself. The family as an entity is put before personal interests. Using the concept of karma, A-Cua's mother-in-law tells her that only people who owe each other in the previous life can become husband and wife in this life (ep.27). Her words imply that it is the bad karma in the previous life that influences this life so there is no way out but to live with it. Having a husband like this,

A-Cua does not forget her position as a wife. When there is a suitor in her workplace, A-Cua refuses his proposal because she believes it is against the moral guidance in the world (ep.24). Although A-Yuan does not fulfil his duties and obligations as a husband, A-Cua does not forget her responsibilities as a wife. Therefore, a woman's personal interests are less important than the family as an entity.

Xi-gu

Chun-Sheng complimented Xiu-Qing for being a good wife, a good daughter-in-law, and a good mother (ep.23) before he passed away (ep.24). In a scene where Chun-Sheng has a fight with Xiu-Qing, Xiu-Qing is said to calm her husband down by her wisdom. Rather than arguing and fighting with her husband, Xiu-Qing chooses a peaceful way to communicate with her husband. Being a good wife, Xiu-Qing is a mental support to her husband during the war (ep.8).



FIG. 16 Xi ep.8

On her journey back to Taiwan, Xiu-Qing insists that the family should stick together no matter how difficult it is. Running out of food, Xiu-Qing begs for food for her children. When Chun-Sheng is arrested by the army, Xiu-Qing insists on waiting for him (ep.9). Being a wife and a mother, Xiu-Qing never gives up on her family, regardless of the difficulties. After settling down in Taiwan, Xiu-Qing starts to manage her own household. She is now in charge of the family. Xiu-Qing's mother tells her that to be a good wife means to be a strong back-up for her husband. One of the most important tasks for a good wife is to take care of the household and the children (ep.13). A good wife should not worry her husband about household issues, including the children's education. Xiu-Qing learns how to manage the household after Chun-Sheng's business fails.



FIG. 17 Xi ep.13

Episodes 13 and 14 show the audience how Xiu-Qing manages the household by keeping chickens and growing vegetables. Although Xiu-Qing has never worried about her own life before her marriage, she has to sell soap on the street to earn a basic income for the family. The scene where Xiu-Qing is selling soap shows the audience how shy and timid Xiu-Qingshe is at the beginning. However, thinking of her family and children, Xiu-Qing is able to sell all the soap. Being a thoughtful wife, Xiu-Qing respects and accepts every decision made by Chun-Sheng and she says: "husband and wife are supposed to share happiness and bitterness (in life) together" (ep.15). Before Xiu-Qing and Chun-Sheng retire from their little business, Xiu-Qing has been supportive of Chun-Sheng's decision and helpful to his business. Xiu-Qing has set a fine example of what a good wife should be. She is not subjugated to her husband; instead of representing Xiu-Qing as an obedient wife, she is portrayed as a witty, loving and caring wife. Despite the fact that the drama is still portraying women in charge of the household, the role of wives is not one of absolute obedience and subjugation to their husbands. Instead of seeing women's submissiveness and obedience to men as gender inequality, the relationship between husbands and wives should be seen as a correlative model.⁶⁰

The separation of the private and the public spheres gives different genders their own responsibilities. Traditionally speaking, the private sphere is subjugated to the public. That is, the male sphere is seen as more powerful while the female one is of minor importance. What the drama does is to reverse the discourse by celebrating women's wisdom and their efforts in managing household chores. Instead of encouraging women to step out of the private sphere, the drama places minor issues on an

⁶⁰ See the discussions in Chapter 2.

important level. That is, the private sphere plays a complementary and supporting role to the public sphere.

Huang

Although Jin-Xian is reluctant to divorce Xin-Jun, she gets the divorce in order to send her oldest son to the asylum. Xin-Jun's role as a wife is only shown before Xin-Jun splits up with her. Before Xin-Jun has an affair, Jin-Xian has been playing her role as a wife well. When Xin-Jun stays in the hospital because of the car accident, Jin-Xian goes to the hospital every day (ep.3). Despite knowing about Xin-Jun's affair, Jin-Xian watches movies with Xin-Jun and the other girl (ep.5).

Although Xin-Jun has affairs, Jin-Xian's parents ask Jin-Xian to act and behave following the correct moral code. That is, although Xin-Jun is not doing the right thing, Jin-Xian should follow the right way to behave as a wife. The right and proper way is to take good care of the family and the children. Therefore, during the separation, Jin-Xian never gives up her children, hoping that by fulfilling her obligations as a wife this could well bring back her husband. For Jin-Xian, she has done nothing wrong; therefore, she would not allow another woman in the family (ep.7). On a visit to Li's family, Jin-Xian's father-in-law tells Jin-Xian that it is his son's fault and her mother-in-law shows great concern about Jin-Xian's health (ep.9). An individual should not show any feelings when s/he is assigned a role. To fulfil the duties of the assigned role comes prior to an individual's emotions and feelings. Unwilling to act "wrongly" as a wife, Jin-Xian refuses courtships from other suitors (ep.11).

P

For A-Cua and Jin-Xian, marriage is where they suffer. Bravely, A-Cua divorces her husband. With no choice in the matter, Jin-Xian gets her divorce as well. The dramas do not judge them or label them as divorced women. The dramas tend to focus on A-Cua and Jin-Xian's tolerance of their husbands' misbehaviour before divorce. As I have mentioned earlier, their tolerance is the basis for their construction as saint-like figures. The function of creating a saint-like figure will be discussed in the next chapter. After divorce, the dramas tend to focus on how these women live as single mothers. Being a good wife means to fulfil her own duties, regardless of her husband's misconduct. The most important job for a good wife is to take good care of the household, including the children. Xiu-Qing is the best example of what a good wife should be. She has been supportive to her husband and never argues against him. When they have different opinions, Xiu-Qing finds ways to persuade her husband rather than arguing or fighting with him.

Instead of portraying these women as absolutely obedient, the dramas tell the audience how to find a way to reach mutual understanding. Not only is Xiu-Qing supportive of her husband, she also does her best to raise her children. That is, Xiu-Qing manages the household to her best ability, leaving her husband nothing to worry about at home. A good wife is assumed to be in charge of the private sphere. However, the private sphere does not seem to be oppressive for women because it is complementary to the public sphere. In the dramas, women's jobs in the private sphere are represented as being equally important as in the public sphere where men wield their power. Instead of fighting for women's access to the public sphere, these dramas reverse the discourse on the private sphere. By emphasising the hardships of women managing a household, the dramas celebrate women's persistence to keep family life running smoothly by portraying the wisdom and hard work of these leading characters. This can be read as a conservative message to encourage women to stay at home; however, the historical background of these leading characters is at a time when most married women stayed home as housewives.

The educational function of these dramas lets the audience, male or female alike, learn to appreciate women's hard work in the private sphere. Women learn the way to negotiate with the family members while men learn to share the women's burden. The dramas resemble Tzu-Chi's agenda in the sense that they show the audience how powerful women in minor positions and difficult situations are. Different from Xiu-Qing, A-Cua and Jin-Xian have more questions about their marriages. Despite the fact that their husbands have betrayed them, A-Cua and Jin-Xian still behave as good wives. In Confucian hierarchy, wives should be obedient to husbands. Therefore, wives are subjugated to husbands. However, it is true only when the husband fulfils his duties and obligations as a husband. This can be seen in the neighbours' attitudes towards A-Cua's and Xin-Jun's concubines. Although the leading characters act according to the proper moral codes, their neighbours or relatives encourage them to consider remarriage.

Divorce has long been seen as shameful to the family because a harmonious entity would be broken. However, the dramas do not blame A-Cua and Jin-Xian for their incompetency in maintaining and keeping their marriages or families complete. Instead, the dramas focus on their ability to keep the family without a functional husband. Neither do the dramas blame those men for not fulfilling their duties and obligations. In the interviewing session, the production team keeps saying that they do not aim to portray a bad guy in the drama. All they want to do is to re-present the events without

making any judgement. By focusing on the efforts made by the leading characters, the dramas show greater respect for women's abilities to manage the household.

SCENE 4: Motherhood *Enter A-Cua, Xiu-Qing, Jin-Xian and their children.*

P

The gender role of a "mother" is a crucial part in the narrative structure because the mothering experiences are similar to the central spirit of Bodhisattvas (see Chapter 3 for the discussion of Bodhisattvas). Motherhood is further extended to the religious field and becomes the embodiment of human Bodhisattva. One of the most important duties of a married woman is to continue the patrilineal line. Therefore, having at least one male heir is part of a married woman's duties. Giving birth to children means the woman climbs to a higher position in the hierarchy of Confucian human relationships. A mother is highly revered under the Confucian doctrine of filial piety. The dramas construct motherhood as selfless love and self-sacrificing care of the children. The selfless love and self-sacrifice are similar to the concept of compassion, the essential element for Bodhisattvas. Although some might argue that motherhood is what oppresses women, the dramas' representation of motherhood is of high respect and celebration. The nurturing feature of motherhood is similar to Bodhisattva's ability to answer the calls of suffering sentient beings. The oppression of women as mothers comes from mothers' duties to keep and continue the patriarchal lineage. Therefore, a mother is the keeper of the patriarchal family. A mother can be a patriarchal figure like a mother-in-law is.

For parents, their offspring who have not married are still considered to be children. A person can be a grown-up adult only when s/he gets married (*Xi-gu*, ep.23). As parents, their duties and obligations are fulfilled only when their children get married (*Ming-yue*, ep.39). This, again, shows the importance of heterosexual marriage. Entering the heterosexual marriage and fulfilling all the duties and obligations of different gender roles completes an individual, man and woman alike, as an adult. Therefore, we can see in these dramas that no matter how difficult their marital lives are, the leading characters do their best to bring up the children. Only when their duties and obligations as mothers are fulfilled do they have free time to participate in activities outside the domestic sphere. As I have mentioned in an earlier section, education is the only way towards achieving class mobility. Therefore, no matter how difficult life is, parents will, at any cost, provide their children with the best chance of education. One of the most important tasks for mothers is to let her children receive

education and this can be seen in the leading characters' efforts and attitudes towards their children.

Ming-yue

A-Cua's role as a mother can be seen in two ways. Before she gives birth to her own children, she takes care of two children, Shu-Hui and Chi-Ming, left by her sister-in-law Shu-Hui Chi-Ming. Even after A-Cua has her own children, she treats her sister-in-law's children and her own equally. A-Cua's single motherhood is highly revered in the drama because of her selfless love towards her sister-in-law's children and her own children. A-Cua's efforts to bring up these children are manifested in her hard work in business and her insistence on the children's education. Although loving and caring motherhood is naturalised in the drama, the nature of motherhood is respected.

A-cu's selfless love can be seen from Shu-Hui and Chi-Ming's point of view. Both Shu-Hui and Chi-Ming lose their mother at a young age. First of all, from Shu-Hui's point of view, A-Cua is the one who encourages and supports her to receive education. As soon as A-Cua knows that Shu-Hui needs registration fees for high school, A-Cua pawns her most cherished marital gifts to pay them (ep.18). Although there are some misunderstandings between A-Cua and Shu-Hui, Shu-Hui changes her attitude when her tutor points out how selfless and difficult it is for A-Cua to bring her up. No matter how difficult life is, A-Cua works her best to give all the children access to education. On the eve of Shu-Hui's wedding, she tells her brother, Chi-Ming, to be grateful for A-Cua's efforts (ep.29). A-Cua's self-sacrificing love is constructed through Shu-Hui's point of view. On the night before the wedding, A-Cua gives Shu-Hui marital gifts, which is what a mother should do for her daughter. The relationship between A-Cua and Shu-Hui is shown as being that of a real mother and daughter. Following the tradition, a mother should spill water onto the ground on her daughter's wedding day, signifying that the daughter is no longer a part of her natal family. At the end of Shu-Hui's wedding ritual, it is A-Cua who spills the water, signifying A-Cua's important role in Shu-Hui's life (ep.30).

A-Cua's love for Chi-Ming is seen in episode 25 where Chi-Ming has a sports event at high school. As soon as A-Cua knows about this event, she puts her work aside and rushes to the school. From the scene, the audience sees how A-Cua cares about Chi-Ming and treats him like her own son. The audience sees A-Cua's selfless love towards Chi-Ming by his appreciation of A-Cua; he decides to give up the chance of going to university because he wants to earn money in order to share A-Cua's economic burden as well as repaying her for all her efforts. Appreciating A-Cua's

efforts, Chi-Ming treats her like his own mother when he tells A-Cua that his wife is Cua's daughter-in-law (ep.35). A-Cua's selfless sacrifice and love is a good basis for her Bodhisattva's path. A-Cua's love towards her sister-in-law's children is greatly depicted because she could have left them behind. However, the director seems to spend less time describing A-Cua's selfless sacrifice for her children. Thus, the loving and caring features of motherhood are naturalised between the mother and her children.

As for A-Cua's own children, she never gives up her children even after the divorce. It seems that the director spends more time portraying A-Cua's love towards her sister-in-law's children than her own children. Motherhood is, therefore, naturalised. When A-Cua leaves home to work in China, she worries about her children's situation (ep.22). Although she is doing well in China, she cannot help being homesick, especially at the thought of her children (ep.24). A-Cua's love and concern for her children can be seen in her efforts to keep the family together no matter how badly her husband treats her. Her children's education is her primary concern for she works her hardest to pay the fees for their education. When A-Cua's oldest son starts to earn money, he suggests that A-Cua could remarry. However, A-Cua rejects the idea because she believes that children are her primary concern and it would be shameful for her children if she remarried (ep.37).

Fulfilling her role as a mother well, A-Cua earns respect from her children and her sister-in-law's children. Therefore, these children feel that paying filial piety to A-Cua is necessary. A-Cua's children do not think filial piety is necessary for an incompetent father. A-Cua's oldest son is not happy with A-Yuan because he has done nothing apart from drinking. Despite the fact that Confucianism emphasises filial piety, the older generation has to fulfil its obligations and duties to the younger generation in order to be respected. The subjugation of the inferior to the superior is not absolute if the superior does not fulfil its role well.

Xi-gu

Xiu-Qing has a husband who is responsible and takes good care of the family. Therefore, the representation of her motherhood is slightly different from the other two. Although she has been protected and spoiled by her family, Xiu-Qing is strong and brave enough to beg for food during war time (ep.9). Facing her husband's failure in business, Xiu-Qing is strong enough to support the family, as the voice-over tells us. In order to pay for the registration fees, Xiu-Qing has to figure out a way to earn a living (ep.14). Different from the other two leading characters, Xiu-Qing does not have to

work outside the family. However, she does have her own way to earn money in order to send her children to school. It is the parents' duty and obligation to supply their needs for an education. While struggling for her children's registration fees for university, Xiu-Qing says: "It is worthwhile working hard because children are the greatest properties for parents" (ep.19). The audience can see how hardworking Xiu-Qing is in order to supply her children's education. Her motherhood is manifested in her persistent efforts to educate her children. Having had access to education, each one of Xiu-Qing's children studies and works in the States.

Xiu-Qing's motherhood further extends to her children's friends. When Xiu-Qing's oldest son brings his Taiwanese student home, Xiu-Qing prepares a meal for the student, and comforts him when he suffers from homesickness (ep.29). A dining scene in Xiu-Qing's daughter's house shows the audience how Xiu-Qing takes care of her daughter's colleagues and friends like her own children. Xiu-Qing's son-in-law compliments Xiu-Qing for being everyone's mother in the States (ep.31). As she gets older, Xiu-Qing is called A-ma (grandma) by Tzu-Chi members in the branch. Her love towards her children extends to the members. Motherhood has extended from the secular family to the religious sphere in the public. In the last episode, all Xiu-Qing's children visit her in her place. The director parallels the scene with a previous one where Xiu-Qing and her brothers gather around her mother's bed. These are scenes where mothers are placed in the central position while children are around them, talking about memories of childhood. These scenes celebrate the mother's importance and sacrifice in bringing up her children. The ability to pull the family together is an accomplishment of a mother.

Huang

Before their divorce, Jin-Xian tells Li-Xue that she can give away her husband but she will never give up her children. As a mother, Jin-Xian never gives up her children despite the fact that four of her five children are either mentally or physically disabled (ep.11). At the beginning of Jin-Xian's marriage, she spends all her time at home, taking care of her children (ep.3). After Xin-Jun fails in his business, Jin-Xian officially splits up with him and starts to earn her own living by tailoring (ep.7). The audience sees how difficult it is for a single mother to raise children who are mentally and physically ill. Regardless of the difficulties, Jin-Xian tells her sister-in-law that "if you give birth to them, you have to raise them up" (ep.9). Jin-Xian is confused about her fate because she cannot see why she is the one to suffer from all the difficulties. Being a mother of four disabled children, all Jin-Xian can do is to supply their basic needs. At the end of the drama, there are only three children left. One stays in the asylum; one

has a happy family life; and she takes one with her to do Tzu-Chi's voluntary work (ep.17).

P

Instead of questioning motherhood as being part of women's nature, the dramas reinforce naturalised motherhood. Being a mother seems to be a natural process in a woman's life. As soon as the leading characters become mothers, their position in the hierarchy of human relationships becomes superior. Although filial piety is much stressed in Confucian society, power does not necessarily come along with the climbing of the hierarchical position. Therefore, motherhood is respected in these dramas because the leading characters have done more than their duties and obligations. On the contrary, fathers are not respected because they do not fulfil their duties and obligations as fathers (apart from Chun-Sheng in *Xi-gu*). Although motherhood is naturalised and seen as the origin of women's oppression, it is also where women's power comes from. Being a mother means to be an elder in society and most Asian countries tend to respect elders because filial piety plays an important role in Confucian society (Quah 2008 p. 71).

The dramas empower women who become mothers, no matter what the marital status is. Motherhood is revered because of its nurturing and caring nature. Being similar to the concept of compassion,⁶¹ motherhood is the simplest approach to Tzu-Chi's voluntary work. The dramas emphasise how the leading characters overcome all their difficulties. Therefore, their determination to fulfil their duties as mothers is highly respected. Mothers are respected because they are the moral teachers and important keepers of the patriarchal tradition. Instead of commenting on the oppression of patriarchy by mothers, I see mothers as the creator and the keeper of the patriarchal tradition. Subjugating to the patriarchal system, mothers have to take care of the heirs because children are the lineage of the patriarchal family. However, in the dramas, it is motherhood itself that draws the attention.

Caring and loving are part of the nature of motherhood but the children should respect and appreciate it. Being a good mother means to fulfil her duties and obligations to her children, mainly manifested in a mother's insistence on children's further education. A successful motherhood is manifested also in the success of her children's careers. In all these dramas, the children have reached certain accomplishments in life and all of them have happy marriages. Although mothers are subjugated to the patriarchal system, it does not mean they are powerless. It is not the love of motherhood that the

⁶¹ See Devido's (2003; 2010) study on Bhikkhunis.

dramas are celebrating. They are celebrating the toughness and persistence of women. Reversing the typical image of weak women, the dramas try to portray women as strong and tough to protect the people they love. On the one hand, mothers are seen as the keepers of the patriarchal lineage; on the other, they are highly revered because of their efforts as the keeper. In most households, mothers spend much more time than fathers with their children. Therefore, the moral lessons and patriarchal traditions are passed down by mothers. Here, I would argue that women are the active agents in the power relationships of patriarchy.

The most fascinating part of the drama is how the leading characters fulfil their duties as mothers no matter how difficult this may be. As the production teams keep emphasising; they are ordinary people who do extraordinary things. Their selfless love for their children, their willingness to shoulder responsibilities, and their persistence in overcoming difficulties are the major themes of the dramas. Mothers' duties and obligations end when their children become adults (i.e. get married). They then extend their love from motherhood to the religious field where selfless love is the primary concern.

SCENE 5: Natal Family *Enter A-Cua, Xiu-Qing, Jin-Xian and their natal families.*

P

One of the rituals in the wedding is for the leading characters' mothers to spill water on the ground, signifying a married daughter is never to return to the natal family.. In academic discourse, we see the ritual as a way to keep patriarchy working, which oppresses women at the same time. In these dramas, the audience sees real life as it is. If the natal family strictly follows the Confucian moral guide, it is not supposed to interfere with a married daughter's affairs. However, in real life, the natal family can be a mental support as well as a material back-up for a married daughter. In these dramas, the patriarchal figures in the natal family are influential throughout their lives.

Ming-yue

Traditionally, married daughters should not regularly go back to the natal family. However, A-Cua's older sister, A-Man, married several years before A-Cua A-Man visits her natal family quite often. Usually, she spends time with A-Yue, A-Cua's mother, in the kitchen and A-Yue would give her advice on being a good daughter-in-law (ep.6).

After A-Cua gets married, she does not have time to visit her natal family; however, the marital gifts from the natal family help her to get through many difficulties. One of the most important and influential figures in A-Cua's natal family is A-Cua's father. While A-Cua is working in China, her father visits her place and her mother-in-law apologises to him for A-Cua's suffering in her marriage. Not able to see his daughter, A-Cua's father feels sorry for his daughter's miserable situation (ep.22). The facial close-up of A-Hai's worried face and the voice-over that expresses his sorrow show the audience how close and intimate A-Cua's relationship with her father is, even after she has married. A-Hai's moral teachings have influenced A-Cua's life; such as having a charitable heart and showing loyalty to her husband. After A-Cua comes back from China, A-Hai visits her at her new house. During his visit, A-Hai tells A-Cua that harmony and peace are what a family needs. Talking about A-Cua's relationship with A-Yuan, her father tells her not to fight with A-Yuan (ep.24). Having nothing to offer her, A-Hai guides A-Cua's confused mind. Seeing A-Hai off, A-Cua feels like crying. The audience feels it when the voice-over expresses A-Hai's concern and affection for A-Cua: "Living a difficult life, A-Hai still brings expensive gifts to A-Cua" (ep.24). Although A-Cua gets divorced, she does not return to her natal family. In episode 36, A-Hai takes care of her when she has surgery.

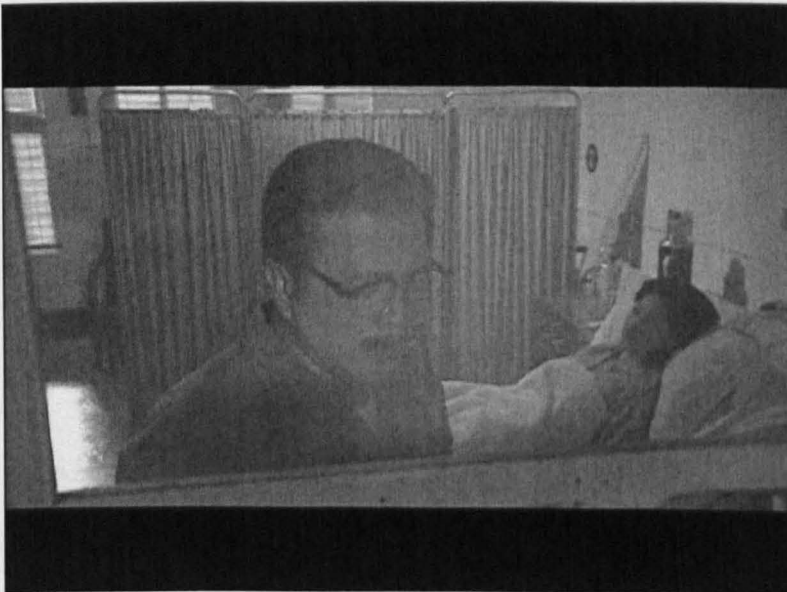


FIG. 18 Ming ep.36

In the hospital, A-Hai is distressed about A-Cua's marriage and all her sufferings. However, he tells A-Cua not to blame anything or anyone because it is her destiny in life to suffer and work hard. As a person's life has already been destined as soon as s/he is born, it is pointless to blame fate. Although A-Hai does not help A-Cua when she is facing all the problems in her marriage, he has always been a spiritual mentor to A-Cua and gives her advice to sort out the confusion in her life.

Xi-gu

Soon after Xiu-Qing's wedding, she goes to China with Chun-Sheng to run a business there. As she flees back to Taiwan, she stays with Chun-Sheng's family. However, having a critical father-in-law, Xiu-Qing decides to stay with her natal family where Chun-Sheng works (ep.10). Xiu-Qing's natal family does not object to a married daughter staying with them. When Xiu-Qing moves to a new place and starts to manage her own household, Xiu-Qing's mother visits her quite often. Knowing about Xiu-Qing's economic situation, her mother puts a small amount of money in the kitchen each time she visits Xiu-Qing (ep.14). Not only does she support Xiu-Qing financially, she instructs Xiu-Qing on how to manage a household, including the proper way to behave as a wife and a daughter-in-law. Xiu-Qing's mother does not stop instructing Xiu-Qing even when Xiu-Qing becomes a mother-in-law. On Xiu-Qing's visit to her mother, Xiu-Qing's mother tells her to treat her daughter-in-law well. In the scene, Xiu-Qing and her mother are chatting in the kitchen and their chat ends with Xiu-Qing's mother hugging her (ep.26).



FIG. 19 Xi ep.26

Xiu-Qing's mother has been caring and loving for Xiu-Qing both before and after Xiu-Qing's marriage. More than just a loving mother, Xiu-Qing's mother is a spiritual tutor to her when she is in trouble or is confused. Xiu-Qing's mother has been a mental support as well as a moral mentor to her.

Huang

At the beginning of episode 4, Jin-Xian visits her natal family. Knowing Xin-Jun is going to start his own business, Jin-Xian's mother gives her some gold for her husband to

start the business. Meanwhile, Jin-Xian's mother worries about the mental illness of Jin-Xian's oldest son. Having her second child falling ill, Jin-Xian is upset and confused. At the time, she visits her natal family and talks to her father. Her father tells her that there must be a reason for her to have these children, implying that it is a task given by God. Although Jin-Xian would not understand the reason, she will figure it out in the future. Knowing about Xin-Jun's extramarital affairs, Jin-Xian's parents comfort her by telling her to follow the proper moral code. When Jin-Xian is left in Hua-Lian with all her children, her mother asks her to go back to Tai-nan. On the first night of Jin-Xian's return to her natal family, she chats with her mum. The love between mother and daughter is shown in the scene where Jin-Xian's mother silently hugs the crying Jin-Xian (ep.9). As Jin-Xian's children grow older, her burden becomes heavier. Seeing Jin-Xian's difficulties to earn her living and take care of her disabled children at the same time, Jin-Xian's younger brother and older sister help to sort out the problem. With Jin-Xian's natal family's help, two of her children are sent to asylums under Xin-Jun's financial support (ep.12). When Jin-Xian first hears of Master Zheng-Yan's lecture, she is reminded of her parents, who analyse the situation and give the best advice.

P

The Tzu-Chi organisation is said to be the spiritual home for all its members. The moral guidance and spiritual mentor from the natal family is often paralleled to Tzu-Chi's function for the leading characters. The representation of close relationships with the natal family shows the importance of the family to an individual. In modern society, people do not stick to tradition as closely as people did in the past. Therefore, this can be an encouragement for married women to remain close to their natal families after marriage. As Chun-Sheng said before their marriage: "Marriage is not a matter about two individuals but a matter involving two families". In Confucian tradition, married women have to learn how to incorporate into another family. However, their deep connection with the natal family cannot be underestimated, especially when the husbands are not doing well (i.e. not fulfilling their duties and obligations as fathers or husbands). In these dramas, the leading characters' natal families offer them both financial support and spiritual guidance. The leading characters' confusion and difficulties in marriage are relieved when the natal families come to help. In these dramas, natal families are portrayed as an important guidance for the leading characters when they are confused about their lives. There are deep connections with the leading characters and their natal families. Tzu-Chi substitutes for the function of the natal family. In these dramas, the natal families are portrayed as spiritual mentors.

Instead of focusing on the husbands' families alone, the dramas try to cover the influence of natal families.

SCENE 6: Kitchen Scene

P

One of the most fascinating scenes in these dramas takes place in the kitchen. As an important place in the private sphere where women are in charge, women have to spend a lot of time in the kitchen, preparing food and interacting with other female members of the family. The kitchen is important in a sense that women prepare meals in it and the whole family eats in it. The kitchen is the place where married women spend their time because they have to prepare meals for the whole extended family while men work outside the home. Therefore, women can build up horizontal ties whilst working in the kitchen. The horizontal ties are further extended in Tzu-Chi's voluntary work. The horizontal ties are centred on patriarchy. It is in the kitchen that women pass down their knowledge, on keeping a household, from generation to generation. Again, as active agents in creating and keeping the patriarchy, women create their own tradition in the kitchen. As mentioned in an earlier section, women can be the patriarchal figure that keeps the tradition of the patriarchal family. Being the central figure in the kitchen, the dining table is a bridge between the private sphere and the public sphere.

Ming-yue

At A-Cua's one-month-old party, her mother prepares the glutinous oil rice and red eggs with her neighbours (ep.1). The kitchen is not just a place for all the female members in the family to work and prepare food; it is also a place for women in the neighbourhood to gather around and have a talk. The horizontal ties are established among all the women, including the married daughter of the family. Being married to her neighbour, A-Cua's fostered sister is able to come round and have a chat with A-Yue once in a while (ep.6). Although women are not allowed in the public sphere, their ability to set up a network in the kitchen cannot be underestimated. The network in the kitchen is not a pure feminine one because the patriarchal tradition is passed down in the kitchen as well. On A-Man's visit to her natal family, A-Yue tells her how to behave as a good daughter-in-law (ep.6). And A-Cua is taught how to manage kitchen chores by her mother-in-law on the first day of her marriage (ep.9). The norms for women to behave properly in the patriarchal family are passed down and taught in the kitchen.

The horizontal ties among women do not necessarily create a positive impact as a united “sisterhood”.

As the dining table is the central figure in the kitchen, many important issues are discussed and decided at the table. The representation of people sitting round the dining table symbolises a “complete family”⁶² (whether it is really happy or not underneath this representation). In episode 28, there is a scene when all the family members, apart from A-Cua, gather round to have a meal. When A-Yuan’s children ask for poached eggs, they are refused. Instead, A-Yuan gives the only poached egg to A-ruì’s younger brother. By representing the scene, the audience gets the sense that A-Yuan does not only neglect his own duties as a husband but he also leaves his duties as a father behind. And the fact that A-Cua is absent at the dining table indicates the incompleteness of the family. Although the family is malfunctioning, it is necessary to maintain an image of a happy family when there is an important guest. When Shu-Hui brings her fiancée home, the family gathers round to have a meal in the absence of A-ruì and her brother (ep.29). The representation of the dining scene round the table reflects one of the most important concepts in the Confucian family. To retain the wonderful image of a complete family is necessary, for personal interests always come after the interests of the whole family.



FIG. 20 Ming ep.29

After A-Cua divorces A-Yuan, the representation of the family becomes a complete one without A-Yuan (ep.39). Later on, when A-Cua is forced to live with A-Yuan and A-ruì again, they are shown to dine at different tables, signifying their separateness (ep.48).

⁶² Family is the basic unit in Confucian society; therefore, an image of a “complete family” is more important than individual happiness.

The representation of the dining scene empowers women in the sense that their rightful status in the family is assured and affirmed. However, on the other hand, it is oppressive because in the face of collective interests women's individualities are oppressed for the greater interests of the family. After A-Cua starts her career in the Tzu-Chi organisation, she is seldom shown in the family or the kitchen.

Xi-gu

When staying in Da-lian, China, Xiu-Qing is shown in the kitchen chatting with her sister-in-law and the housemaid (ep.7). Although Xiu-Qing does not have to do any work in the kitchen, she still appears there as it is the private sphere where a housewife belongs. The preparation of meals is a process which connects female members in the family (ep.7). Xiu-Qing's mother and Xiu-Qing's mother-in-law are shown having snacks at the dining table, chatting about their children (ep.16). Traditionally speaking, women are confined to the private sphere but they are not secluded.



FIG. 21 Xi ep.16

Female members from different generations can have a chance to connect and talk to other female members in the family at the dining table. When Xiu-Qing's daughters grow older, they start to help in the kitchen chores and, like their mother and grandmothers, they establish their own network in the kitchen (ep.18; 23). The network centres on the passing down of the patriarchal tradition. Contrary to the presence of Xiu-Qing and her daughters in the kitchen, Chun-Sheng and the sons are shown in the living room or at the working table (ep.17). The gendered labour division is obvious in the drama; however, it does not prioritise the male sphere over the female one. Instead, the private sphere is shown as supportive and complementary to the public

sphere. As Xiu-Qing's mother knows the financial difficulties Xiu-Qing has, she hides a small amount of money on the shelf in the kitchen (ep.14).

After emigrating to the U.S.A., Xiu-Qing prepares meals for her children's friends because she knows how much they will miss Chinese dishes, as foreign workers and students in the U.S.A. (ep.29; 31). Thus, the dining table becomes a place to bridge the private sphere and the public sphere. The loving and caring nature of motherhood is, then, extended to the public sphere, along with Xiu-Qing's participation in the Tzu-Chi organisation.

The representation of the dining scene is one of the most important representations of a complete and happy family. As soon as Chun-Sheng decides to marry Xiu-Qing, he is invited to Xiu-Qing's place. The whole family gathers round to have lunch; however, with Xiu-Qing's mother's objection to the marriage, the meal continues without her presence (ep.6). The dining table is represented as a place where men and women come to an agreement on crucial issues. The private sphere is a strong back-up for men. Once Xiu-Qing and Chun-Sheng start their own family, they are shown to have meals together all the time. Whenever there is a difficult time in the family, Chun-Sheng and Xiu-Qing are shown to hug together next to the dining table (ep. 8; 12).



FIG. 22 Xi ep.8

These scenes show the audience that Chun-Sheng and Xiu-Qing can overcome every kind of difficulty hand-in-hand together. And the representation of the family together reflects Xiu-Qing's insistence on sticking together as a family.

On the first day of Jin-Xian's marriage, she is given a brief induction to the kitchen by her sister-in-law (ep.2). The kitchen becomes a place where Jin-Xian establishes horizontal ties with her sisters-in-law. Not only is Jin-Xian's sister-in-law supportive to her, but she also tells Jin-Xian the proper way to act in Li's family. This dining scene is the most fascinating one in the three dramas because it is a rule in Li's family that men and women dine separately. Men are to dine before women (ep.2). The dining order reflects the Confucian concept of *Zhong-nan ching-nu*.⁶³ However, as Jin-Xian's sister-in-law says, their mother-in-law is the one who is in charge of the whole family. This truly represents the power dynamics in Confucianism. Although the family strictly follows the dining order, the family is fully in the charge of a woman, Jin-Xian's mother-in-law.



FIG. 23 Huang ep.2



FIG. 24 Huang ep.2

⁶³ *Zhong-nan ching-nu* [重男輕女] is often said to be a prevailing concept in Sinic societies. The term expresses the most critiqued Confucian idea on prioritising male heirs over female heirs.

The family is shown to dine together only on the Chinese New Year's Eve when every family member gathers round for dinner. Despite the fact that it should be a lovely scene when the family gathers round, the scene in episode 6 marks the breaking of Jin-Xian's marriage (Xin-Jun has lived with Li-Xue for a while). While the family has dinner, Jin-Xian hides in the kitchen crying (ep.6). The second time the audience sees Li's family gathering round is at the funeral of Jin-Xian's mother-in-law. The funeral is not shown in the drama; instead, the drama shows the dinner after the funeral where Li's brothers, their wives and children are shown to have dinner together. There is a place for Jin-Xian as Xin-Jun's wife while Li-Xue has to hide in her room because she is not recognised by the family (ep.11). As in *Ming-yue*, a concubine is not allowed to be present on formal occasions. The kitchen scene symbolises Jin-Xian's and A-Cua's recognised status as the "chief wives". The dining table shows the emphasis placed on the "proper position" in human relationships

After the separation, in Hua-Lian the dining scenes in Jin-Xian's place are shown without Xin-Jun, signifying Xin-Jun's absence from the marriage as well as the family. The financial difficulty is shown at the dining table as well, as there is a scene when the children gather round for dinner and they eat rice balls without any other dishes (ep.10).



FIG. 25 Huang ep.10

By contrast, the very last scene is a happy one where the whole family gathers round for dinner on a Chinese New Year's Eve (ep.16). Jin-Xian's salvation after entering Tzu-Chi is shown in the happy dining scene with her grown-up children. Jin-Xian and her children have been through the worst time and they have survived without Xin-Jun's presence.

P

The representation of the dining scenes reflects the situation of each family. Therefore, the dining table is a force that bridges the private and the public. Acting as a bridge between the male sphere and the female sphere, the dining table is where important issues are announced, discussed and decided. More than a bridge between the private and the public, the private sphere is shown as a strong back-up for the husband or the children. Although it belongs to female members, it is where the patriarchal tradition as well as gendered labour division is kept and maintained. The dining table is centred on patriarchy while women are active keepers of it. The representations of the dining table in the dramas reinforce the traditional norms of being good housewives and good daughters-in-law. To act on the norms is the only way women climb from the minor position to the higher position in Confucian hierarchy, which also stresses the importance of family as an entity.

Take A-Cua and Jin-Xian as examples: they are the recognised chief wives in the families. The mistresses are not allowed to be present on formal occasions. Although the family as an entity comes before personal interests, there are norms to follow and obligations to fulfil for each individual. The norms are set for the greater interest of the family as a whole, rather than individual interests. The importance of “role” and the rightness of “role”⁶⁴ can be seen in the representations of families in the dramas. The kitchen where patriarchal tradition is kept cannot be seen as oppressive to women because women are free to build up horizontal ties among female family members and neighbours. It can be a place where the right “role” is justified. Moreover, the kitchen and the dining table are places where women manifest their power for food preference for the family members. The dramas respect women’s hard work in the private sphere without representing them as mere labourers in the family. For example, Xiu-Qing is portrayed as an important support for Chun-Sheng. The dramas aim to celebrate women’s power from the private sphere without breaking the traditional norms or gendered labour division. For a society where harmonious relationships are prioritised, this is a typical Tzu-Chi approach to spread its agenda. Without breaking the prevailing norms, Tzu-Chi prefers to reverse the existing discourses and make them popular.

⁶⁴ 正名 is a concept that places emphasis on the righteousness of each individual position in the family. The earlier example provided in the dramas (recognised chief wives vs. despised concubines) demonstrates how the concept is practised in daily lives. The righteousness of each role encourages each individual to act according to the right moral code rather than personal interests.

ACT III

PROLOGUE: Tzu-Chi headquarters in Hua-Lian *Enter the Tzu-Chi organisation.*

P

The first turning point, marriage, takes the leading characters into real life. The second turning point comes from their participation in the Tzu-Chi organisation. The third stage of their lives is a journey towards spiritual comfort. Therefore, the stories take place in the religious field rather than the secular. Encountering dangers and difficulties in life, the leading characters are confused about the meaning of their lives. After fulfilling their duties and obligations as mothers and wives, the leading characters turn to religious activities as a way to sort out their confusion or to comfort their minds. Before they know about the Tzu-Chi organisation, they have participated in some folk religious activities. Visiting temples and donating money to temples are the most frequent activities because they believe that donating money is a way to accumulate merits (Tsomo 1999). What Tzu-Chi offers them is a different concept. This can be shown in their first impression of the Tzu-Chi headquarters. Instead of donating money to the temples (the donation goes to the temples for building bigger ones), Tzu-Chi uses the donation to do charity work. The first contact with the Tzu-Chi organisation marks a new page in the leading characters' lives. The major concern of their lives switches from family life to public affairs, principally charity work in the public sphere.

Ming-yue

A-Cua's burden is lessened after her children grow up and earn their own living. Having more money and leisure time, A-Cua visits many temples to help with chores in the temples and to make donations for the purpose of refurbishing the temples. When she first reads a Buddhist canon, she bursts into tears because it reminds her of her sufferings in the past. From then on, she vows to be a devoted vegetarian, signifying her identity as a Buddhist. On a trip to Hua-Lian, A-Cua is brought to the headquarters of the Tzu-Chi organisation. The camera starts at a distance. When it moves closer, the audience sees the headquarters for the first time. A-Cua comments to her friend that the headquarters of Tzu-Chi are different from other temples. Instead of being fancy and richly ornamented, the architectural style of the headquarters is simple and plain.

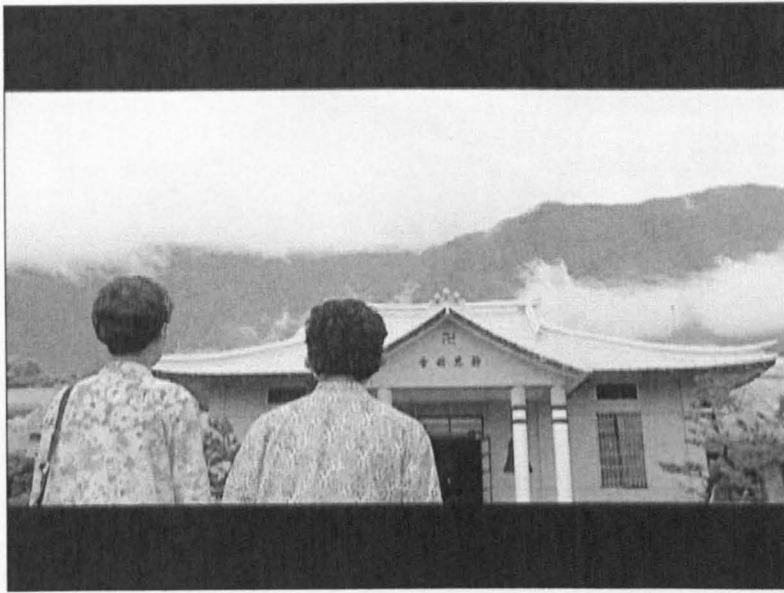


FIG. 26 Ming ep.45

The plain architectural style impresses A-Cua because she believes the monastics live a simple lifestyle. The appearance of the Tzu-Chi headquarters represents Tzu-Chi's spirit, of simplicity and naturalness. Before entering the headquarters, A-Cua and her friends bow down like people do before entering temples. The next scene shows A-Cua sitting on a bench musing. Her confusion about her sufferings in marriage is finally solved after listening to Master Zheng-Yan's speech (ep.45). Her new path in Tzu-Chi is just about to start.

Xi-gu

Losing her husband, Xiu-Qing immerses herself in sorrow for a long time. With most of her children being away in the States, either studying or working, Xiu-Qing has nothing else to be busy with. Too preoccupied with melancholy, she is encouraged to do voluntary work in an orphanage and a hospital. The representation of her voluntary work is used as a basis for further charitable work in Tzu-Chi. It seems that, in Da-Ai Drama, previous experiences are used to build up the leading characters' career in Tzu-Chi. That is, the climax of the dramas is the last part where they start to *do* Tzu-Chi. Several years after Chun-Sheng's death, Xiu-Qing moves to the States to live with her youngest daughter and her son-in-law. On a visit back to Taiwan, Xiu-Qing joins a pilgrimage trip to Hua-Lian which combines sightseeing and Tzu-Chi's induction. After sightseeing, Xiu-Qing is brought to the Tzu-Chi headquarters.



FIG. 27 Xi ep. 31

Xiu-Qing is shown to bow down in front of the headquarters and she spends a night there. As soon as Master Zheng-Yan knows that Xiu-Qing comes from the States, she is summoned to have a private chat with Master Zheng-Yan who appoints her to spread Tzu-Chi in the States. Senior members convince Xiu-Qing by quoting Master Zheng-Yan's words: "There is nothing impossible and competent as long as you are willing to do it". This is an important quote that shows Tzu-Chi's agenda: to *DO*. So begins Xiu-Qing's career in the Tzu-Chi organisation (ep.31).

Huang

Seeing her children growing up, Jin-Xian has more time to visit temples with her friends. The Tzu-Chi headquarters in Hua-Lian is one of those temples. On her first visit, she is impressed by the simplicity of the architectural style.



FIG. 28 Huang ep.15

Going back to Hua-Lian reminds her of her earlier life Hua-Lian there thirty years ago. Like A-Cua in *Ming-yue*, Jin-Xian is reminded of her suffering in marriage when visiting Tzu-Chi. Master Zheng-Yan is famous for advising her disciples by telling stories (Chiang 1997). During the visit, she sees how the monastics earn their living by making candles. She buys books (written by Master Zheng-Yan) and tapes (recorded by Master Zheng-Yan). After listening to Master Zheng-Yan's speech, Jin-Xian starts her career in Tzu-Chi (ep.15). Jin-Xian is deeply touched by Master Zheng-Yan's story about a woman whose husband has extramarital affairs.

P

Most of the scenes, before knowing Tzu-Chi, the leading actresses act in constructed settings. From this point on, they have to act in many real settings related to the Tzu-Chi organisation. The scenes where the leading characters first make contact with the Tzu-Chi organisation are presented in such a way that not only are the leading characters impressed at the plain architectural style, but so is the audience. Organised like an ordinary temple-visiting activity, the leading characters immediately see the differences between the Tzu-Chi organisation and other temples. Generally speaking, people bow before entering a temple to show their humble respect to the gods and goddesses worshipped in the temple. However, the Tzu-Chi headquarters are not for worshipping gods or Buddhas. Most of the visitors are there to see Master Zheng-Yan and to know more about Tzu-Chi.

Different from normal pilgrimages,⁶⁵ the trip to the Tzu-Chi headquarters is said to be a "home returning" trip. Similar to the techniques of reality TV, these dramas let the camera into the organisation to show the audience how the organisation works and the monastic life. By having the leading actresses visit the headquarters and experience living there, the audience sees the monastic life in Tzu-Chi. It explains an important concept developed in ancient Chinese Buddhism: "No work, no food".⁶⁶ Following this tradition, Master Zheng-Yan and the monastics insist on earning their own living to support their daily needs. Rather than being supported by donations from lay people, Master Zheng-Yan, and her ordained disciples, are financially independent. All donations go to charity work and medical services in the Tzu-Chi organisation. Master Zheng-Yan is never shown in any of these dramas but the audience sees her impact on the leading characters' lives. What attracts the leading characters is Master Zheng-Yan's ability to tell stories. Telling her followers stories in Taiwanese, the followers

⁶⁵ See Naquin and Yu's (1992) study on pilgrimages in Chinese religions.

⁶⁶ "No work, no food." [一日不作，一日不食] is a rule set by a Bhikkhu, Bai-Chang (749-814), in Tang China. This is the basis for the forest monastic system in ancient China.

realise that Buddhism is not a complicated set of philosophical concepts; instead, it can be practised and realised in daily life. The telling and retelling of life stories among Tzu-Chi members establish a kind of therapeutic discourse (Lu 2004).⁶⁷ Master Zheng-Yan advocates the concept of *DOing* Tzu-Chi instead of sitting in a hall meditating Buddhist doctrines. Jin-Xian is attracted by Tzu-Chi's ability to guide people to behave in the right way instead of persuading people to change their destiny through superstitious rituals (Huang, ep.15).

SCENE 1: Folk Religion

P

Before the leading characters know about the Tzu-Chi organisation, they have been involved in various kinds of folk religious activities.⁶⁸ As Confucianism respects ancestors and the origins of the patrilineage, ancestor worship has been widely practised. The rituals of ancestor worship are performed in every household as a daily practice. Women are largely in charge of ancestor worship. This feature of Confucianism is seen as a kind of religion. Ancestor worship is to pay respect to and show appreciation for the ancestors. Is it a kind of religious ritual? Although the Tzu-Chi organisation is a Buddhist organisation, it is not exclusive to other religious practices. This subsection aims to provide an example of the blurry line between different religious practices. The dramatic representation of religious activities provides us with a chance to reflect on the current studies on Buddhist women. The question is, is it appropriate to use the Western concept of religion to study Buddhist women in different cultural backgrounds? Other than daily practice of ancestor worship, women often go to folk religious temples to pay their respects to various kinds of gods and goddesses. As different gods or goddesses are in charge of different issues, it is natural for people to worship a variety of them. In these dramas, we can see temples are places where women as well as men form horizontal ties. Chapter 3 has already mentioned the importance of women in the Taiwanese religious sphere. It has long been a tradition for religious women to enter the public sphere in imperial China. What is more significant in Taiwan is that there have been more women than men in the

⁶⁷ See Dubrofsky (2007) for a case study of therapeutic culture of reality TV, and White (1992) for therapeutic discourse on American TV.

⁶⁸ Naquin and Yu (1992) note that there is an unresolved conflict between the two schools of religious scholars in Chinese religions. One school of scholars focuses on elite traditions which are a study of systemised and institutionalised traditions of religions such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. The other school of scholars sees religious practices of uneducated people as "folk religion" which puts more emphasis on empirical works rather than on texts (p.10).

religious sphere. Women's horizontal ties in the religious sphere can be seen as an important gathering among women (Weller 1999).

Ming-yue

Apart from the routine ritual for ancestor worship, there are several occasions when people think of worshipping ancestors. On A-Cua's birth, her father and her grandaunt burn incense sticks to thank their ancestors for giving the family a baby (ep.1). It is believed that with the protection of ancestors, they can have their first child in the family. In episode 13, A-Cua's mother-in-law burns incense sticks to worship ancestors when she hears about the bombing of A-Yuan's ship. To worship ancestors is not only to show respect for the patrilineal ancestors but also to hope that the ancestors will protect their living descendants. The protective power of ancestors is to make sure that the patrilineage can continue and the family can expand and prosper. Because it is a protection of the patrilineal family, single women are not allowed to be worshipped. Only when a single woman is married can she become a part of a patriarchal family.

Chapter 3 has shown that Guan-yin is the most worshipped goddess in East Asia and it is one of the most important goddesses in the Tzu-Chi organisation as well. Guan-yin is representative of Tzu-Chi's agenda. Therefore, when the leading characters or their family members are confused, they are shown to turn to Guan-yin. As A-Cua's grandaunt worries about A-Cua's illness, she goes to a temple to worship Guan-yin (ep.7).



FIG. 29 Ming ep.7

While A-Cua is doing business in China, she visits a temple and the audience can only see a close-up of the part where she worships Guan-yin (ep.23). When people are

confused, they ask Guan-yin, hoping that she can help them. As A-Cua does not know what to do with the money she picks up on the street, she asks for Guan-yin's permission to use the money to start a business (ep.38). Guan-yin, an important figure in folk Buddhism, is the only deity shown in the drama.

When A-Cua has more time and spare money to use, she often visits different temples and gives a donation to the temples as a way to show her piety. For most women, to help in the temples and to make donations is a way to accumulate merits (ep.42). When A-Yuan has a stroke, A-Cua and her mother-in-law hold a religious ritual for him, and hope that it will help to restore his health (ep.44). In the ritual, A-Cua and her mother-in-law chant Buddhist sutras, hoping to accumulate more merits for A-Yuan. Although A-Cua has participated in many religious activities, it is the first time she reads Buddhist canons. As soon as she reads the sutras, she bursts into tears because it reminds her of her suffering in her marriage. Thereafter, she vows to keep a vegetarian diet.⁶⁹ Visiting temples is a way for women to establish networks with other women. On A-Cua's frequent visits to folk religious temples, she networks with other women. The director chooses two of her friends' stories to tell the audience about A-Cua's kindness and generosity. One of them treats her daughter-in-law badly. Seeing her friend's ill treatment of the daughter-in-law, A-Cua advises her friend not to be too strict on her daughter-in-law. The other story tells the audience the proper way to interact between husband and wife.

Xi-gu

Following on from the scene where the teenager, Xiu-Qing, plays petals with her cousins and nephews, the director shows us a scene where Xiu-Qing and her family gather round to worship Heaven in front of their tea shop (ep.1). Worshipping Heaven is a traditional Confucian ritual. Similar to ancestor worship, it is held to appreciate Heaven's help in the past and to pray for Heaven's protection in the future. The proportion of religious scenes is relatively low in this drama. However, the scene where Xiu-Qing's mother and Chun-Sheng's mother meet is worth discussing. On a visit to a temple, Chun-Sheng's mother recognises Xiu-Qing's mother as they had been neighbours before their marriages (ep.2).

⁶⁹ A vegetarian diet is seen as an initial step towards Buddhism because not to kill animals is a way to show mercy and compassion towards all sentient beings.



FIG. 30 Xi ep.2

From then on, they often meet in the temple and talk about their children. As Chun-Sheng refuses to marry the fostered daughter-in-law, Chun-Sheng's mother is worried but Xiu-Qing's mother encourages her not to think pessimistically (ep.5). The temple has become a place for housewives to meet and share their daily lives. Temples are places where supernatural power and human relationships meet.⁷⁰

Although Xiu-Qing is seldom shown visiting temples, she wants to visit a Buddhist temple after emigrating to the U.S.A. The temple has become a place where people from similar cultural backgrounds meet (ep.33). The temples represented in the earlier episodes are those belonging to folk religion while the one represented in the U.S.A. is a Buddhist one. Temples are shown as places to unite certain groups of people in the drama. Chapter 5 provides a crisis for the feminist movement in Taiwan. Religious centres form communities sharing a similar identity.

Huang

The representation of Jin-Xian's religious activities can be seen in several scenes where she pays worship to Heaven at home (ep.3; 14).

⁷⁰ See Schak (2009) and Weller (1999) on the discussion of religious activities as communal centres in Chapter 3.



FIG. 31 Huang ep.14

As Jin-Xian is left behind by her husband, she suffers a lot from raising up all her children. She finds some comfort in sutra-chanting activities in the temple (ep.10). Being harassed by her business partner, Jin-Xian is frustrated. Following on from that scene Jin-Xian goes to a temple and worships a goddess, looking like Mazu.⁷¹ With a close-up of Jin-Xian's confused face, Jin-Xian says, "What else can I believe?" (ep.11) Obviously, men have frustrated Jin-Xian and, now, she turns to religion for a spiritual reliance. Like *Ming-yue*, female deity plays an important role in women's religious beliefs.

P

Based on Master Zheng-Yan's interpretations of Humanistic Buddhism, Master Zheng-Yan extends the concept of Bodhisattvas from its celestial image to secular practices. The discussion in Chapter 3 has shown that Master Zheng-Yan is seen as a live embodiment of Bodhisattva. Although Guan-yin is assumed to be a sacred deity, Master Zheng-Yan secularises Bodhisattvas and provides a new discourse on Bodhisattvas. As an institutionally Buddhist organisation, Tzu-Chi does not promote certain folk religious rituals which are deemed superstitious in modern society. Therefore, the portrayal of religious rituals in the dramas is of the daily rituals like ancestor worship. To worship the ancestors is one of the most important and basic concepts in the Confucian norm. It teaches the living descendant not to forget about the difficult times of their ancestors. Neither gods nor goddesses, other than Guan-yin, are presented in the dramas. Guan-yin, one of the most worshipped Bodhisattvas in

⁷¹ Mazu is one of the most worshipped female deities in Taiwan. Marshall (2006) sees the worship of Mazu as a Taiwanese way of shamanism which refers "to non-traditional shamans who are spirit mediums outside of the Siberian cultural sphere" (p.128). His articles show that Taiwanese popular religion has its own history of traditions, influenced by traditional religions like Daoism and Buddhism.

Taiwan and highly revered in the Tzu-Chi organisation, is often talked about and presented in the dramas.

The temples are not just places for believers to pay worship to gods and goddesses. As seen in these dramas, the temples and religious activities are also places for women to network with each other. When it comes to a foreign country, the temples or religious activities become places where people from similar cultural backgrounds meet. Religious activities remain communal centres in the modern world.

SCENE 2: Bodhisattva's Path *Enter A-Cua, Xiu-Qing, Jin-Xian and Tzu-Chi members.*

P

After the first visit to the Tzu-Chi headquarters, the third stage of the leading characters' lives begins. The leading characters devote themselves to voluntary work in the Tzu-Chi organisation and, therefore, find spiritual comfort in the Tzu-Chi organisation. The narrative structure of Da-Ai drama is similar to Reed's study of Guan-yin narrative. Reed (2003) examines miracles of Guan-yin in twentieth-century Taiwan; mainly of soldiers in war time. Guan-yin narrative exemplifies the protective power of Guan-yin and her ability to answer believers' calls.

Da-Ai Drama has a similar narrative pattern in which the Tzu-Chi organisation is a saviour figure for the leading characters. In the narrative structure of Da-Ai drama, the leading characters suffer a lot in the second stage (in marriage). They do not suffer without complaining but they choose to be strong and face up the challenges. While they are trying to overcome the difficulties, they question the meaning of life. Why are they the ones to suffer? Is there any way out? They have been searching for answers in all kinds of religious activities but none of them answers their questions. Not until they know about the Tzu-Chi organisation do they find comfort in their minds. In Guan-yin narrative proposed by Reed (2003), lay Buddhists who have encountered Guan-yin herself repay Guan-yin's help by becoming devoted vegetarians. In Da-Ai drama, the leading characters become devoted Tzu-Chi members because they find answers to their confusion and sufferings in the Tzu-Chi organisation, either by listening to Master Zheng-Yan's lectures or by doing voluntary work in Tzu-Chi.

However, the narrative of Da-Ai drama does not end here. Being a devoted Tzu-Chi member means to *DO* Tzu-Chi. Reed (2003) proposes "Guan-yin counter narratives" used by Master Zheng-Yan. Master Zheng-Yan has experience of encountering Guan-

yin when she was young. Instead of encouraging her followers to chant the name of Guan-yin for help, she encourages her followers to stand up against suffering by helping oneself and others. Da-Ai drama follows this "Guan-yin counter narrative". The story does not end at the third stage of the leading characters' lives because their new lives as devoted spiritual beings start here. What happens in the third stage is their hard work in the Tzu-Chi organisation. Recruiting more members and raising more funds from followers are the basics. *Ming-yue* shows the audience A-Cua's efforts as a volunteer in Tzu-Chi hospitals and her visit to the Tzu-Chi branch in Thailand. Xiu-Qing, in *Xi-gu*, is the founder of the branch in the Valley Area, in the U.S.A. Jin-Xian devotes herself to voluntary environmental work. Da-Ai Drama constructs stories in which every ordinary person is able to overcome their difficulties and help others. Rather than sitting there waiting to be saved, the members embody the image of Guan-yin and help each other. This is what Master Zheng-Yan called Bodhisattva's path.

Ming-yue

In this drama, Tzu-Chi becomes the place where retired people and elders spend their leisure time. Reversing the prevailing discourse that older people are useless, Da-Ai Drama depicts Tzu-Chi's volunteering works as useful to society. Nearly at the end of the drama, a voice-over comes in to tell the audience that. To do Tzu-Chi and charity works is meaningful for the elders because it is a great contribution to the world (ep.64). After A-Cua first reads Buddhist canons, she vows to keep a vegetarian diet, hoping that she can live a monastic life in the future when she finishes her obligations to her mother-in-law. However, when A-Cua's mother-in-law finds out A-Cua's intention to enter monastic life, she is forced to promise never to do that (ep.52). Therefore, A-Cua decides to practise Bodhisattva's path in the human world as a way to practise Buddhism (ep.52).

A-Cua's image as one of the human Bodhisattva is constructed through the story. Helping in her father's business as a young girl, A-Cua sees how her father helps poor people (ep.3). By portraying an intimate and close relationship between A-Cua and her father, the drama implies that A-Hai has a great impact on A-Cua's way of acting and behaving. A-Cua's father sets a moral example for A-Cua. His insistence on loyalty and his charitable mind forms A-Cua's personality as well as her image of a human Bodhisattva. A-Cua's image of a human Bodhisattva is an extension of the nature of motherhood. A previous section on motherhood has mentioned that the fulfilment of motherhood is a sound basis for being a human Bodhisattva. A-Cua selflessly loves people round her, which is why she is admired by those people. She brings up her sister-in-law's children and treats them like her own children. Despite the fact that A-

Cua has divorced A-Yuan, she takes good care of her mother-in-law (ep.55). Moreover, when A-Yuan is ill, A-Cua pays for the medical fees and she takes care of A-Yuan and A-rui to the end of their lives (ep. 43; 59; 60; 62). A-Cua's doings are depicted as tolerant, generous and merciful. Her attitude towards people round her shows the audience how she practises Buddhist doctrines in her daily life. Extending her love from the family to others is the first step on the Bodhisattva's path. What impresses the audience is A-Cua's willingness to let A-Yuan and A-rui be buried together. More than persuading people to get involved in charitable works, the drama tries to persuade people to practise good deeds in their daily lives.

Xi-gu

In the opening scene, the audience already knows the reason why Xiu-Qing is called A-ma (Grandma) by Tzu-Chi members in the Valley Area. Her image of a human Bodhisattva is constructed through her familial background. In the first episode, the audience sees Xiu-Qing riding on a bike. She gives out rice and daily necessities for a blind couple on her mother's behalf. Her close relationship with her natal family influences her attitude towards charity and social welfare. All Xiu-Qing's brothers and her mother are doing charitable works. Xiu-Qing has always wanted to help the poor and do remarkable things like her brothers do. Therefore, voluntary work in the Tzu-Chi organisation offers her a platform to realise her dream. She is called "pu-sa"[菩薩] (Bodhisattva) by Tzu-Chi members (ep.35). Her image of a human Bodhisattva is developed through her involvement with voluntary work. Before she starts to help in the Tzu-Chi organisation, Xiu-Qing does voluntary work in an orphanage and a hospital (ep.24; 25). The voice-over tells the audience that Xiu-Qing treats the orphans like her own children and she learns that doing charitable works needs some training as well (ep.25). Similar to A-Cua in *Ming-yue*, Xiu-Qing's role as a human Bodhisattva is an extension of her role as a mother. Her care and concern towards Taiwanese students and workers in the Valley Area establish her role as everyone's mother or grandmother. Although she just offers the students and workers ordinary meals this is what provides comfort for them when they are feeling homesick. In the metaphoric family of Tzu-Chi, Xiu-Qing's image of a human Bodhisattva is an extension of her motherhood.

Huang

At the end of the drama, Jin-Xian changes her name to the one given to her by Master Zheng-Yan, signifying her determination to live her religious identity and shoulder the responsibilities given to this name, Lu-fu (to help herself and others out of the

sufferings of life) (ep.17). Sitting on Tzu-Chi's train,⁷² Jin-Xian and her youngest son are stepping on the Bodhisattva's path. Jin-Xian's image as a human Bodhisattva is constructed by her determination to bring up all her disabled children, regardless of all the difficulties she faces. After years of separation, Jin-Xian says to Li-Xue that she does not blame Li-Xue for taking away Xin-Jun (ep.10), and she will fulfil her duties as a mother well because she has already given birth to them. Her wonderful fulfilment of her motherhood is the basis for being a human Bodhisattva. Her tolerance towards Li-Xue saves her from a deeper struggle or drowning in confusion. As a woman who has suffered a lot, she is able to use her personal experiences to help other people who are suffering.

P

All the leading characters are human Bodhisattvas who step on Bodhisattva's path after knowing Tzu-Chi. As they are ordinary people, the dramas tell the audience that normal people can be human Bodhisattvas in their daily lives by facing and overcoming challenges and difficulties in life. Not only do they face difficulties, they learn to "let go of" troubled minds.⁷³ The leading characters are saved by the Tzu-Chi organisation, an embodiment of the Guan-yin figure in their lives. Furthermore, the leading characters devote themselves to Tzu-Chi voluntary work as a way to save others in the world. The image of a human Bodhisattva is an extension of the leading characters' gender role as "mother". The dramas reassure the audience that it is not difficult to do charitable or voluntary work. The power of the Buddha nature exists in every sentient being's mind. The central doctrine of Tzu-Chi and Humanistic Buddhism is to build an earthly heaven. To build an earthly heaven needs effort from every ordinary individual. The dramas advocate this concept of practising Buddhism in daily life.

SCENE 3: Jobs in the Tzu-Chi Organisation--Visiting Poor Households

P

There are various kinds of voluntary work that a Tzu-Chi member can do. Visiting poor households is one of the voluntary jobs most frequently presented in Da-Ai Drama. Visiting the poor households is a way to teach Tzu-Chi members how rich they are, as well as how to help others. Seeing the terrible situations in which people live is a shocking but useful lesson for Tzu-Chi members. Visiting poor households is more

⁷² Tzu-Chi's train is a train for Tzu-Chi members to visit the headquarters which are located on the east coast of Taiwan.

⁷³ See Chapter 3 on the discussions of *The Four Noble Truths*.

than an act of doing charity work because the members learn Buddhist doctrines by helping those in need. These activities are embedded with religious messages. The Tzu-Chi organisation terms these poor households as “appreciated households” [感恩戶].⁷⁴ Instead of assuming a superior position as “helpers,” Tzu-Chi reverses the discourse and teaches the followers to appreciate these poor households for offering them a chance to practise Buddhism. After visiting the poor, the Tzu-Chi organisation decides whether to financially support the poor family or not. Rather than focusing on how the poor are helped, the dramas tend to tell the audience how the system in Tzu-Chi works and how Tzu-Chi members learn from visiting and helping the poor. By visiting a poor family, the leading characters learn more about the appropriate ways of doing charity work and the audience also learns this from the life stories of the poor household.

Ming-yue

On the first trip to visit the poor, A-Cua and other Tzu-Chi members help the poor family to clean their home and offer them spiritual comfort by keeping company with them. On her way home, A-Cua shares her feelings with other members. They use Master Zheng-Yan’s words: “As long as you do it (visiting the poor), you can feel it (Buddhist teachings)” (ep.50). When A-Cua shares her experiences with her friend, she says only people who have good karmas are able to help others (ep.50). To see these poor households impresses on her how rich she is, both materially and spiritually. Reminding her of her past, A-Cua shows great sympathy for the poor. As a way of paying tribute to those who have helped her in the past, A-Cua is more than willing to help the poor family. However, she is stopped when she tries to give them money in private. The scene shows the audience that the Tzu-Chi organisation is systemised and organised when helping the poor (ep.51). Visiting the poor household is a process to examine the case before it goes through certain administration. The system is established to make sure that every donation is used in the appropriate way. Not only does the drama tell the audience how Tzu-Chi works but it also uses the poor people’s stories to teach the audience the proper way to act. For example, A-Cua visits a poor woman who had been abandoned by her son because the conflict between her and her daughter-in-law had killed the daughter-in-law. A-Cua uses this story to warn her friend to treat her daughter-in-law better (ep.57).

Xi-gu

⁷⁴ One of my interviewees used this term even though she does not participate in Tzu-Chi’s voluntary work.

As the story is located in the U.S.A., the framework for visiting the poor is different. Xiu-Qing and other members in the branch decide to pay regular visits to an asylum, reported to have the least resources in San Jose. In the asylum, Tzu-Chi members befriend the residents, regardless of their religious beliefs. Knowing that one of their patients converts to Christianity, Xiu-Qing is happy for him and shows him the same amount of concern. As she later tells other members, they are helping and serving these people in a Buddhist spirit instead of a Buddhist form (ep.38).⁷⁵ Xiu-Qing's words show Tzu-Chi's respect for various religious traditions as well as Tzu-Chi's interpretation of religion. Believing all religions aim to offer a positive impact on their followers, Tzu-Chi emphasises the spiritual doctrines more than the external forms. Mei-Li, the voice-over of the drama, tells other members that "compassion is shown in respecting the patients' religious beliefs and to give them what they need" (ep.42). Seeing all kinds of suffering in the asylum, the volunteers and Xiu-Qing see how bad people's lives can be. By visiting and doing voluntary work in the asylum, the members experience what is an essential doctrine of Buddhism: "Life is bitterness" (ep.42). In episode 44, the male members are shown giving out food to illegal immigrants who live under a bridge. Out of compassion, voluntary workers try to help as many people as possible, regardless of their ethnicity, nationality, or religious beliefs.

P

Visiting the poor is an act of compassion. For a Bodhisattva, to help people who are suffering is the most important job. Therefore, Tzu-Chi offers financial help to poor families under strict scrutiny. The dramas tell the audience how the organisation uses all the donations in a systematic way to assure all the donors that every penny is used in the right place. In the early stages of the Tzu-Chi organisation, it used the *Tzu-Chi Monthly* to list all the uses of donations. The audience does not know how the poor feel at being financially supported; however, the audience sees how satisfied the leading characters are. Having gone through difficult times themselves, the leading characters sympathise more with the appreciated households. Moreover, the leading characters are spiritually comforted which makes them feel happier than material satisfaction. There is a discourse centred on material wealth in the Tzu-Chi organisation. Through establishing the duality between material wealth and spiritual joy, Tzu-Chi gives a

⁷⁵ Studying the religious lives of contemporary Chinese Americans, Lee (2006) points out that the Tzu-Chi organisation creates "legitimacy of Chinese Buddhism" (p.259) by social services and "the work of Tzu-Chi is also redefining the form of religious activities for Chinese immigrant communities as they adapt their religious views to incorporate service into their religious activities" (p.252). Tzu-Chi sets an example of not using funds from the government, fearing that governmental funds might restrict and limit their social service activities. Not only does Tzu-Chi serve its own community (Chinese immigrants), but it also establishes an American root by interfaith activities and recognises the broader context as multi-ethnic and multi-religious.

brand new discourse on helping behaviour. It is often stressed that material satisfaction does not bring spiritual happiness.⁷⁶ Seeing the poor people's stories also helps Tzu-Chi members to reflect on themselves. To see the bad consequences of improper behaviour helps people to learn. Tzu-Chi members experience Buddhist doctrines by doing various types of voluntary work. Working in a group the members experience Buddhist doctrines whilst helping the poor, as well as networking with people who share a similar faith. What the leading characters offer to the members is an embodiment of a human Bodhisattva. That is, the members have a chance to learn the spirit of Buddhist doctrines through the leading characters. As compassion is an essential doctrine in Bodhisattva's path, the leading characters and other members are learning the way to be compassionate in their helping behaviour.

SCENE 4: Jobs in the Tzu-Chi Organisation--Voluntary Work

P

Being a Tzu-Chi volunteer is not an easy job because it is necessary to participate in the training session, especially when doing voluntary work in the hospitals. In the earlier sections, all the scenes are filmed in constructed scenes or studios. The sense of reality in the previous section is reconstructed on purpose. However, when the dramas have more plots about the Tzu-Chi organisation, the reality comes from the real scenes in the various areas of the organisation. When filming the leading characters' voluntary work, whether they are medical volunteers or environmental volunteers, the production teams use a lot of documentary footage to build up the realness for the audience. The scenes about medical volunteers take place in Tzu-Chi hospitals while the scenes involving environmental volunteers take place in the recycling field. Both the audience and the actors experience Tzu-Chi voluntary work via the cameras. The training sessions present the voluntary system of the organisation as well as the central doctrine of the Tzu-Chi interpretation of Buddhism.

Ming-yue

When Tzu-Chi first establishes its own hospital, plenty of volunteers are needed for there is a great deal of work to be done in the hospital. A-Cua is one of those volunteers. Through her experiences as a volunteer, the audience sees how Tzu-Chi's hospital develops from the beginning (ep.51). A-Cua experiences that life is a changing

⁷⁶ A similar discourse emerges from the audience's response in Chapter 6.

state, and that nothing lasts.⁷⁷ Episode 56 shows the audience that A-Cua is receiving theoretical as well as practical training in medical and nursing skills. The media representation of the training courses tells the audience that charity work needs to be systematic and organised. Taking a form like reality TV, the audience realises that to be a volunteer needs a certain amount of training. Also, it tells the audience that it is necessary to find an organised and efficient way when doing charitable works. The medical volunteers work in the hospitals as well as with aboriginal tribes.⁷⁸ In the early days, aboriginal tribes were too far to reach and medical resources were in great need. A-Cua is shown on one of these free clinical trips. As a person who has lived through the Japanese colonisation, her language skills (Japanese) help the elders in the tribe, because they can only speak their mother tongue and Japanese (ep.59). The dramas show a brief history of the foundation of the Tzu-Chi hospital and the organisation's contribution to medical care in eastern Taiwan. The setting up of the first hospital is the primary appeal to many housewives. This is the beginning of the Tzu-Chi organisation and where Master Zheng-Yan's charisma comes from.

Huang

Being a medical volunteer in the Tzu-Chi hospital, Jin-Xian uses her personal experiences to tell her story to a patient who commits suicide because of marital issues (ep.15). The voluntary work consists of physical labour and psychological support. As a person who has been through difficulties in her marriage, Jin-Xian's experience unties the knots in the patient's mind. The leading characters are shown to advise those who are confused. Using the suffering in their own marriages to give advice is highly similar to Master Zheng-Yan's approach of telling stories.⁷⁹ As for the environmental volunteers,⁸⁰ Jin-Xian⁸¹ does a lot of recycling work because selling the recycled items is one of the financial resources of the Tzu-Chi organisation. After the launch of Da-Ai TV, Master Zheng-Yan decided to use the profits from the recycling work to support Da-Ai TV. That is, the organisation does not rely solely on donations. The recycling

⁷⁷ Lu (2003) interviews Tzu-Chi medical volunteers and studies their views of the body. The volunteers tend to experience the concept of "ever-changing" throughout the voluntary work in Tzu-Chi's hospitals.

⁷⁸ Taiwanese society consists of a large number of Han (mostly immigrants from mainland China in the Qing dynasty) and a small number of aborigines who live in the mountains or marginalised areas across the island.

⁷⁹ See Chapter 3 on Master Zheng-Yan's charismatic leadership.

⁸⁰ Ho (2003) argues that Tzu-Chi's agenda is to reform or change the society from the below (grassroots) because the environmental works done by Tzu-Chi members consist largely of grassroots women.

⁸¹ The drama, *Huang Jin-Xian*, is inspired by the director's experiences of filming Jin-Xian's documentary on her recycling and environmental work in the Tzu-Chi organisation.

work partially supports the organisation's charitable works.⁸² Whilst doing the recycling work, Tzu-Chi members, especially women, have a chance to network with each other (ep.16). In the last episode, the real Jin-Xian talks to the fictional Jin-Xian in the recycling field. It is conventional for the real person to act in one or two episodes.

P

Having a camera in the organisation, Tzu-Chi is able to let the audience know what this organisation is about and what the members are doing exactly. Instead of preaching or teaching Buddhist doctrines, the dramas aim to let the audience know more about the systems and the different aspects of the organisation. The dramas show the audience how the organisation works as well as Master Zheng-Yan's teachings. The blurry line between the real and the fictional enables the audience to entertain whilst absorbing Tzu-Chi's agenda. The dramas use clips from real scenes to show the audience different aspects of Tzu-Chi's voluntary work and the systematic volunteer training programme. Using fictional actors and actresses, the audience still enjoys watching these experiences as dramas, not as serious documentaries. The stories of those being helped by the leading characters are filmed to show the audience how leading characters help themselves as well as helping others out of their suffering. The difficult times they have been through in the previous section enables them to share their experiences with those who need help.

The medical volunteers learn the lesson that life is constantly changing; therefore, it is useless to worry or to fear death. As every individual is born to suffer, to cling onto a belief or a desire is what causes troubles in life. Seeing people who suffer from this, the leading characters tell them not to cling onto their desires by sharing their own personal experiences. By doing this, the leading characters are learning Buddhist doctrines via their helping behaviour. The one being helped is led into the world of Buddhism. As for the environmental volunteers, the environmental issue is one of Master Zheng-Yan's concerns. Through the physical actions of looking after the natural world, the underlying message is to clean up the confusion and troubles in people's minds. By doing recycling work the members are taught not to waste any items and to cherish everything they have. Apart from the religious teachings and practices, Tzu-Chi is a place for women to network with each other. Doing Tzu-Chi is a good way for women, especially those who are in the "empty nest" period, to network

⁸² The environmental work started in 1990 with Master Zheng-Yan's instruction on environmental issues. Nowadays, there are more than 67,000 volunteers across the island. As a result of the environmental work, the Da-Ai Technology Co. was established in 2006. It produces textiles using recycled plastic bottles. The textiles make various types of products that are used in disaster relief as well as for commercial sale. The profits of the company go to the Tzu-Chi organisation.

and to spend their leisure time as their burdens of doing household chores are taken over by their daughters-in-law. Although Tzu-Chi is said to be an organisation for housewives, it is necessary for these housewives to fulfil their familial duties first. There is a great emphasis placed on the balance between the family and Tzu-Chi voluntary work. Tzu-Chi reverses the existing discourse on helping behaviour⁸³ and turns it into a religious practice. The media representation of the Tzu-Chi voluntary system establishes the credibility of the Tzu-Chi organisation.

SCENE 5: Jobs in the Tzu-Chi Organisation--International Perspective

P

As the Tzu-Chi organisation has branches across the world, there are several portrayals of Tzu-Chi's concern for international issues, including disaster relief. *Xi-gu* is a story about the branch in the Valley Area; therefore, the story is a good example to see the development of a religious organisation under globalisation. The story-line multiplies when it comes to describe Xiu-Qing's efforts in setting up a new branch. The drama tells the audience their stories and how they change after entering Tzu-Chi. The branch is constructed as a family, led by grandma Xiu-Qing. When filming the scenes in the branch in San Jose, the actors, actresses and the production team were impressed by the members' warm welcome. Doing charity work while keeping in touch with Taiwan makes Tzu-Chi's oversea branches like a Taiwanese society. In the local context, Tzu-Chi is a supporting network and has horizontal ties among housewives. In the global context, Tzu-Chi becomes a supporting network among Taiwanese and Chinese diaspora. Its strong tendency of lay characteristics enables Tzu-Chi's branches to do more than a Buddhist organisation.

Ming-yue

The international perspective shown in this drama is A-Cua's visit to Thailand. On A-Cua's visit to the Tzu-Chi branch in northern Thailand, she is guided by local members to see the building plan of Tzu-Chi's primary school and high school there.⁸⁴ She is told that the financial resources come from local members and local believers rather than from the headquarters in Taiwan (ep.63). Although Tzu-Chi is an international

⁸³ See Ting (1997) on the case study of Tzu-Chi's helping behaviour.

⁸⁴ The refugee villages in northern Thailand are made up of soldiers who fought in the Chinese Civil War in the early twentieth century. The defeat of the KMT government forced the soldiers and refugees on the border to retreat to northern Thailand. However, they are not recognised by the KMT government or Thai government. Governmental support for the refugees stopped in 1994. The Tzu-Chi organisation began its supporting project (ongoing), including financial support and an educational programme, in 1994.

organisation with a huge amount of financial resources to use, the use of money is carefully divided. She is also guided to the refugee villages in northern Thailand.

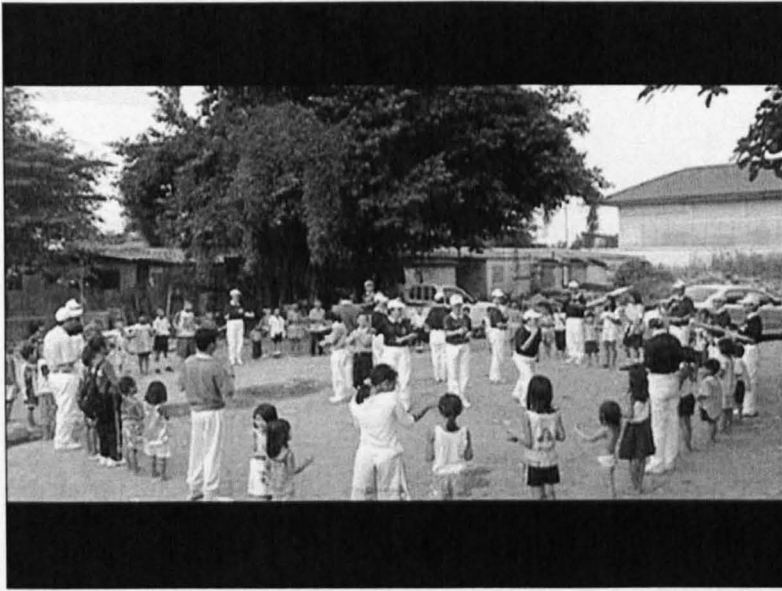


FIG. 32 Ming ep.64

With the clips from the real settings, the audience experiences the same shock as the production team and the actress. In the interviewing session, the director explains that he tries to capture the shock when they first arrive in the village. The audience sees the living conditions in the refugee villages and Tzu-Chi's help for these refugees. Although the refugees are living in horrible conditions, the production team as well as A-Cua see the most beautiful language on earth; that is, their smiling faces (ep.64). Again, the duality between material wealth and spiritual satisfaction is reinforced. The drama not only tells the audience how a foreign branch works but also what the branch does in a foreign country. Furthermore, by filming the living conditions of these refugees, the drama tells the audience that we should not be greedy because we have better living conditions than a lot of people in the world. One of the most important messages from the drama is that material conditions or satisfaction do not equal happiness. As long as people are not greedy, they can find happiness under every kind of condition. This can be seen as a Tzu-Chi response to a heavily consumerist society.

Xi-gu

Assigned the mission to spread Tzu-Chi in North America, Xiu-Qing starts to work on the process of establishing a branch in the U.S.A. The establishment of the branch is assisted by the immigrant community; therefore, the Tzu-Chi branch becomes a religious society for Taiwanese immigrants. In a bazaar, a group of Taiwanese engineers who work in the Valley Area meet (ep.39) and they play an important part in systemising and organising several events (ep.45). Different from other Tzu-Chi

branches where women are the majority, the gender ratio in this branch is quite balanced. Although most of the time, the gendered division of doing charitable work is not obvious, female members in the branch are shown preparing meals while male members have meetings (ep.42). As most of the female members are single mothers or retired women, what they do in the branch is an extension of their familial roles. In local branches in Taiwan where female members are in the majority, they would mention their ability to do “men’s work” in the branches. Not wanting to cross the assigned gender attributes, Tzu-Chi encourages its members with a capacity to embody both feminine and masculine attributes. Recruiting more and more members, Xiu-Qing becomes a commander of the branch (ep.37). Stepping out of the household, Xiu-Qing is no longer a housewife and she is able to fully devote herself to Tzu-Chi’s charitable works. Her care and concern for the members in the branch are an extension of her familial role as a mother. Xiu-Qing is a perfect embodiment of Tzu-Chi spirit. She is able to be a commander in the branch whilst keeping her caring and loving attributes as a mother.

Rather than eliciting a dual opposition between genders, Tzu-Chi emphasises the co-ordination between genders to form a harmonious society. In a society where collective identity and harmonious relationships are greatly emphasised, the Tzu-Chi approach is more acceptable to the public. This is why Tzu-Chi attracts such a big group of followers while most of the communities with flagging political agendas do not. The kitchen scene extends further to the Tzu-Chi organisation. When the branch in San Jose, California, first rented a meeting place, the kitchen and dining table played a crucial role in networking and recruiting new members. As one of the early members recalls, they went to the meeting place during lunch break and enjoyed meals prepared by Xiu-Qing and other female members.



FIG. 33 Xi ep. 41

For a foreign worker in the States, to taste something homely is the only cure for homesickness. A lunchtime gathering becomes a way for members to ease their homesickness and to hear more about Tzu-Chi. Many housewives, not knowing what they are good at, find a place in the branch by doing familiar chores like cooking. During the preparation of the food, members talk about their confusion and difficulties in life or in marriage. Thus, a supporting network emerges. In Taiwan, Tzu-Chi attracts a lot of housewives because it extends the private sphere into a religious field where women are more comfortable. The private sphere leads the public sphere and blurs the boundary between the private and the public (*nei/wai* framework).

For students and workers, the branch is a place to network with people from the home country. For retired people, the branch is a place to meet other people and to spend their time in doing good deeds. As one of the members says, Tzu-Chi enables her to help others so that she does not get bored as an old woman (ep.42; 46). This is similar to A-Cua in *Ming-yue*. For single mothers, the branch becomes a supporting network where they encourage each other and share their experiences (ep.41). Mei-Li, the voice-over of the drama, loses her husband before she emigrates to the U.S.A. and at the beginning of her stay there, she spends most of her time shopping or beautifying herself. After entering Tzu-Chi she changes; her outward beauty is nothing compared with her inner beauty as she has learnt a lot from doing voluntary work (ep.42). The duality of material wealth and spiritual happiness is brought into her story. The discourse of inner beauty embodies the Buddhist concept of "emptiness."⁸⁵ A-Cai, another single mother in the branch, shares her experiences of raising her son with Mei-Li. Whilst helping in the kitchen, Mei-Li and A-Cai share their experiences as single

⁸⁵ See Appendix E.

mothers and encourage each other to be strong for the children (ep.41). Motherhood is emphasised and reinforced here.

Starting from a humble group of people, the meal time is what starts the branch. The dining table switches from a gathering place in Xiu-Qing's nuclear family to a gathering place for Taiwanese students and workers in the branch. As immigrant workers or international students, gathering round a dining table, with food they are familiar with and people who speak the same language, is a way to establish horizontal ties. The kitchen or the dining table becomes a centre for the Taiwanese community. In the Tzu-Chi organisation, there is a discourse that holds respect for women's hard work which celebrates motherhood as a form of strong and selfless love. As an organisation largely composed of female members, Tzu-Chi does not want to contradict the prevailing ideology on patriarchy. However, it reverses the discourse of gender by emphasising women's efforts to look after the family. In this discourse, men have to appreciate women's efforts in doing this. Instead of seeing women as inferior and weak, Da-Ai dramas, which tell stories from women's points of view, tend to emphasise women's wisdom and toughness to overcome difficult situations. As director Deng says in an interview, this is a drama that shows how strong women are. Women can be strong when facing hardships and can be a strong support for men (ep.8). The media approach to Tzu-Chi offers a new interpretation without challenging or reforming the existing discourse on gender.⁸⁶

P

For many Asian countries and third world countries, globalisation is seen as an evil force that sweeps away the cultural authenticity of minor cultures (Robertson 1992; Tomlinson 2002). However, the dramas, especially *Xi-gu*, show the achievement of a local religious organisation to an international level. Humble as it was at the beginning, the Tzu-Chi organisation has participated in the relief effort for many international disasters. These three dramas have shown the audience Tzu-Chi's concern for international affairs. Vowing to be human Bodhisattvas, the members follow the spirit of Bodhisattvas. Therefore, they do their best to help people who are in great suffering across the world. Wherever the natural disaster happens, Tzu-Chi mobilises its members and gathers resources in order to help in the affected areas (*Ming-yue*, ep.66; *Xi-gu*, ep. 37, 48; *Huang*, ep.15). Using religion as an appeal, the Tzu-Chi organisation grows stronger and stronger under globalisation. Most of the overseas branches were founded by Taiwanese immigrants. Although its members are mostly Taiwanese or Chinese, their charitable acts are not limited to Chinese communities.

⁸⁶ See Chapter 3 on Tzu-Chi's media approaches.

The strong lay character of the Tzu-Chi organisation enables the overseas branches to be multi-functional.

SCENE 6: The Family Metaphor

P

As the previous sections show, family is the basic entity of society. Gender is constructed within the framework of family. To fulfil duties and obligations given to different gender roles is what constitutes a man or a woman. When entering the Tzu-Chi organisation, these women simply extend their secular gender roles to the organisation. As previous sections show, Tzu-Chi creates a discourse on helping behaviour. The discourse on helping behaviour transforms the secular gender roles into a religious embodiment of Bodhisattva. As an organisation with strong lay features, every member finds their own position by doing what they are good at in the family. For housewives, performing their knowledge in household chores is what they can contribute to the organisation.

Ming-yue

On A-Cua's visit to a folk religious temple, she meets a woman who always fights with her husband. A-Cua helps the woman to get along with her husband, using her own experiences to teach the woman. A-Cua's kindness and advice remind the woman of her mother so the woman asks A-Cua to be her godmother. Although A-Cua treats the woman as her daughter, she refuses the suggestion. A-Cua believes that their relationship is no different from family members and would like to extend this kind of intimacy to practise Buddhism. It is what Master Zheng-Yan called "*dharma relatives*". Therefore, the woman would like to follow A-Cua's career in Tzu-Chi and devote herself to Tzu-Chi voluntary work (ep.66). "Dharma relative" is an extension of the secular family. Using a secular concept on "relatives", Tzu-Chi establishes a discourse on "dharma family" within which every member belongs to the Tzu-Chi family.

Xi-gu

The importance of family further extends to the Tzu-Chi organisation where the family is used as a metaphor to indicate the bond among its members. The Mandarin title of the drama *Xi-gu A-ma* means "Grandma from the Valley". Tzu-Chi members in the Valley Area are children of Xiu-Qing who is then called "grandma" (ep.1). The previous section has shown how Xiu-Qing attracts the followers by her performance of motherhood. In a farewell party where Xiu-Qing delivers a speech on stage to say

goodbye to Tzu-Chi members, as she is going back to stay at the headquarters for a while, Xiu-Qing's oldest son comments on her change from his Mum to the Tzu-Chi members' grandmother (ep.46). Tzu-Chi members call themselves "dharma relatives" which metaphorically transforms members into a more intimate relationship. One of the students who spends a lot of time in the branch says that she is not homesick because of the warmth in the branch (ep.42). Female members thus extend their nurturing roles from the private sphere (family) into a public sphere where their selfless love can be distributed to a broader public. As the voice-over, Mei-Li, describes her relationship with Xiu-Qing, she says they are like mother and daughter as well as teacher and pupil (ep.42). The branch in the Valley is like a smaller version of the Tzu-Chi organisation where people treat one another like family members. All the members have a spiritual home--the headquarters in Hua-Lian.

Huang

Listening to Master Zheng-Yan's cassettes, Jin-Xian finds someone who can answer her questions about her miserable life. Master Zheng-Yan reminds her of her parents who always give advice and instruction to Jin-Xian when she is confused. The director parallels the montage of Jin-Xian's parents' scenes to Master Zheng-Yan's speech (ep.16). As a spiritual guidance, Master Zheng-Yan is like Jin-Xian's parents who guides Jin-Xian through difficult times and confusion. As Jin-Xian tells her son, Master Zheng-Yan is different from other religious leaders because she never asks her believers to change their destiny using superstitious rituals; instead, she reasons with her believers and advises them on a proper way to overcome difficulties.

P

As Tzu-Chi emphasises "dharma family," it advocates the values of the family in the dramas. By using the term *dharma relatives*, Master Zheng-Yan unites Tzu-Chi members and lets them become a family. Being the leader of the organisation, Master Zheng-Yan is the head of this huge household. The dramas switch the emphasis on secular families to the religious and spiritual family, Tzu-Chi. As a spiritual home for the members, Master Zheng-Yan provides spiritual guidance for her followers. Those senior Tzu-Chi members act like spiritual parents to the junior members or newcomers. To love selflessly and to sacrifice without asking anything in return are the central themes of the Tzu-Chi organisation.

The previous sections on the secular family tell the audience the importance of family and the importance to fulfil familial obligations and duties. Carrying the secular concepts of familial values to the Tzu-Chi organisation, the leading characters learn to

love broadly (which is the meaning of Da-Ai). Not wanting to contradict or challenge the existing discourses on gender and family, Tzu-Chi creates a religious discourse on family. This approach and the discourse on spiritual family show the intertwining relationship between Confucianism and Buddhism.

SCENE 7: Ending Scenes.

P

The dramas usually end when most of the Tzu-Chi activities are introduced to the audience. Of the three dramas analysed, only one of the leading characters is dead at the time of broadcasting. As for the other two dramas, the leading characters are presented as continuing to devote themselves to Tzu-Chi's voluntary works (continuing to practise the Bodhisattva's path).

Ming-yue

In the last episode, A-Cua is shown doing environmental work with her daughter-in-law. A-Cua finally realises the Buddhist doctrine of life. Life is a sea full of bitterness but an individual does not have to fear that bitterness. As long as there is no fear in the mind, an individual can find life easier. Regardless of her friend's suggestion to stay at home and enjoy the rest of her life, A-Cua chooses to continue her Bodhisattva's path. The camera moves to the last scene where A-Cua, with a big smile, stands next to her bike under a huge tree watching the road ahead.



FIG. 34 Ming ep.66

The voice-over comes in to explain the title of the drama: *Ming-yue zhao hong-chen* means A-Cua's selfless love is a resemblance to moonlight which is able to shed light on every corner of the earth (ep.66).

Xi-gu

In the very last years of Xiu-Qing's life, she is too weak to participate in Tzu-Chi activities. While members in the branch are preparing for a sign-language musical to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the branch, Xiu-Qing stays in bed. At the end, the audience sees the members successfully perform the musical on stage and Xiu-Qing comes on stage for the curtain call.



FIG. 35 Xi ep.50

The video clip of the real Xiu-Qing in the curtain call is shown to the audience. The last scene corresponds to the opening scene where Xiu-Qing says: "Life is like a play". The musical ends; so does Xiu-Qing's part in this life (ep.50).

Huang

In the last episode, Jin-Xian is shown to be on the Tzu-Chi train to the headquarters with her youngest child. She realises that the past has passed, what is left ahead are her responsibilities within the Tzu-Chi organisation. She changes her name to the one given to her by Master Zheng-Yan and leaves the photo that signifies her past in the drawer.



FIG. 36 Huang ep.17

The drama ends with the closing of the drawer. So ends the drama.

P

The final scenes in *Ming-yue* and *Huang* show the audience that their sufferings come to an end after encountering the Tzu-Chi organisation. However, their lives do not stop after being saved. For A-Cua and Jin-Xian, the suffering and painful past motivates them to help other people who are suffering. Traditionally, the Guan-yin narrative stops at the point when the believers are saved by Guan-yin. For Tzu-Chi members, the story never ends because they are stepping along Bodhisattva's path and it is their responsibility to help others out of the sea of bitterness. The end of the dramas marks the beginning of their ongoing practice of Bodhisattva's path.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown the narrative structure of Da-Ai Drama by analysing three dramas. In the first part of the narrative structure, the leading characters are portrayed as happy girls, to the extent that they are the most cherished girls in the family. Seeing the gender representation in the dramas, I would like to argue that gender is not necessarily a factor of women's oppression in Confucian society. The first part of the narrative constructs women as "daughters"; there are less duties and obligations given to the daughters, other than being obedient to their parents. However, obedience is not practised thoroughly and strictly. The dramas depict the leading characters' individualities and their active participation in the public sphere in childhood. Daughters, the least powerful status in the Confucian hierarchy, can be reversed to a

most protected status by patriarchal figures. Although there are female characters who are victims under patriarchy, the leading characters are portrayed as princess-like figures. It is not my intention to argue that the gender role of “daughter” is always a princess-like figure. The portrayal of the princess-like figures is functionally used to contrast with their suffering in their marriages. Their fully developed individualities will be used in the third part of the story. In a Confucian society, stepping into marriage is a necessary process in life. Confucianism, as a moral guide, is a compulsory heterosexual matrix in which gender roles multiply. The concept of *fen* comes into understanding the correlative model on gender roles and human relationships.

Waving goodbye to her natal family, a woman starts the process of incorporating into another family. After marriage, a woman’s gender roles multiply to “daughter-in-law”, “wife”, and “mother”. An individual can be said to be a complete human being only when s/he fulfils all the obligations and duties given to the different gender roles. The gender construction is sophisticated and complicated in the sense that it is constructed through various gender roles in the compulsory heterosexual matrix of Confucianism. There is not a set of rules on how to behave as a good “daughter-in-law”, a good “wife” and a good “mother”. The dramas simply present the challenges and difficulties every woman faces in marriage. The representation of the conflicts between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law is a good example to show the readers how active women are in keeping the patriarchal tradition. Most of the literature on women in Confucianism and Buddhism places the emphasis on the part of women’s oppression and blames the oppression on the patriarchy. However, the drama analysis shows that women are the crucial keepers of the patriarchal tradition. Taking a closer look at the media representation, I come to the conclusion that women are the oppressors as well as the oppressed. If this weird situation cannot be understood, there will always be objections against women’s liberation and feminist movements from the ‘grassroots women’ who believe in traditional values. Because Confucianism emphasises ‘hierarchy’, the more powerful women from a higher position in the hierarchy are decisive factors in clinging onto the traditions or letting them go. As the dramas show, the leading characters who have been through difficult times as daughters-in-law become kind and loving mothers-in-law. The key is not whether to keep or discard the tradition but how women ‘interpret’ these traditions in an acceptable way.

In the drama portrayal, the leading characters are criticised for tolerating their husbands’ misconduct. However, as I have argued in earlier sections, the righteousness of a chief wife cannot be underestimated. Confucian patriarchy actually empowers women by justifying their right position in the family; it is not to ignore

women's sufferings in marriage. What I argue here is that there is indeed a system to empower women in Confucianism. Given the time, the ahistorical critique on Confucian oppression of women should be re-examined. Although the emphasis on motherhood is to use their nurturing and caring nature as an approach to the later images of human Bodhisattvas, Da-Ai Drama empowers women by emphasising the hard work and effort that mothers make for their families. Also, the dramas trigger appreciation from the audience for the sacrifices women make on behalf of the family.

Reversing the prevailing discourse on motherhood as being oppressive, Da-Ai Drama depicts women in a different way and wins the hearts of the female audience. The strategic approach of Da-Ai Drama is successful in the sense that it appeals to a larger public by narrating the stories close to their daily experiences. Attracting a larger public in the first place, Da-Ai Drama offers a slightly different discourse based on the prevailing discourse on motherhood. The gender construction of the role of mothers is highly respected because of the Confucian teaching on filial piety. Da-Ai Drama uses this as an advantage and focuses on the selfless love and self-sacrificing efforts made by mothers. The narrative structure uses motherhood to pave the way for the leading characters' broader love in their Tzu-Chi careers. The secular understanding of motherhood makes it easier for the audience to understand and practise Buddhism.

Motherhood links the leading characters' secular roles to their religious embodiment as human Bodhisattvas. Tzu-Chi transforms the secular sense of family into a religious interpretation of dharma family. In the secular patriarchy, mothers are a tool to produce male heirs for the continuation of the patrilineage. The tool, motherhood, is empowered because mothers are responsible for bringing up the children, physically and mentally. Climbing up the hierarchy does not necessarily empower women because their highly revered status is guaranteed only when they fulfil their duties as keepers of the patriarchal tradition. Whilst mentally supporting and morally moulding the children, mothers are active agents in passing down the patriarchal tradition. In the process of passing down the tradition, mothers create and guard the tradition. They become the keepers of the tradition. This is manifested in the way mothers-in-law discipline daughters-in-law.

After fulfilling the secular duties as mothers, women return to the spiritual pursuit of the meaning of life. However, after a long time in marriages, it is not an easy task for women to enter an ordinary public sphere. A mother goddess becomes a bridge that links motherhood to the sacred search for the spiritual. Both motherhood and the mother goddess are represented as women without sexuality. That is, they have

transcended the secular boundary of gender attributes. Rather than being gender neutral, the mother goddess embodies both feminine and masculine gender attributes. The intertwining relationship between secular discourses and the sacred discourses makes it difficult to single Buddhist women out of their social contexts. Through analysing media representation, it can be argued that social contexts cannot be separated in the discussion of religious meanings and teachings.

Da-Ai Drama creates an image of human Bodhisattvas by adding new elements (toughness and braveness) to the existing discourse on motherhood. Transforming the secular practices of good moral conduct into religious practices of doing good deeds, Da-Ai Drama brings Buddhist doctrines into daily life. The patriarchal tradition is further reinforced by religious and media forces. However, the reinforcement of certain traditional values helps to empower women as well. Tzu-Chi's popular appeal among housewives is similar to the narrative structure of Da-Ai Drama. Unwilling to contradict or challenge the prevailing ideology, Tzu-Chi and Da-Ai Drama empower the subjugated discourse by adding new interpretations on top of it.

This chapter demonstrates gender construction via the fulfilment of various gender roles. The process can be complicated; therefore, the power dynamics are not a one-way flow but a multi-faceted one. This is not to argue that women's sufferings and oppression can be ignored, but to provide a further thought on the different aspects of this power mechanism. When studying Buddhist women in many parts of the world, the social context is interwoven with the religious context, adding more difficulties in fully understanding the power dynamics and women's oppression in a religious tradition. Although women's position in patriarchy is complicated (the oppressed and the oppressor at the same time), the one thing we can be sure about is Tzu-Chi's strategic approach in reversing the prevailing discourse. This could be a way for feminists to think beyond the elite framework and to negotiate a grassroots approach.

CHAPTER 6

Who is the Playwright of *LIFE IS A PLAY*?

“The script of this life is written by the past life. Although doing good deeds does not necessarily rid you of disasters and sufferings, it helps to accumulate the spiritual fruit of wisdom and happiness in the next life.” (My trans. *Tzu-Chi Monthly*, 461)⁸⁷

This quotation from Master Zheng-Yan helps Hung, Jin-Xian out of her pathetic situation. If life is a play, who is the playwright? Putting it in a Buddhist concept of reincarnation and causes and effects, our life and our destiny have already been written in the previous life. Whatever happens in this life is a result of the karmas, good or bad, in the previous life. We should always bear in mind that only by acting and doing good deeds in this life can we avoid the miseries happening again in this life and the next. The first part of this chapter presents secondary documents from the production end. The opinions on the production end show the preferred readings (Hall 2003) set up by Master Zheng-Yan as well as the production teams. The second part of this chapter presents the audience’s response from interviews and comments from online forums.

The first section on prime-time dramas provides a discourse on Da-Ai Drama as quality TV programmes in the commercial TV environment. Rather than watching Da-Ai Drama because of the religious orientation, some audiences watch it because of its quality compared with other prime-time dramas. The second section discusses the definition of religion in the Taiwanese context in which lay Buddhist practices are different from the academic construction. By showing the blurry line between the secular and the sacred, I would argue that the religious use of technology broadens the scope of religious studies to non-institutionally based and non-textual traditions. The third section shows the audience’s responses to Da-Ai Drama as a promotion of the Tzu-Chi organisation. The audience is well informed of the systems of the Tzu-Chi organisation as well as its agenda. There are critiques on the clichéd parts of the

⁸⁷人生舞台的劇本，是自己過去生寫下的；

今生做好事，未必能消災免難，卻能累積來生的福慧資糧

leading characters' participation in the Tzu-Chi organisation. The last section begins with the discussions of *Xi-gu A-ma*⁸⁸ in an online forum. The verisimilar scenes reinforce the discourse of realness and ordinariness which shows a nostalgic watching experience as well as generational differences. The narrative structure of Da-Ai Drama creates a saint-like image of the leading characters with a common touch by reiterating their ordinariness. The narrative pattern and the ordinariness make Da-Ai Drama an edutainment form of drama, allowing the audience to reflect their personal experiences upon the dramas.

Production End

This section presents views on Da-Ai Drama at the production end from interviews published in magazines and newspapers. Staying close to reality is the goal of Da-Ai Drama because it is the real life that Da-Ai Drama tries to present to the audience. I am not diminishing the important role of the production teams, but as I will discuss below the concept of "staying real" plays such an important part in Da-Ai Drama that I would like to focus on the story itself, rather than the dramatic elements added into the dramas. As I have already stated at the beginning of the previous chapter, "realness" is repeatedly mentioned and reinforced as an important part of the watching experience.

In a newspaper interview with Pang, Yi-an,⁸⁹ the manager of Department 1 of Da-Ai Drama, the reporter praises Pang's ability to make Da-Ai Drama one of the few quality TV programmes in Taiwan. By 2006, Da-Ai Drama attracted more than 800,000 viewers. Pang explains that Master Zheng-Yan's requirements and expectations of Da-Ai Drama are to write Tzu-Chi's own canons and to record the history of Tzu-Chi's volunteers. A more important mission for Da-Ai Drama is to purify people's minds and to lead them to the brighter side of humanity, through telling Tzu-Chi members' stories as a response to the chaotic capitalist media environment and a heavily consumerist society. Therefore, Pang spends time finding Tzu-Chi members' stories to tell (*Ming-Sheng Daily* 27.08.2006). The concept of purifying people's minds is embodied by the decision that Tzu-Chi's earnings from recycling work were used to fund the Da-Ai Channel from 2003 onwards.

⁸⁸ It is a drama that will be analysed in the next chapter.

⁸⁹ Pang, a Catholic, is the first female producer in the Taiwanese TV industry. Since retiring from TTV in 1998, she has devoted her passion for the TV industry to the Da-Ai TV networks.

“Master Zheng-Yan expects to extend this greener planet concept to greener minds. Environmental volunteers help to reduce the amount of rubbish by doing recycling work. As all the earnings go to fund Da-Ai TV, more people can transform their minds after watching it. This is: ‘Rubbish becomes gold. Gold becomes love. Love becomes a purifying stream that flows around the world’.” (*Tzu-Chi Monthly*, 451)

The Chinese name of Da-Ai means “Broader Love”. Therefore, it is love that the drama emphasises. Love and compassion are what drive the Bodhisattvas to help those who are suffering. In a later section on the audience’s response, most of the audience affirm the purifying power that Da-Ai Drama brings to their watching experience. The reason why Da-Ai Drama creates a positive watching experience is that it represents real-life stories. Sticking to Master Zheng-Yan’s instruction of “staying real” to the stories, Ho, Zhi-ling, the manager of Department 2 of Da-Ai Drama, tells a journalist about her thoughts on Da-Ai Drama. Although it is difficult to stick to the realness when adapting the real stories, Master Zheng-Yan believes that only the realness reflected in the dramas can make a *real* and positive impact on society. For Master Zheng-Yan, the positive impact is what media should do for society. For Ho, being wise in our lives is a lesson that is never taught in school and cannot be acquired simply by asking people (*Editing Association of R.O.C* Sep.2003). By producing real-life stories, the members of the audience are able to learn how to be wise. Although the audience may not have experienced much in real life, they have a chance to learn about wisdom by watching other people’s lives. Wisdom is a crucial element for Bodhisattva as well. The audience have a chance to learn the good or bad from these real stories and bring these watching experiences into action in daily life. A screen writer, Chen, Huei-ling who has written several scripts for Da-Ai Drama comments: “Real events are the thing that screen writers cannot create. That is why the audience can have a different watching experience” (*Tzu-Chi Monthly*, 451). It is the Tzu-Chi members’ life stories that lay down the basis for the screen writers. All the production teams do is to collect the stories and put them together for the purpose of broadcasting on TV.

In 2008, Director Chen, Huei-Ling, a 32-year-old woman, won ‘best director’ in the Golden Bell Award for the drama *Huang, Jin-Xian*. On stage, she humbly apologised to all the nominees who were well-known senior directors in the Taiwanese TV industry. In her speech, she thanked Master Zheng-Yan, the Tzu-Chi organisation, and Da-Ai TV where she had been working for ten years. The following year, her first commercial TV drama (labelled as an idol drama), *Next Stop, Happiness*, was launched on a

commercial TV network, TTV, and it achieved the highest ratings during its period of broadcasting. In an interview, Chen talks about how she found the story of *Huang, Jin-Xian* whilst she was filming documentaries about Tzu-Chi's environmental volunteers for another TV programme in the Da-Ai TV network. For Director Chen, Huang's story is touching because of its reality. Huang's life is more dramatic than any fictional drama or novel.

“Instead of seeing Huang's story as a grassroots drama, Chen thinks what she is filming is a romance. The leading character, Huang, Jin-Xian, loved her husband, despite his extramarital affairs and irresponsible behaviour towards his four disabled children. She struggled with negative emotions like jealousy, sadness, and pain for forty years. Finally, Huang learnt to “let go” of her persistence on love or hatred as she became a Tzu-Chi volunteer.” (My trans. *Yahoo News*, 17.10.2008)

In the story, the director emphasises Huang's love for her husband and Huang's ability to “let go” of her emotions and devotion to the religious activities. Although Huang suffered a lot from her husband's disloyalty, the director does not intend to portray Huang's husband as a bad man because there are more regrets than hatred in Huang's narration of the story. For Chen:

“Humanity is fragile and weak. Some people expose their fragility which causes suffering to people around them. However, we should be more objective and adjust to the way people interact with each other. By amending the interpersonal skills, we can avoid miseries in our lives. It is important, then, for people to watch real events in fictional dramas. By reflecting upon themselves whilst watching the dramas, the audience could be more tolerant and generous when facing the weakness and selfishness of humanity.” (My trans. *Tzu-Chi Newspaper*, 18.02.2008)

Chen's interpretation corresponds to Da-Ai's purpose of emphasising the bright side of humanity; that is, the leading characters' capabilities to cope with all kinds of difficulties in life. The purpose of exposing the misconduct of Huang's husband is an educational function to remind people not to make similar mistakes. From Chapter 5, the readers should be affected by the misconduct of the leading characters' husbands and the

leading characters' tolerance towards those misdeeds. Approaching the story from a realistic perspective, the production teams fail to place judgements on the men's misconduct whilst celebrating the women's toughness and tolerance. Director Chen's words tell us that she simply visualised the story as it was told by Huang. Huang's story demonstrates the Buddhist teaching of life; suffering. Da-Ai Drama is not satisfied at merely showing the audience that life is a pool of bitterness. It goes on to show the human ability to stand up for oneself and to help others who are suffering as well. Human strength and power to help oneself out of suffering exemplifies that the Buddha nature exists in human nature. Acting and thinking righteously help us to develop the wisdom to understand the causes and effects of suffering.

Using the concept of the First Noble Truth⁹⁰ to explain the 'bad guys' in Da-Ai Drama helps us to understand the religious messages it tries to convey. Rather than depicting these bad guys in a traditional narrative pattern, Da-Ai Drama does not make a judgement on them. They are functionally placed to show how the leading characters overcome difficult times and find spiritual relief in religious activities. Rather than blaming the leading characters' sufferings on their husbands, or the loss of her husband (in Xiu-Qing's case), Da-Ai Drama emphasises the transformation of the leading characters' thoughts. There is no sufferer behind the suffering. The suffering is real but the doer cannot be found. It relies on the sufferer to let go of the need to hate, love and so on.

Master Zheng-Yan has commented on *Ming-yue Zhao Hong-chen* which centres on A-Cua's tolerance towards her husband and the concubine. In Master Zheng-Yan's opinion:

"People in modern society lack tolerance, which is genuinely represented in *Ming-yue Zhao Hong-Chen* through A-Cua's attitude towards her husband and the concubine. The Da-Ai drama needs two elements: 'genuineness' and 'kindness'. Even though the drama is about a painful life or a life with a blurry line between right and wrong, it should be able to lead the audience towards experiencing the 'bitterness' of life and towards seeing the light of hope in the bitterness." (My trans. *Tzu-Chi Monthly*, 469)

Rather than seeing the leading character's sufferings from a secular point of view, Master Zheng-Yan approaches the problem by offering the Buddhist explanation. This is criticised by the feminist scholar Mei (1998), for promoting a conservative point of

⁹⁰ See Chapter 3 for the definitions and meanings of The Four Noble Truths.

view. Religious teachings are seen by some feminist scholars as conservative and backward. However, Cheng's (2008) case study shows how the male and female followers have active agency in interpreting 'sexist' texts. Facing the 'sexist' tradition and texts, both male and female followers offer more 'gender-neutral' interpretations. Cheng questions that if religion is so bad, why are women in it? Radical changes advocated by feminists attract fewer grassroots women than religious activities. Da-Ai Drama uses a similar strategy to embed Buddhist teachings in the dramas. In the concept of The Four Noble Truths, to be enlightened means to disrupt the bitterness of life and death. What draws sentient beings into reincarnation (the wheel of life and death), is a troubled mind, followed by bitterness. Take A-Cua as an example: although she gets her divorce, her generosity and kindness towards her children and mother-in-law unavoidably bind her to her divorced husband. As A-Cua is not able to run away from her family and, therefore, her divorced husband, what Master Zeng-Yan suggests is for her to change her mind and treat her divorced husband like everyone else, so that her life could become easier. Rather than telling the audience to put up with difficulties or unequal treatment they receive from other people, Da-Ai Drama shows the audience how other people experience bitterness in their lives and how they transcend their suffering to a spiritual and religious level.

The suffering and misery experienced in the first and the second phases of life are a way to experience the Buddhist doctrine that 'life is bitterness'. As the leading characters do not know the proper way to deal with the difficulties and misery in their lives, they place themselves in the vicious cycle of bitterness. When they encounter Tzu-Chi in the third phase of their lives, their confusion and troubles are wiped out. Realising that life is a pool of bitterness, the leading characters let go of their confused and troubled minds as an integrated process to reach enlightenment. Vowing to be Tzu-Chi's volunteers is a way to step onto the Bodhisattva's path. Emphasising the realness of each story broadcast, Da-Ai Drama transmits the Buddhist teachings, The Four Noble Truths, through telling real stories. The purpose of establishing Da-Ai Drama itself embodies the teachings of The Four Noble Truths. As Master Zheng-Yan advocates a 'this-worldly' Buddhism, the Bodhisattva's path should be understood differently from that in the Buddhist canon. Master Zheng-Yan secularises the concept of Bodhisattva and the Bodhisattva's path.

Audience End

Prime-time Dramas

Melodramatic prime-time dramas. As I have given a detailed account of the Taiwanese TV industry in Chapter 4, I will provide a brief section on audience response to prime-time TV dramas in this section. Why does Master Zheng-Yan want Da-Ai TV to be the purifying stream in the current media environment? During the process of collecting comments on Da-Ai TV, for my research, from online forums and various blogs, I discovered a tendency for people who watch Da-Ai Drama, or most younger people (assuming the internet users are the younger generation aged from 12-34 years⁹¹) to despise prime-time TV dramas, usually termed as grassroots dramas. In the Taiwanese TV industry, the most competitive advertising market for terrestrial and cable TV networks are the prime-time dramas (8-10 p.m. on weekdays) and the idol dramas (10-11.30 p.m. on Sundays). As I have mentioned in Chapter 4, the prime-time dramas are a major advertising market from the “Old Three” TV network period until the present day. Mandarin-oriented prime-time dramas give their way to Taiwanese-oriented prime-time dramas (*grassroots dramas*, hereafter).⁹² Within this competitive market (and the hidden political stance) of TV channels, two TV networks, FTV and SET, stand out. FTV and SET produce prime-time dramas in Taiwanese, which largely appeal to the older generation who did not grow up in the KMT education system and the working class who are used to speaking Taiwanese rather than Mandarin-Chinese. I have mentioned the environment of the prime-time TV market in Chapter 4 and I am going to focus on the audience response in this section to aid an understanding of Da-Ai Drama’s popularity in Taiwan. How does the audience response form a discourse for commercial TV dramas and Da-Ai Drama? This discourse helps us to understand the audience response.

While I was searching for online forums that discuss Da-Ai dramas, I found an online forum discussing Taiwanese TV dramas in general. Amongst many other topics, there was one topic asking the question: “What do you think about CTS deciding to

⁹¹ Statistics show that over 90% of the internet users are aged between 12-34 years (2010 TWNIC, Taiwan Network Information Centre).

⁹² Under the control of the KMT government, Taiwanese, as a language, was banned in public places; in order to solidify their political system, the KMT government announced that Mandarin-Chinese would be the official language. With the lift of martial law and under a government that encourages the subjectivity of Taiwanese, more and more TV programmes and dramas are made in Taiwanese.

broadcast Korean dramas during prime-time viewing?”⁹³ (twBBS.net.tw). Within this topic, there are opinions against broadcasting Korean dramas during prime time. There is a tendency for the users to criticise the grassroots dramas produced by FTV and SET. These dramas are termed as “unhealthy” and “melodramatic” and it is widely believed that these dramas only attract the older generation and those who are less educated. Korean and Japanese exported dramas are objected to because they do not represent the Taiwanese culture.⁹⁴ The grassroots dramas are criticised because of the low quality and ridiculous plots.

In another online forum, a topic on “Taiwanese prime-time TV dramas~ progress or regression?” is intensely debated. A user (starstarse) sees prime-time TV dramas as a retrogressive step because s/he used to be a big fan of prime-time TV dramas in the nineties when Taiwanese prime-time TV dramas were in their heyday. Both Mandarin-oriented and Taiwanese-oriented dramas were produced. Various genres, from historical dramas to modern day romances were covered. However, within a decade, the market was monopolised by grassroots dramas. “OMG! Such a dramatic change leaves me at a loose end. Take the prime-time dramas from *channel numeric*⁹⁵ as an example: all the dramas end up having plots containing gangs, drugs, robberies and conspiracies” (30.11.2007). The rating success of grassroots dramas on FTV and SET TV beats other genres of drama for prime-time TV. Therefore, grassroots dramas become mainstream. Several responses agree with the fact that these dramas include too many violent scenes. One of the users (212649) points out a phenomenon of Taiwanese prime-time dramas, as follows:

“Some TV channels just change the title of the dramas and the names of the characters but the plots remain the same. The actors and actresses are always the same from the beginning of the year to the end. They are not satisfied until they play the roles from grandparents to grandchildren. Apart from being violent, clichéd and melodramatic, these dramas cannot transfer any cultural values to the audience.” (13.02.2008)

⁹³ For a long time, prime-time dramas were produced by TV networks themselves using Mandarin-Chinese or Taiwanese.

⁹⁴ However, the circulation of media products and pop culture gradually formed a Pan-Asian identity. Korean and Japanese dramas are famous in other parts of Asia; so are Taiwanese pop culture and idol dramas.

⁹⁵ The Chinese name of SET TV consists of a number; therefore, channel numeric is a hidden implication for online users to avoid any legal problems.

Expecting prime-time dramas to be something more than mere entertainment after dinner, the online users seem to expect something local with cultural values or educational functions. The lack of legal regulation enables the TV networks to cut down production fees by importing dramas from other countries. Despite the fact that the audience wants quality-made local dramas rather than Korean or Japanese dramas, commercial TV networks have to respond to the economic recession by broadcasting Korean dramas, Japanese dramas, or Chinese dramas. Among the commercial TV networks, FTV and SET are the only two TV networks that insist on producing their own dramas which are labelled grassroots dramas.⁹⁶ Although the target audience of the grassroots dramas is limited to a certain group of people, it constitutes a large percentage of the prime-time TV market.

When asked why she chose to watch Da-Ai dramas, an interviewee answered:

“Personally, I think other prime-time dramas are ridiculous. I can’t watch them alone. It’s fun when you watch them with others. I visit my natal family once a year. It’s interesting to watch the dramas with them because you can predict the plot since the same drama is still on. But, in fact, I think they are useless for society. I would say, for several years, the dramas have made society more and more materialistic. I mean, how is it possible for everyone to be as rich as any of these characters? It’s not realistic. Anyway, it’s just hilarious!” [Laughter] (Yuan-Yuan)

Nowadays, grassroots dramas represent the prime-time TV market. The problem with these dramas is that the genre is fixed and there are not any serious social issues discussed in them. The dramas contain strong language and ridiculous plots (e.g. people can die and revive again without any plausible reason). In such a media context arises Da-Ai Drama. As an overseas student, I travel back home once a year. When I left for the U.K. in 2006, there was a new prime-time drama launched on SET TV, and my parents watched it after they finished viewing the forty-five minute Da-Ai drama each day. A year later, on my first day home, I spent time watching the Da-Ai drama with my parents, trying so hard to figure out what was going on on the screen. After forty-five minutes, I only had a vague picture of the drama and decided to give up Da-

⁹⁶ At the time of my writing this, there is a new Mandarin prime-time drama, 飯糰之家, broadcasting in Taiwan and its ratings are not too bad.

Ai drama until the next drama was on. What surprised me afterwards was the fact that my parents switched to SET TV and THAT drama (launched a year ago) was still on. The maddest part was when my parents spent ten minutes explaining the plots from the past year to me; I CAUGHT onto the plot without any problem. I left the room, puzzled at my ability to understand Da-Ai dramas in forty-five minutes and the ease with which to catch a grassroots drama in ten minutes. What is the difference between Da-Ai Drama and any other commercially-oriented grassroots drama? This is the key point why Da-Ai Drama insists on broadcasting these stories which are based on real events with minimal adaptations.

Despite the fact that grassroots dramas from FTV and SET attracted (or “kidnapped”, as termed by many internet users), a large section of the audience, the viewers have gradually turned their backs on these dramas. The simple fact that housewives have to do household chores and people have to get ready for the next day’s work may prevent the audience from sitting in front of the TV set for two hours every day. The simple fact that an episode of Da-Ai Drama is a lot shorter than an episode of commercial prime-time dramas does not sound attractive enough to catch the audience’s attention and glue their eyes to it for forty-five consecutive minutes without switching to other channels. As a later section will show, there are several reasons why the audience chooses Da-Ai Drama, a TV programme embedded with religious agenda. First of all, there is the *realness* and *genuineness* of the stories that are broadcast. The reconstructed reality makes the audience feel closer to their daily lives. The sense of plainness and simplicity is seldom seen in most commercial TV dramas. The issues discussed in the dramas are close to the audience’s lives. Secondly, Da-Ai Drama is quality TV; dramas that aim to bring the brighter side of humanity to the audience. As I have mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, Da-Ai Drama aims to provide a correct media environment for the audience. A non-commercial channel guarantees its quality and the contents without commercial interests. Thirdly, Da-Ai Drama offers the audience a chance to reflect on their daily experiences both whilst watching and afterwards. This is why I see the watching experience as a new way to practise Buddhism. The teachings of the Noble Eightfold Path⁹⁷ allow the followers to be practiced in daily life. These elements that attract the audience influence how the audience perceive the dramas and the representation of Tzu-Chi’s agenda. I will first discuss why the audience prefer Da-Ai Drama to grassroots dramas in the prime-time battlefield.

⁹⁷ See Chapter 3 on *The Four Noble Truths*.

Shorter broadcasting time. Back in the “Old Three” TV network period, prime-time dramas were broadcast for an hour (8.00 p.m.-9.00 p.m.) on weekdays. With the liberal policy of cable TV systems, the competitive markets started to prolong the broadcasting hours of prime-time dramas. Gradually, the broadcasting hour was lengthened to ninety minutes. It has become two hours and ten minutes nowadays. One of the appeals of Da-Ai Drama is its shorter broadcasting time, forty-five minutes a day. Although each Da-Ai Drama consists of more than forty episodes, each episode is no longer than forty-five minutes. A shorter broadcasting time every day prolongs the broadcasting period of each drama. Therefore, the population of the audience can be consolidated and expanded. One of the interviewees started to watch Da-Ai Drama six months before the interview. As a housewife, she is used to watching TV at prime time. When asked why she started to watch Da-Ai Drama, she answered:

“I accidentally switched to the Da-Ai channel and started watching Da-Ai Drama. Personally, I think there are too many advertisements in other prime-time dramas. I couldn’t stand them because I had to sit there watching a drama episode for such a long time (two hours). When flipping through the remote control, I stopped for a while at a Da-Ai drama which had a nice plot and I kind of stuck with Da-Ai.” (Ling)

For Hsieh-Ling, watching prime-time dramas is a habit and an entertainment; therefore, she does not spend too much time on it. What attracts her to Da-Ai drama is its short length of broadcasting. Taking a short break from household chores, Da-Ai drama fits in with her need for entertainment.

Responding to the debates on the length of prime-time TV dramas (from one hour to two hours), an internet user (shew) argues: “Responding to the debates on two hours or ninety minutes [about the length of prime-time TV dramas], I think Da-Ai Drama has proved that as long as the quality is good, even a short period of forty-five minutes without commercial advertisements can have a long-lasting impact on the audience” (17.09.2008).

Insisting on its non-commercial orientation, Da-Ai Drama has its own broadcasting schedule. Different from commercial TV networks, Da-Ai Drama is broadcast at prime time for a length of forty-five minutes every day, seven days a week. Without the

disturbance of commercial TV advertisements, Da-Ai Drama offers the audience an exclusive indulgence in its quality dramas. The short length of broadcasting time without commercial advertisements is one of the reasons why Da-Ai's audience numbers are growing. Within the forty-five minutes, the audience can leave the real world behind but engage in the world Da-Ai Drama creates. Strategically speaking, the absence of advertising leaves the audience no chance to switch to other channels. The non-commercial environment enables the audience to fully immerse themselves in the nostalgic feelings.

Quality TV Dramas. Although Da-Ai TV is not a major commercial TV network, its quality on TV programmes is acknowledged and recognised. It is not a religious channel that limits itself to a narrow group of followers, neither is it a channel that provides cheap programmes. The exclusively occupied prime-time TV market not only raises concerns from the audience but also from the actors, actresses and the production teams. Mainstream prime-time dramas are Taiwanese-oriented without serious social concerns. Therefore, actors and actresses who do not speak Taiwanese find it difficult to survive in the TV industry. Production teams that used to produce dramas with strong social concerns find it too limited for their talents. The length of commercial dramas squeezes other slots; therefore, less and less different genres of dramas are needed. In a report on the Taiwanese TV environment at the end of 2008, the editors pointed out a tendency for the non-grassroots drama actors, actresses, and production teams to choose non-commercial TV networks such as Da-Ai TV, Public TV, or Hakka TV,⁹⁸ as an alternative (Tivo, *2008 Media and Entertainment Observation*). More and more less-commercially-oriented production teams turn to non-commercial TV networks. As a result, more and more of the audience are aware of these quality dramas broadcast in the prime-time slot. Being tired of grassroots dramas or Korean dramas, the audience finds non-commercial TV networks a better option to commercial TV networks. Apart from the time length, Da-Ai Drama is well-known for its quality. For the audience, Da-Ai Drama is different from other commercial prime-time dramas because of its quality in terms of actors, actresses, directors, and screenplays. The quality and the indigenous Taiwanese elements in the dramas are the main appeal of Da-Ai Drama.

⁹⁸ As a part of Public TV Networks, Hakka TV targets Taiwanese who speak Hakka and its dramas are of high quality.

An internet user (sweet330) comments on Da-Ai Drama as follows:

“I used to ‘think’ all the dramas on the Da-Ai channel were boring but I changed my mind once I watched it. The actors and actresses interpret the characters carefully so that I enjoy the plots pretty much. Rather than having plots like conspiracies in other commercial dramas, there are more caring and loving plots in Da-Ai Drama.” (28.11.2007)

Most of the commercial prime-time dramas are criticised for having violent scenes or melodramatic scenes that are too exaggerated. Da-Ai Drama offers the opposite due to its religious orientation of Da-Ai TV.

“I think the quality of Da-Ai Drama is good and there is a big difference between Da-Ai Drama and other prime-time dramas. Probably because it is based on real events so the stories are closer to our daily experiences. It's not like those TV dramas that have exaggerated plots.” (channey 09.04.2008)

A blogger posted a comment after watching *Ming-yue Zhao Hong-chen*, s/he puts forward the most common critique of Da-Ai drama:

“There are people who feel that Da-Ai Drama is way too romantic, not in the sense of romance, but in the sense that you start to doubt whether these kinds of selfless people really exist in the world? To be honest, I doubt that as well (with an embarrassed smile.) However, rather than watching dramas that depict weird relationships, competitive business environments, and violent gang fights, it is better to watch pure and simple dramas that aim to provide a brighter side of humanity.” (Fangsblog.pinet.net 20.11.2005)

Da-Ai Drama's quality can be seen in the screenplays and the actors. The plots and the stories are attractive to the audience because they are ordinary and they are real stories compared with commercial prime-time dramas which are fictional and exaggerated. The main purpose of Da-Ai TV is to provide dramas based on reality that

can have a positive impact on society. A later section will discuss how the audience responds to the reconstructed reality and its impact. Real life stories can be boring, but Da-Ai Drama reflects historical changes as well as life changes.

Religion

As a warm-up question, I asked each interviewee to talk about their religious activities and their attitudes towards religion. This could help us understand the religious context in which the Tzu-Chi organisation belongs. Also, this could help us to understand why I see Da-Ai Drama as a field of religious practice. Most importantly, this section shows people's perceptions on religion which are different from the definition of religions under the framework of religious studies.

Definition of Religion. Most of the interviewees do not have a regular habit of visiting temples, reading Buddhist texts, or listening to Buddhist lectures. For them, religion is meant to have a positive impact on society rather than an institutionally based organisation or regularly practised rituals. Chen, a retired civil servant, identifying himself as a Buddhist, says:

“...listen[s] to Buddhist canons and doctrines in Buddhist halls. As I am lazy, I listen to Buddhist masters' interpretations on Buddhist canons on different Buddhist channels.”

Chen acknowledges that the convenience of technology allows him to learn and practise Buddhism via watching TV. For him, it does not matter which religion you believe in, religion matters in the sense that:

“...without a spiritual reliance, you are like a lost boat sailing in the ocean. And you won't be able to know the meaning of your life.”

Religion is not about salvation after death. It is understood to be a spiritual journey towards the meaning of life. The Third Noble Truth teaches Buddhists to know about the origin of sufferings. The causes and effects of sufferings are the causes and effects

of life. Instead of seeing religion as a salvation after death, religion is a “this-worldly” solution to the meaning of life. Terming herself as a Buddhist, Lin spends time learning the proper way to worship Buddha in a Buddhist hall. Having a Christian daughter and a Daoist mother-in-law, Lin chose to be a Buddhist because:

“Buddhist rituals look graceful. They are so different from Daoist rituals because there are fewer offerings⁹⁹ needed in Buddhist rituals. [...] At the moment, I buy some flowers and fruit to offer my worship fortnightly.¹⁰⁰ By doing this, I feel like there is a spiritual reliance in my mind.”

The supporting power of religions is what comforts a confused mind and leads it onto the right path. Emphasising the importance of having a spiritual reliance in the mind, Lin is tolerant to different religions as long as there is a sense of belonging, a place to rely on. Again, the spiritual comforts and reliance are emphasised. Admitting her lack of knowledge in Buddhist canons, Lin’s central understanding of Buddhism is to have a merciful and compassionate heart. As the Tzu-Chi organisation places less emphasis on canonical texts and more on *action*, Lin’s attitude reflects the attitude of lay Buddhists. Despite the fact that there are many great scholars in Buddhist canons and studies on Buddhist women in canons and the monastic, the real life of lay Buddhist women is rarely discussed and explored. Da-Ai Drama records the daily life of lay Buddhist women which shows a different view on lay Buddhist women.

In Hsieh’s interview, she mentions how the screen writers put *Still Thoughts* into lines and responds to the leading characters’ confusion and troubles. Yo likes the fact that *Still Thoughts* “do not contain a heavy Buddhist message; however it strikes into your heart”. As *Still Thoughts* are Master Zheng-Yan’s teachings on daily life, James finds them “interesting because any random sentence you pick on, answers your troubling mind. From my [James] understanding, we have too many troubles and confusion so any single sentence in *Still Thoughts* gives you an answer. It’s like Buddhist doctrines in a daily way.” Lay Buddhists tend to prefer Buddhist teachings in an easy-to-understand language which tackle daily-life issues that they encounter.

⁹⁹ Traditional folk religious rituals require lots of offerings.

¹⁰⁰ It is a tradition to offer worship or hold a religious ritual at home fortnightly but not a compulsory process.

(NathanLee) in his blog comments on *Ming-yue zhao hong-chen* when the plot starts to bring in religious elements:

“Religion has a power to purify people’s minds. I start to realise what that means. After suffering from all the miseries, A-Cua devotes herself to religious services and activities. It reminded me of a senior when I saw A-Cua faithfully worshipping the Buddha in the temple. The senior had an unhappy marriage so she had relied on religious power for years, hoping to attain tranquility and reliance in her mind.” (22.11.2005)

When I told one of my interviewees that young people believe in love more than religion, she smiled and told me: “...because you have never been through difficult times.” For my interviewees, religion is the light that guides people through the darkness in life.

Religion is a spiritual reliance to offer an explanation on the meaning of life. For the audience, religion aims to bring a spiritual reliance to human beings and, therefore, sort out people’s confusion in this life. What they perceive as a proper religion does not consist of complicated rituals or teachings. Religions are seen as spiritual powers that make a positive impact on human beings. The elite Buddhism, relying on the teachings in canonical texts, is transformed into several simple concepts in daily-practised lay Buddhism. The lay Buddhists inherit the essential elements from Buddhist texts and interweave the prevailing social discourses, Confucian ethics, into the religious practices. The religious practices seem to be flexible for lay Buddhists. This is why I argue in Chapter 3 that a text-based study of religion cannot reflect the daily experiences of lay people in various contexts.

Da-Ai Channel. Having participated in Yi-guan-Dao¹⁰¹ and Daoist activities, Yuan is now more interested in Buddhism. As well as reading a lot of different Buddhist canons, Yuan watches a lot of Buddhist channels. In the interview, she clearly distinguishes different teachings from different Buddhist masters on Buddhist channels. As for the Da-Ai channel:

¹⁰¹ Yi-guan-dao [一貫道] is a religious mixture of Daoism, Confucianism, Buddhism and Christianity. It became popular in Taiwan in the 1990s. Weller’s empirical experiences with “the Way of Unity” (Yi-guan-dao) shows that most of the religious sects promote traditional and conservative values such as filial piety, respect for authority and hierarchies. This is a kind of religious revival of Confucian values in modern society. (1999, 92)

“Master Zheng-Yan’s Da-Ai channel, the meaning of Da-Ai is like...When you have more contact and watch it more often, you will know what Master Zheng-Yan wants. She is open-minded so she wants her disciples, unlike chanting sutras, to spread the better merits without asking anything back. Just *do it*.”

Listening to Master Zheng-Yan’s lectures on the Da-Ai channel, Yuan is touched “because she has different topics and she covers international issues as well everyday ones.” Seeing the deep connection between Master Zheng-Yan and her followers, mostly lay people, Yuan is touched by their corporation as an embodiment of Bodhisattva.

“The most precious part about Tzu-Chi is how her followers follow her without complaints. She has been emphasising the ideal of Bodhisattva. Although Tzu-Chi has branches worldwide, she doesn’t have to do it personally. It’s all her disciples’ efforts. And I admire her persistence the most.”

Yuan points out the narrative pattern of Da-Ai Drama:

“It teaches people that no matter how difficult your life is, you have to give out and help others. The dramas are telling the same story. The stories start from a difficult life, through a transformation [of meeting Tzu-Chi], the leading characters lead a better life.”

An internet user (kirkkirkkk) has the same point of view:

“In general, Da-Ai Drama doesn’t have ridiculous plots like other prime-time dramas. It is reasonable, actors wise and plots wise. This is what Taiwanese dramas should be. Maybe there are people who question why the leading characters always get involved in Tzu-Chi in the last part of the dramas. It’s nothing more than a transformation in the mind. If you look into the leading characters’ hearts, you’ll find a trace.” (13.04.2007)

Yuan and (kirkkirkkk) point out the essential concept of Da-Ai Drama. The transformation of the leading character's life does not come from the Tzu-Chi organisation or Master Zheng-Yan; the transformation comes from the leading character's willingness to give out what they have, without asking any rewards in return. Using a famous story in Buddhist canons, Yuan believes that Da-Ai Drama advocates the idea of giving out. That is to "let go" of the desire for material wealth. To give away material wealth earns back spiritual comfort and happiness. In the Buddhist concept, people who are having a poor material life in this life are doing so as a result of the bad karmas from the last life. In order to improve their merits in this life and the next, poor people have to make every effort to share what they have left. Gradually, the good karma will come back to them. Therefore, a better 'this life' will result in a better 'next life'.

Da-Ai Drama's Appeal. The docudrama form of Da-Ai Drama means that real stories are acted out by actors and actresses. Using well-known actors and actresses from across the generations, increases the appeal of Da-Ai Drama.

A nineteen-year-old internet user (dar5103) posted an article on her watching experiences:

I'm a nineteen-year-old student. I seldom watch Da-Ai but I accidentally switched to Da-Ai several weeks ago. I was attracted by the leading actresses. Lin, wei-jun's performance from an idol drama actress to Da-Ai is impressive. Li, jia-ying's performance is natural and fascinating. To be honest, I started watching the drama when I first saw these two beautiful actresses. However, it's a delicate drama that reflects the real aspect of society. Before this, I only watched idol dramas. I was deeply touched by Da-Ai Drama. I wish more young people like me would care more about society." (30.06.2009)

Being attracted by young idol drama actresses in the first place, the audience starts to appreciate the quality and the agenda of Da-Ai Drama. Another internet user (jinger1219) is attracted by watching the same drama (dar5103):

“I have known about Da-Ai Drama for a while and it wins a lot of TV awards. However, I always thought it was a channel which preached Buddhism. I can't be bothered to watch it anyway.”

However, when she sees the drama, she is attracted by the relationships between parents and children depicted in it:

“It represents the relationships between teachers and students as well as parents and children in a realistic way. I am sympathetic to the topic. The relationship between parents and children is a difficult lesson to learn. The drama helps me learn about the way to communicate with parents as a child. What is more, the drama helps me learn about the way to interact with my children [in the future]” (25.07.2009)

Da-Ai Drama has attracted the younger generation by using younger actors and actresses. If Da-Ai Drama was in the traditional form of documentaries or reality shows, the appeal would be reduced. Instead of becoming a narrow-casting channel, the target audience is much broader than other religious channels because of the success of Da-Ai Drama. Reported to have beaten several commercial TV networks in the prime-time slot, Da-Ai TV is a well-known TV channel in Taiwan.

Promotion of the Tzu-Chi Organisation. Using a docudrama format, Da-Ai Drama uses documentary clips or film of voluntary work in Tzu-Chi's headquarters or branches to let the audience know more about the organisation. What does the audience think about the promotion of the organisation?

“Da-Ai Drama is good and the quality is good. It can easily touch your heart, apart from the part where they all participate in the Tzu-Chi organisation.” (jessielee428 21.11.2007)

“Da-Ai Drama is good in general although I wouldn't watch it episode by episode when it goes to the Tzu-Chi part. It is good overall. [...] the ordinariness is what touches your heart.” (sonichiro 21.11.2007)

As Da-Ai Drama is about the Tzu-Chi senior members' life stories, the latter half of the stories focuses on the devotion to Tzu-Chi's voluntary work. Although most of the audience does not like the depiction of Tzu-Chi in the leading characters' stories, there are exceptions when the production teams cleverly embed Tzu-Chi's agenda in the dramas. Commenting on *Xi-gu A-ma*, an internet user (shew) shows her preference of director Deng's dramas on the Da-Ai channel. In (shew)'s opinion: "...the greater love in director Deng's drama does not idolise Tzu-Chi. It tries to internalise Master Zheng-Yan's spirit and makes it more touching." Most of the internet users think it is boring when the plots go to the leading character's work in the Tzu-Chi organisation. "The latter part makes every drama look similar because there are too many promotions and recommendations for Tzu-Chi's agenda," says an internet user (w2088d). However, s/he finds *Huang, Jin-Xian* fascinating because "...the director weaves Tzu-Chi's greater love and agenda into the plots. You don't feel that it is preaching to you."

A famous internet writer, Jui-Ba-Dao, writes an article *Consuming Sorrows* as a response to a drama which is about the body donation of a university student. In this article, he sharply points out the weakness of Da-Ai Drama, hoping that his critique will improve Da-Ai Drama:

"Every drama produced by the Da-Ai channel has its good intentions and it has a positive impact on society. However, the fact that the screen writers spend too much time on educating people is a shame. Instead of stuffing all the moral lessons into a short story, what a good fable needs is to tell the story in a good way, leaving room for people to look for the meanings by themselves. If preaching is inevitable, the balance should be carefully scaled to avoid too much lecturing damaging the normal narrative structures. The worst situation comes from a redundant and repetitious recommendation. The preaching becomes exhausting to the audience. I believe that is not the intention of the Tzu-Chi organisation." (*China Times* 13.08.2006)

Seeing the Da-Ai channel as a Buddhist channel, my interviewee, Hsieh, believes it is a channel that uses daily life stories to preach Buddhist doctrines.

“It’s like an ad but advertisements are commercial. If it is for commercial interests, I wouldn’t term Da-Ai as an advertisement. If it is for the benefit of all sentient beings, not for personal interest, not for generating wealth, I would say it’s an advertisement for the common good of everyone. It is like they are spreading Buddhist doctrines and introducing the Tzu-Chi cult to the world.” (Hsieh)

Da-Ai Drama is a religious response to a complicated media environment that has relied too much on commercial interests. It is a cultural response to a liberal economic market that has forgotten the central doctrine of cultural industries. A phenomenal success of a local religious TV network is not just an accident. It reflects what society needs in an age bombarded with information; that is, simplicity and naturalness. Simplicity and naturalness are part of the agenda of the Tzu-Chi organisation. By using ordinary life stories to appeal to the audience, Da-Ai Drama wishes to transmit Tzu-Chi’s central agenda to the audience and spread it to the whole of society.

One interviewee informs me about being “brainwashed” by Da-Ai Drama on the issue of body donation. Chapter 3 presented Chang and Leung’s (2005) study on Tzu-Chi’s media approach to body donation. Their study has not covered the TV aspect of Tzu-Chi’s media usage. Yuan is impressed by several dramas on body donation:

“Through the broadcasting of Da-Ai Drama, it is more efficient because less volunteers are needed [to persuade the donor’s family]. TV broadcasting can be more effective in the sense that when there are similar occasions in the future, people are already aware of the option [of body donation].”

Body donation is an important agenda in Tzu-Chi’s medical mission. By broadcasting dramas on body donation, Da-Ai TV perfectly transmits one of Tzu-Chi’s most important agendas to the audience via the power of media. Not only do the dramas educate the audience about the concept of body donation, but they also show the audience the process and rituals of it. Although body donation is against traditional Confucian values, Tzu-Chi manages to add a religious sense to this secular practice. This example of body donation shows that Tzu-Chi uses Da-Ai Drama to let the public know about different facets of Tzu-Chi’s charity work and social services. Da-Ai Drama

is a platform to inform the public what Tzu-Chi does as well as Master Zheng-Yan's teachings on *action*."

Liu, one of my interviewees, is a fifty-year-old housewife who has never participated in any Tzu-Chi activities. However, when asked about the Tzu-Chi organisation, she could talk fluently about Master Zheng-Yan's central doctrines without any problem:

"You begin to know what Tzu-Chi is about. Although they raise funds from people, Master Zheng-Yan earns her own living. She earns her own living just through her publications and the monastics earn their own living by working by themselves. All the donations go to hospital building and disaster relief. Only by doing this can they influence people's lives. It's not like other temples which use the donations to build glamorous temples."
(Liu)

Being a full-time housewife, Liu has to stay at home to take care of her mother-in-law. Although she has never been to a Tzu-Chi branch, or participated in any Tzu-Chi activities, Liu admires Master Zheng-Yan and really hopes she will have a chance to visit Tzu-Chi's headquarters some day in the future."

An internet user (chloe5678) comments on one of the Da-Ai dramas s/he watches:

"It's the first time I have watched a Da-Ai drama from the first episode to the last so I know how Tzu-Chi works now. And I realise that it isn't an easy job to do good deeds because you need to win people's hearts and let them have a delightful heart to do it. First of all, you have to change yourself. That is why *shi-jies*¹⁰² always mention 'practice'. Shi-xung and shi-jie are not born to be kind and generous. It's just that they are willing to change themselves and be better people. I think what Da-Ai Drama emphasises is not how good 'Tzu-Chi' is but how to transmit the concept of 'goodness' to everyone." (02.01.2009)

¹⁰² Tzu-Chi members call female members *shi-jie* [師姊] and male members *shi-xung* [師兄], indicating that they are in the same (Buddhist) school.

Although there are many people who criticise the last half of Da-Ai Drama as a pure advertisement for the Tzu-Chi organisation, it is Tzu-Chi's strategy to spread its agenda, as well as its systems, through Da-Ai Drama. By showing Tzu-Chi's voluntary work and how the organisation works, Da-Ai Drama is a platform for the audience to know more about the Tzu-Chi organisation. The participants know more about the organisation while the broader public starts to know about it. The media used by Tzu-Chi helps the audience to know where the donations go and how they help people. Yao participates in many aspects of voluntary work in the Tzu-Chi organisation. Beginning as a member who donates monthly, Yao feels comfortable with the Tzu-Chi organisation because she thinks all the donations should "be used appropriately." Seeing the reports on Tzu-Chi's activities, Yao is "willing to participate in Tzu-Chi's activities because it is *doing* something". She is a volunteer in Tzu-Chi's hospitals and she helped with disaster relief for the 921 earthquake. What she feels about Tzu-Chi is that "it does not waffle on about its contributions but to *do* things."

Da-Ai Drama

Xi-gu A-ma. What happens when the drama is blurred with the reality? In my research on the Internet, I found a forum where the Tzu-Chi members in North California discussed *Xi-gu A-ma*. As an audience, I have a sense of how Xiu-Qing takes care of the Taiwanese in North California. Being an international student in the U.K. enables me to experience the warmth these people feel from Xiu-Qing. While watching the drama, my tears fell when I saw Xiu-Qing preparing meals for her children and the Tzu-Chi members in the States. When I saw the online forum, sharing the members' memories about Xiu-Qing through watching the drama, I was impressed by the deep connection between Xiu-Qing and the members. Furthermore, the blurry line between the drama and the reality enables me to engage and involve myself more deeply into the story. The drama is no longer a drama for entertainment. It becomes a part of the audience's life and it is a part of Taiwanese history as well. This short section uses *Xi-gu A-ma* and its audience from the branch to exemplify how the fictional blurs with reality.

Commenting on the first episode, (Bob) said:

“Life is really interesting!¹⁰³ After watching the first episode, I feel like I have seen A-ma again. I feel like she is welcoming us with her beautiful smile and calling us for the meal in a gentle voice. She guides us with her kind and compassionate heart.” (17.09.2008)

At the time of broadcasting, Xiu-Qing had been dead for years but watching the dramas reminded the members of her. The person (Jia-jia) who wrote the biography of Xiu-Qing posted her appreciation of the production team on the forum. Watching the first episode three times, she thinks “...the director and the screen writer are amazing because the presentation is way beyond my imagination”. She hopes that “...with the drama, everyone could know more about Xiu-Qing as well as the history of Taiwan. This is the reason why I wrote the biography.” (19.09.2008) As an audience, I did come to realization when I saw the depiction of Xiu-Qing’s second eldest brother’s democracy activities. Her life was interwoven with much of the early modern history in Taiwan. What I learnt from the drama is a grassroots point of view on Taiwan’s history. What impresses me is Xiu-Qing’s brothers’ urge to free women from the bad practice of fostered daughter-in-law. This is what I have never read in a text book. Wouldn’t it be an important part of women’s history as well as a model for local feminist movements, although it was led by male intellectuals? Responding to (Jia-jia)’s hope to let more people know about Taiwanese history, another person (Ming-Jin)¹⁰⁴ posted a short comment on how he came to know about the important history of charity work in Taiwan after watching the first few episodes.¹⁰⁵ There are so many facets of society to explore but so little media representation on it.

When the plot moves to the part where Xiu-Qing starts to *do* Tzu-Chi in the States, the storylines multiply. More and more stories about Tzu-Chi members in the Valley Area are told. For members who followed Xiu-Qing to visit the nursing homes, the scenes remind them of what they did in the past. As for newcomers, stories of each member enable them to know more about each member. Watching the drama becomes a way to connect with senior members in the branch. (Jia-ying) sums up these stories as follows:

¹⁰³ This is Xiu-Qing’s favourite quote and reflects her attitude towards life.

¹⁰⁴ Ming-Jin is an important character who appears in the latter half of the drama.

¹⁰⁵ Xiu-Qing’s third eldest brother helps the homeless in an asylum established by his friend. And that is an important part of the history of charity in Taiwan.

"I feel sorry that there are so many stories I don't know about the members. I hope to know more about the softest part inside every member's heart. Only by knowing the part that needs love most can I care and love every member like my own family members." (29.10.2008)

Her comment shows how the members love each other like a family. Those stories are about the members' difficult pasts or the mistakes they had made before. What touches my heart and probably many people's hearts is their willingness to expose their weaknesses and to amend their mistakes. Upon seeing this short comment, I came to understand why these stories are appealing and why they can tug at the heartstrings of the audience. Without placing an evil guy or placing judgement on any character, Da-Ai Drama shows the most genuine part of humanity; toughness and weakness alike. Life can be complicated and difficult. It is our weakness and toughness that decide the attitude we adopt to cope with different situations in life. By showing the real events and adding the least dramatic elements, Da-Ai Drama presents stories for the audience to know more about humanity. Only when people are willing to face their own weaknesses and strengthen their resolve to overcome them can they bring happiness to people around them. Furthermore, when seeing similar difficulties people have been through, the audience have a chance to reflect on themselves and make a better decision. On the other hand, the lack of criticism on the 'bad' or 'evil' guys is seen as encouraging or promoting traditional values such as tolerance and so on. As I have argued in Chapter 3, the media approach to Tzu-Chi does not want to severely attack or critique the prevailing ideology. This strategy can be read as conservative but its appeal to the public cannot be underestimated.

(Bob) shows his appreciation at the end of the broadcasting of *Xi-gu A-ma*:

"Thanks to director Deng's production team. They presented such a good quality Da-Ai Drama. And thanks to Jia-jia *shi-jie* for writing down A-ma's rich and classic life journey. Having watched *Xi-gu A-ma* for a month, I was aware of unforgettable memories coming out along with the plots. In the beautiful melody of *Yu-ye-hua*,¹⁰⁶ my homesickness burst forth. I started to miss my hometown, family and friends. When I saw A-ma's childhood living

¹⁰⁶ *Yu-ye-hua* [雨夜花] was a song for children originally, but as the children under Japanese colonisation no longer sang songs in Taiwanese, an intellectual rewrote the lyrics of the song. The lyrics metaphorically express Taiwanese oppression under Japanese government.

in Da-dao-cheng,¹⁰⁷ it reminded me of the temples and shops 'cause I spent my childhood in that area as well. Complicated emotions came to me when I saw Dr. Lin's¹⁰⁸ absence at his father's funeral. It might have been my dad's 'particular arrangement' for me to join Tzu-Chi and start a good karma with A-ma." (05.11.2008)

Indeed, for people who know the leading characters, their memories come flooding back. For others who do not know the leading characters, the story is still touching because of their similar experiences. As a way to memorise Xiu-Qing, (Bob) says:

"...although A-ma left us a long time ago, she seems to be here with us. Whenever I hear the greetings of the children in Tzu-Chi's Chinese school, I think one of them might be A-ma who has come back to practise Bodhisattva's path for the suffering sentient beings."¹⁰⁹

Feeling honoured that his story is presented in the latter part of *Xi-gu A-ma*, (Minjing) humbly thanks the drama because their stories:

"...represent many *shi-xung* and *shi-jie* who have made great contributions to Tzu-Chi. Being a part of the story and showing themselves to Tzu-Chi members worldwide is an honour. It reminds me of my mission and my promise to Master Zheng-Yan and Tzu-Chi." (08.11.2008)

This section aims to show the blurry line between the reality and the fictional drama. People are more involved and engaged with the drama when they are friends of the leading characters. As for Tzu-Chi members, it is a way to know more about their fellow members. Seeing how other members devote themselves to Tzu-Chi's voluntary work consolidates their identity and encourages them to do their best in the organisation. Da-Ai Drama is not only a way to promote Tzu-Chi, it is a way to create and reinforce religious and group identity. In one of my interviews with the manager of a Jin-Si Bookstore, the manager told me stories about a member whose story was broadcast in

¹⁰⁷ Da-dao-cheng used to be the busiest district of business in early Taipei.

¹⁰⁸ This user is Dr. Lin's student in the university as well.

¹⁰⁹ It is common thinking among Tzu-Chi members that they will come back to this world, based on the concept of reincarnation, to step on the Bodhisattva's path, hoping to help more suffering sentient beings.

Da-Ai Drama. Da-Ai Drama is not watched as fictional drama because these are people who live amongst us and events that have happened around us.

Verisimilitude. It has been a tradition for Tzu-Chi to record their volunteers' stories and voluntary work. In the early period of Tzu-Chi's history, it uses *Tzu-Chi Monthly* to tell these stories. With technological advancement, Tzu-Chi films its voluntary work in documentaries and that is the origin of Da-Ai Drama. Although there are many similar documentary programmes on the Da-Ai TV channel, none of these programmes wins as much success as Da-Ai Drama. The main purpose of Da-Ai Drama is to document Tzu-Chi members' life stories as closely as possible to reality, but in a 'fictional' form. That is to say, the essence of Da-Ai Drama is its *genuineness* and *realness*. As ordinary¹¹⁰ life stories are the major appeal to the audience of Da-Ai Drama, there are several questions raised in this section. How does the audience feel about the re-constructed reality of Da-Ai Drama? How does the re-constructed reality of Da-Ai Drama impact on the audience's watching experiences?

In a comment on Da-Ai Drama, an internet user (sshow) states that:

"What it shows are daily issues that everyone can face in real life. There is nothing special about it but it is real. I keep wondering if I were the leading characters, I might sit there complaining about the unfairness this world has dealt me. I like the inspiration I get from the dramas, such as the way to communicate with others and the way to sort out problems. Whilst watching the dramas, I think about myself and the way those leading characters sort out problems. Apart from the fact that these stories are touching, I carefully reflect on the behaviour and interpersonal relationships in my daily life. I think this is a good inspiration for me. What I learn from Da-Ai Drama is to be open-minded and positive about life. It is useless to sit there complaining because there are things that cannot be changed. Look forward and sort out the problem when you face it." (20.05.2007)

¹¹⁰ What I meant by 'ordinary' in this section refers to the daily life issues tackled in the dramas. Instead of referring to 'working-class people' as 'ordinary people,' what I meant by 'ordinary people' is anyone who is not a star or an historically significant person. The discourse of 'ordinariness' here is different from that in British cultural studies.

I have previously mentioned Master Zheng-Yan's attitudes towards Da-Ai Drama. She insists on broadcasting these stories because she believes there is always hope in life. Rather than presenting complicated issues such as the meaning of life, Da-Ai Drama deals with minor issues in daily life. (jayclub) on the same forum shares his watching experiences:

"What I feel about Da-Ai Drama is its realness and naturalness. They are ordinary stories but touching. Da-Ai Drama calms me down most of the time while the hilarious scenes make me laugh heartily. What attracts me in Da-Ai Drama is that the plots are not exaggerated, nor boring, nor serious but full of educational meaning. I believe it is because humanity prefers the brighter side!" (28.02.2006)

The educational meaning is what the production end emphasises. Watching these dramas adapted from real events enables the audience to learn wisdom from others. Brundson et. al (2001) note that the didactic approach used by lifestyle TV provides educational meanings in TV programmes. Simplicity and realness touch the hearts of the audience because these are problems they face every day. These minor but annoying problems are never taught in school. Da-Ai Drama is a reflection of society so that the audience can find their own way of interpreting the dramas and learn something from their watching experiences. The realistic portrayals of daily life in Da-Ai Drama are what attract the audience.

"These are just my humble opinions. The script is really good! The daily life depicted in the drama is very realistic. For example, the family members don't go home for dinner so the mother has to prepare noodles for everyone when they come home late. It's exactly the same in my family. I watch it with my parents and predict what the parents [in the drama] will say without a mistake. For example, when the dad [in the drama] sees A-tuo [the leading character] napping, I guessed that dad would tell A-tuo to 'sleep on his bed'. And it turned out to be exactly right. I kinda suspect my dad is one of the script writers. [...] My family has been watching Da-Ai Drama for years. Da-Ai Drama is very ordinary and simple. It makes you want to switch channel after an hour but you get used to it very quickly. The dramas are always about real people. I think it is amazing how they turn these ordinary daily conversations and events into climactic dramas 'cause

the leading characters can be anyone like the auntie next door. I can't help thinking what would happen if I were the leading character....." (smileyboy 16.07.2006)

Da-Ai Drama does not consist of beautifully-written lines and plots. From settings, clothes, and make-up to plots and lines, every single detail aims to present ordinary people's lives. The realness that touches the audience's heart makes the audience feel like it is one of their stories. The audience could be one of the leading characters. It is one of the attractions of Da-Ai Drama's docudrama form. Like many talent shows and reality TV, Da-Ai Drama's ordinary story encourages the audience's engagement because their ordinariness can be a part of the drama. It encourages the audience to look into minor issues that they have never taken seriously. Unlike most TV dramas and the celebrity cult that offer the audience and fans glamorous dreams, Da-Ai Drama encourages and celebrates the power of ordinariness which corresponds to Tzu-Chi and Master Zheng-Yan's humble beginnings. Humility and ordinariness are the charismatic features of Tzu-Chi as well as Da-Ai Drama.

One of my interviewees is impressed by the drama, *Ming-yue zhao hong-chen*, because his sister is the neighbour of the leading character. To have his neighbour's story broadcast on TV makes him feel closer to the drama when watching it. The insistence on representing the stories as closely as possible to the reality results in screening *ordinariness* and *naturalness* in the dramas. The ordinariness and naturalness allow the audience to draw on their daily experiences while watching the dramas. Through representing real events, Da-Ai Drama aims to provide wisdom to cope with daily-life issues that have never been taught in school. These are reasons why I consider watching Da-Ai Drama to be a practice of Buddhist doctrines. It teaches the audience wisdom to sort out daily problems and to act righteously.

(6898) makes an important point: society has changed a lot in the last few decades. Although Da-Ai Drama is not an historical drama, it is precise in historical accuracy which elicits the contrast between the past and the present. In the next subsection, the nostalgic feelings brought about by Da-Ai Drama will be discussed. Despite the fact that Da-Ai Drama has been criticised for presenting the leading characters as saint-like figures, there are viewers who believe in certain adaptations to make the dramas look better. Only through fictional adaptation and production can Da-Ai Drama become

attractive to a broader population. Hsieh sees Da-Ai Drama as a casual way to approach Buddhist doctrines because:

“Da-Ai drama is very casual and daily. It is like using Buddha to preach. It is casual and never tells you the appropriate way to behave. All the dramas are about daily life.”

Seeing how other people overcome difficulties inspires the audience to think of an appropriate way to act in daily life. Righteous action is a basic Buddhist practice. It is these daily issues that appeal to people. (sherry7912) cries at the scene where a Taiwanese, living in Australia, receives gifts from her parents in Taiwan. “It’s my first time to cry while watching TV drama.” Having experiences as an international student in the States, (sherry7912) understands how lonely an international student can be.

“Although I am not in Australia like Ming-zhen, I know how it feels to be away from parents. When I studied language in America for three months, I missed home so much. I cried at night frequently. It is a feeling beyond description. It was true that ringing your parents could ease the homesickness but it only made you miss home more after the call. This scene strikes at my heart. Da-Ai Drama pulls the strings of my heart.”
(04.10.2009)

A simple plot reminds the audience of their life experiences. There are generational differences for international student experiences as well. After watching a drama on the branch in Turkey, an internet user (yuchiehhsieh) shares his/her experiences as an international student:

“After Guang-zhong [the leading character] studied in Lybia, I felt closer to the studying (of studying abroad) although time and location were different. I am an international student in the States. I realise how lucky I am after watching the drama. Living in a modern world, I don’t have to wait for a long time to ring my family. Email, indeed, replaces traditional mail. Although it can’t give you an actual sense of being there reading the mail, it reduces a lot of difficulties and inconveniences in communication.” (07.04.2009)

These simple depictions of daily life might be boring at first sight, but they represent some feelings and details that we have never thought of. Similar to the comment, I realised how convenient and lucky I am to be born in a modern world after watching several dramas. For example, in *Xi-gu A-ma*, Xiu-Qing and her husband saved every penny they earned in order to buy a plane ticket, instead of a ship ticket, for their eldest son who planned to do further studies in the States. It is a touching scene for me because it reminds me of my parents' hard work and their high expectations for me. Through watching the dramas, I came to an understanding that my humble achievements cannot be realised without many people's support. If there is anything I have learnt from this study of Da-Ai Drama, it is an appreciation for everything I own and every individual I meet. Nowadays, with the convenience of travelling, a plane ticket is like the basic for travelling abroad. Travelling back home once a year is normal for us. This is just a subtle thing in my life and I take it for granted. The *subtlety* and the *ordinariness* are what make people reflect upon themselves. The representation of reality creates a duality between the past and the present (as it will be discussed in a later section). Da-Ai Drama does not try to celebrate a glorious past; instead, it tries to tell people how rich their life is in the present and how this kind of richness is built up by our ancestors. An appreciation towards others and a little love without prejudice can make the world better. Furthermore, if we have extra time or money, we can do our best to help those who are poor or suffering from poverty and disasters. This demonstrates a discourse on material richness versus spiritual comfort which will be discussed in the later section.

A blogger (Nathanlee) comments on the success of *Ming-yue zhao hong-chen*:

"...the success partially goes to 'Granpa Ji.' For him, every scene setting is an artistic creation. Based on his precious knowledge and experiences, the historical setting was created from nothing. I admire his spirit and his abilities. The Mercedes used in Shu-Hui's wedding scene was 'bought'! When I first saw the scene, it came to my mind how difficult it is to rent an antique model of a Mercedes that is still working. To reconstruct the scene is significant to the drama. We had a great time watching this successful reconstruction of the historical setting." (13.11.2005)

The nostalgic feeling is not felt by the older generation alone. An internet user (nma) posted his/her feelings after watching a Da-Ai drama:

“The drama attracts me because the setting is in my school. Whenever the school is shown on the screen, I feel nostalgic and excited and what is more, I recognise some people acting in the drama. Recognising people on screen is surprising for me. When I first came to this school, I was surprised at its historical surroundings. The windows were made of wood as well as the desks. They all look antique. However, a new block was built last year and those wooden windows you see in the drama were replaced by aluminum ones. After watching the drama, I am a bit reluctant to part with the antique surroundings ,and I start to like the antiqueness in the school.”
(21.06.2007)

To reconstruct an antiquarian setting enables the audience to attach themselves more to the drama. The reconstruction of historical settings becomes an essential part of watching experiences which reinforces the *realness* and the *genuineness* of the stories. As the central doctrine to Da-Ai Drama is to represent the reality as closely as possible, there are many responses from interviewees who see their past in a nostalgic sense. A nostalgic sense of the past is also a response to modern society.

Da-Ai Drama addresses many different issues in Taiwanese society. And here is an issue for mainlanders. When discussing another drama, an internet user (monsterba) posted a comment on a drama about a soldier who came to Taiwan with the KMT government:

“I grew up in the soldiers’ village. My dad’s background is similar to Pan’s father [the leading character of that drama]. They came to Taiwan with the KMT military. We are deeply touched when watching the drama. Pan’s dad said he cried all the way back to China when he visited there for the first time. It was exactly the same for my father. My dad left home at ten years old. Not until he was fifty or sixty years old did he return home. Knowing his parents were dead when he went home was such a heartbreaking experience.” (09.08.2005)

Da-Ai Drama tells stories of Taiwanese and mainlanders alike. In a society where the conflict between Taiwanese and the mainlanders is tense (at least in the media and politics), it is very touching to see the portrayal of mainlanders in the media as well. Da-Ai Drama is not just about Tzu-Chi members' life stories.

The verisimilitude of Da-Ai Drama opens up an intergenerational watching experience. There is a topic discussing *Ming-yue zhao hong-chen* in an online forum:

"I am watching it as well. My mum is interested in this drama because it's about her generation. (My mum is at the same age as A-Cua's youngest son.) So my mum tells me the history whenever watching the drama."
(29.10.2005)

The intention of recording and broadcasting the stories of senior Tzu-Chi members, in Da-Ai Drama helps the audience to understand how the organisation works as well the history of Taiwan. An internet user (olivienemily) vividly describes his/ her experiences on watching Da-Ai Drama with his/ her father:

"When I was home the other day, my dad rushed home shouting out loud, 'switch to the Da-Ai channel, hurry up!' (But my dad is an enemy of the television. He falls asleep during all kinds of TV programmes.) I turned on the TV for him since he rarely asks. Then he started to tell me that the drama was about one of his close friends (that is the leading character). I am quite happy to see my dad happy. My dad has known the leading character for more than thirty years so he didn't stop telling me about their past. (It seems like he went back to his youth once again.) Dad was thinking about his past while watching the drama. Although there are many crazy scenes in the drama, my dad says those scenes depict what the parents or fathers were like in their generation." (12.09.2007)

Similar to this internet user, when I watched Da-Ai Drama with my father, he always tells me what happened in his childhood and how his parents treated him in a similar way to that in the dramas. He looks happy watching a drama portraying his difficult past. Da-Ai Drama becomes a way for me to understand how the older generation grew up and learnt to be tough in difficult times. Watching Da-Ai Drama becomes a

way to close up our generation gap and allow me to look into Taiwanese history from an ordinary person's point of view instead of a textbook point of view. The drama this user talks about concerns a household with domestic violence and the husband repents his behaviour after entering the Tzu-Chi organisation. I was shocked when I saw the drama on because domestic violence is unbearable for people of my generation, not to mention it has been illegal since 1998. However, as this user said in his/ her article, it was common in his/ her father's generation. Rather than placing a clear judgement on the leading character, the drama focuses on the process of repentance and becoming a better person. For young people like us, we cannot understand why women put up with their abusive husbands and we cannot understand why a marriage does not consist of romantic love. Through the drama and the discussion with our parents, we understand the huge differences between our generation and their generation. An internet user (Xiao-mi-er) says:

"I have watched several Da-Ai Dramas. Has anyone noticed that all these stories are based on female characters, apart from *Cao-shen chun-hui*? In the past, women were the ones who shouldered the familial responsibilities. They fought steadily without any complaints in an unequal society. They removed obstacles in difficult times. They took care of their families and children and, therefore, changed the destiny of a family or themselves. Women are much more persistent and tougher than men! Conclusion: Show more sympathy to the elders who have suffered a lot in the past!"
(30.10.2005)

Through the dramas, the younger generation learns more about generational differences. Although it is difficult to let the older generation understand what gender equality and feminism are, I still believe that feminism and gender equality is open to every person in society, old or young. The biggest problem I find myself, as a feminist, is how I can communicate the concept of gender equality to my parents and people of their generation who keep the patriarchal tradition. During the period of my fieldwork, I informed all my interviewees, 80% of them were female, that I was doing my degree in Gender Studies. A few female interviewees started to lecture me on how the younger generation despises the idea of marriage and family. I was impressed by one of them who gave me this endless lecture on the importance of family and women's destiny as happy housewives. It is not my intention to remain single forever. It is not my belief that feminism can be in conflict with marriage. It is not my belief, as a queer feminist, that men are inferior to women. However, from my educational background and

achievements, they simply label me as the kind of new-age girl who could not care less about marriage and men. The nostalgic portrayal of the past represents 'conservative' traditions faithfully and, therefore, some of my friends complain to me how 'conservative' these dramas are. Chapter 5 has shown how these 'seemingly conservative' representations are re-interpreted and have added new meanings.

Nostalgia. The verisimilar depiction of the leading character's life raises a nostalgic feeling among the audience. Da-Ai Drama can be seen as a religious response to modernity in Taiwan. Its success in ratings shows that people are struggling between a modern lifestyle and spiritual comfort. As the narrative pattern shows, Da-Ai Drama establishes a dual opposition between material wealth and spiritual comfort. The contrast between the past and the present fits into this dual opposition. The celebrity cult, the fashion trends, the middle-class media products and elite education emphasise success and wealth. The above mentioned products of modernity encourage people to pursue a luxurious lifestyle. Media celebrates the dazzling and glamorous lifestyle as if material wealth brings happiness. All of a sudden, the tsunami of economic recession strikes the whole world. People start to wonder, where lays the happiness?

In this section, I will discuss how the nostalgic feelings in the dramas form a discourse on the past versus the present. The most direct and greatest impact is its reconstructed scenes of the past which create a strong nostalgic sense in the audience. Due to industrialisation and urbanisation, the street scenes have changed rapidly in the last few decades. Carefully reconstructed scenes of certain historical periods have been an important part in Da-Ai Drama. Unlike most European countries where historical buildings can be legally protected from major changes in their appearance, industrialisation and urbanisation have greatly changed the look of both urban and rural areas in Taiwan. To reconstruct street scenes from a decade ago can be difficult, let alone the fact that most of the dramas span across a century. The representation and reconstruction of certain historical periods can be new to the younger generation while the scenes can be familiar and nostalgic to the older generation. It is the verisimilitude of the dramas that elicits the duality of the past and the present.

Being deeply touched by *Cao-shen chun-hui*, an internet user (Misako) posted an article to share her watching experiences on this drama. Before she talked about her thoughts on the drama, she wrote two paragraphs which perfectly describe the

nostalgic feelings from the audience's point of view. The nostalgic feelings often bring back childhood memories to the audience:

“My family was not well-off when I was a child. When I was hungry in the afternoon, my mum would add two spoons of sugar onto the top of a bowl of boiled rice, finished with some boiled water. This was the snack for my brother and me. I had no idea what was the difference between rich and poor at the time. I thought the boiled rice with sugar water was nothing different from a dish of fried vegetables or stewed eggs. Not until I grew older did I realise that it was the only affordable snack on my parents' low wages.”

As I grow older, more and more expensive food is affordable. However, it is weird that I miss that bowl of sugar-water rice more and more often. It is like, deep in my mind, that I think the most irreplaceable food on earth is the ten-dollar noodles sold at the food stall around the corner of the street. At that time, I expected to get two tiny coins from mum every afternoon. Holding the coins in my sweating palms, I went for the noodles with my brother. The noodles with coriander, some vinegar and chillies make my mouth water whenever I think of it even now. In fact, I cannot remember nowadays how it tasted. Given a chance to taste it again, I might not be able to recognise it. However, the feelings of deliciousness, satisfaction and preciousness will never fade in my memories.” (02.10.2005)

This is a beautiful memory describing the spiritual happiness versus material wealth which parallels the dual opposition of the present and the past. The nostalgic settings bring back the most precious memories in the audience's mind. Reminding the audience of what they cherish most is a way to teach them to be less greedy. That is, to stop the cravings or desire for a luxurious lifestyle or material wealth. I am impressed by my interviewees who keep portraying contemporary society as a materialist and greedy society that preaches 'money' as a religion. The present is glamorous, with technological advancements and material satisfaction; however, there is a material-deficient past full of whole-hearted people. It is the genuine connection and attachment among people that is lacking in the materialistic modern world. What Da-Ai Drama provides is a chance to see and experience the past once again in the dramas. It is not to say that Da-Ai Drama celebrates a glorious past. It simply provides an option for the

audience to become simpler, to be less greedy, and, probably, to find the most precious part in their minds through watching the reconstructed scenes of the past. The agricultural past is a glorious age when people were simple-minded and society was less influenced by materialism and greediness.

“Because watching Da-Ai Drama show stories from the leading characters’ childhood through to the present, which is very similar to the process of my growing up. It gives me a nostalgic feeling. Looking back into my childhood makes me feel steadfast and down-to-earth. Life in the past was really difficult and the people were like..., anyway, just follow the plots.” (Pei: Then you can review your life?) Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. (Xu)

Modern society is criticised for being consumerist and materialistic. People find it difficult to keep up the pace with social changes because of economic growth. Not all the audience read the nostalgic feeling positively; for some of my interviewees, the nostalgic feelings can be painful; some of them have been through really difficult times. In an interview with a middle-aged housewife, she mentions a funeral scene broadcast the day before the interview. The funeral scene contains a detailed portrayal of a funeral, held in a folk religious tradition. There are several funeral scenes in different dramas that remind me of my personal experiences of funerals, especially those of my grandparents. Whenever funeral or death scenes pop up, my dad bursts into tears. The detailed portrayals of funeral or death scenes do not upset us; instead, they remind us of the loved ones who have left us. It is these moments when I realise how deep my dad’s love is towards my deceased grandparents. The impact is more real and shocking than any dramas can have on me. As well as emotional experiences, I gain some knowledge on the traditional funeral rituals. My dad is the one who explains why the rituals are held in a certain way and points out how the concept of *zhong-nan ching-nu* is carried down in the practices of these rituals. As one interviewee told me:

Most Da-Ai dramas try to teach people the righteous way to act by using people’s stories in the past. I have this feeling [sad and negative] whenever I watch it. I think it is good to teach people the right way but my emotion goes down when I watch it. This could be my feeling. Or, this is because we have been through these [difficulties] in the past. For people of my age, we’ve been through this kind of wrongdoing. It’s like you have finally managed to lock those wrongs in a corner of your heart and decided not to

think about them anymore. However, when we see a similar plot, because the historical setting is similar to ours, for people around fifty years old, then my personal feeling is that all the things we've covered over and tried to forget in order to make ourselves a little bit happier, are revealed again, and we get hurt again." (Yao)

Expressing her watching experience in great detail and using several metaphors to elaborate her experiences, Yao further explains her embarrassing position in between two generations. For her, she has to strictly follow the teachings of her parents' generation; however, the younger generation does not buy those traditional doctrines. Therefore, the younger generation sees the dramas as fictional construction because they think those difficult situations could never happen to them.

Another interviewee shares similar negative experiences watching Da-Ai Drama:

"It (Da-Ai Drama) is more realistic but it is not necessary to depict it in such detail. I think there are many children who cannot understand this (death)." (Hsieh-Ling)

The detailed and realistic portrayal of Da-Ai Drama brings Hsieh-Ling back to her miserable past. She often needs time to pull herself away from the miserable memories after watching Da-Ai Drama.

Xu also mentions the conflicting position of her generation as a part of the watching experience:

"The younger generation doesn't know what patience is. People in the past had to listen obediently to their parents' words. However, we have to respect our children's opinions nowadays. When they disagree with our opinions, they won't listen to us."

Despite the fact that these interviewees see the realistic portrayals as negative and uneasy watching experiences, I have come to realise, as I deeply involve myself in the

dramas,,that these are difficult situations that happen across time. Being a part of the generation which is overly protected by our parents, I have seldom suffered from poverty or the necessity to earn the family's living at a young age. While watching the portrayal of the past in Da-Ai Drama, I cannot imagine what kind of a life that would be. Da-Ai Drama offers young people a chance to see those difficult times in the past. Although we have seldom experienced poverty, it is a good chance for us to know more about our parents' generation and how society has changed in the last few decades.

For some, the realistic reconstructed scenes help them understand what the past is like.

“For example, there are many stories about the marriages between Taiwanese and mainlanders.¹¹¹ The mainlanders actually helped us a lot and some of them married Taiwanese girls. They volunteered in the Tzu-Chi organisation and there are quite a lot of good mainlanders. Sometimes it makes you feel like these are stories of your neighbours. It's like something that happens next door to you.” (Lin)

As an indigenous Taiwanese, it might be difficult to understand the mainlanders and their lives. However, Da-Ai Drama provides the audience with a chance for mutual understanding. After giving the example of the marriages between Taiwanese and mainlanders, Lin continues to describe what she sees in Da-Ai Drama:

“You can understand different ways people interact with each other in the dramas. In the past, people led a difficult life but the interpersonal connections were deeper. Nowadays, people are richer but there is less interaction among people. In the past, we greeted our neighbours, uncles or aunties next door but people don't do this anymore.” (Lin)

¹¹¹ I can't tell why the interviewee mentioned the marriages between Taiwanese and mainlanders; however, the tension and conflicts between the mainlanders who came to Taiwan after 1949 and the Taiwanese deepened under the rule of DDP from 2000 to 2008. The interviewee is trying to use this example to illustrate the positive impact of Da-Ai Drama because she mentioned how positive and morally correct Da-Ai Drama is before she started to talk about the portrayals of the marriages between Taiwanese and mainlanders.

In the discourse on the past versus the present, the audience often mentions interpersonal bonds of love and care in the past. Contrary to the past, human relationships are seen as distancing and collapsing nowadays. The values of collective community in agricultural society are highly praised while the individualism and liberalism are seen as damaging to society. As Tzu-Chi and Buddhism advocate a broader love towards people and the world, the nostalgic feelings of the past are a way to experience how good it is to be surrounded by love, rather than wealth.

Not happy with the societal changes as a result of modernisation, Lin thinks traditional values in Da-Ai Drama should be preserved. Instead of seeing Da-Ai Drama as religious dramas, Lin sees them as dramas containing essential moral ethics. The interpersonal skills and the moral virtues that are celebrated in the past can be seen in Da-Ai Drama, and, therefore, become a good lesson for the younger generation. Yuan, a housewife with two children, says that she invites her young children to watch Da-Ai Drama with her time after time because:

“Occasionally, I like to let them watch it because I think the depiction of life is similar to the life I had in my childhood. And I explained to them what my life in the past was like. Through the images, they could understand what my life was like in the past.”

For Yuan, to tell the children what her life was like in the past is a way to teach her children:

“For example, burning wood in the kitchen, carrying water from the well or river, and things like feeding the ducks. I told them that these country scenes were part of my life. When I told them about my past, they couldn't understand it and they didn't even think that it was possible. Through images on the television, they got to see the real scenes.”

To show her children what the past was like is a way to educate her children. Da-Ai Drama is not only used for self-reflection, it is used to teach and educate others. Yuan believes that her children should know how rich and lucky they are to be born in a modern society. The past is not just history. It can become a lesson to teach her

children how to appreciate the life they have. The *realness*, especially the countryside scenes, remind Yuan of her childhood and that makes her feel nostalgic:

“When I watch the re-constructed scenes in the dramas, I have a nostalgic feeling. It’s like when I was a girl, you must never experience that, right? (Pei: True.) So, when you see how messed-up society is, you crave for the simple past. I don’t know how other people think but I have this strong feeling to go back to the past.”

The nostalgia felt by the older generation also gives the younger generation a thought on modern society. Surprised at Da-Ai Drama’s ability to bring a brighter side of humanity to the audience in contemporary society, an internet user (9113050) comments:

“I had never watched Da-Ai Drama until my girlfriend introduced me to *Ming-yue zhao hong-chen*. I was shocked by the plots. What society lacks is this. Society is full of selfish people who think of no one else but themselves. All they think about is how to live a better life, how to make more money, and how to grasp more power. However, they never seem to realise that helping people is the origin of happiness. To ‘genuinely’ think about others can make you happy in the rest of your life.” (25.01.2007)

Yuan’s view reflects a discourse on the present and the past. At the time of the interview in 2008, the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers had just started to influence the whole world. As a country relying heavily on US dollars, the economic recession severely damaged the private sector in Taiwan. In Yuan’s interview, she sees the recession in a positive way because people had been living luxurious lifestyles for such a long time that they had forgotten the simplest ways to live and the basic aspects of being human. She told me people could start to think about what kind of life they actually wanted and start over again. Economic recession is a good chance for people to adjust their lifestyles. The steadfast and down-to-earth attitude people had in agricultural society becomes an important lesson to the modern world where wealth and fame are the only religion people believe in.

As I have mentioned earlier, Da-Ai Drama are stories about Taiwanese people in the past century. To stay close to reality means that rapid societal changes are faithfully represented in society as well. Therefore, the audience is aware of the generational differences and social changes in the dramas as well as in real life. Generational differences enable the younger generation as well as the older generation to reflect upon the life they used to have and are having at the moment. The generational differences and rapid social changes stimulate and reinforce the dual opposition between material wealth and spiritual comfort which is an appealing discourse in the Tzu-Chi organisation. Da-Ai Drama can be seen as a religious response to the process of modernisation in Taiwanese society. The following section will discuss how traditional values are represented in the dramas.

Traditional Values. The nostalgic sense of Da-Ai Drama creates an impression that Da-Ai Drama promotes a set of conservative and traditional values. Weller's studies (1999) of the appeal of Yi-Guan-Dao in Taiwan are an example of the success of Tzu-Chi in Taiwanese society. What appeals to most Tzu-Chi followers is Tzu-Chi's similar advocacy and respect for Confucian values while the Tzu-Chi organisation would add more Buddhist concepts in its teachings. Woo (2006), in his study of Taiwanese and Hong Kong women, points out the features of Chinese religions as lacking an authoritarian source and tending towards syncretism. His description of a religious woman is vivid:

"This means that a woman can simultaneously hold Confucian values, belong to a Daoist temple, and pray for help to Guan-yin, a Buddhist Bodhisattva of compassion-- and all without exclusive allegiance to any particular monk, nun, priest, priestess, or organisation." (p.208)

My drama analysis shows how Buddhist women cannot be separated from their social contexts. Madsen (2007) argues that Buddhist and Daoist activities in contemporary Taiwan blend with Confucian ideals of moral discourses. This blending process helps to preserve Confucian ideals as well as modernise the Confucian discourse in order to fit into the modernised economic and political system. As family relationships are the primary human relationships in society, it is important to resolve any conflicts between the family and society by cultivating the individual. In order to cultivate an individual, s/he has to understand and fulfil his/her familial responsibilities:

“This way of thinking about moral order is different from the logic of Western-style liberal philosophy, which is more concerned with protecting the autonomy of individuals than with ensuring the integrity of a societal whole.” (Madsen 2007 p.3)

Responding to social changes during the process of modernisation, my interviewee, Chen, believes that people nowadays act for “egoistic perspective instead of a familial perspective”. Seeing individualism as a Western import to Taiwanese culture, he suggests that “if we could include this kind of drama into our text books and teach them the traditional values that would be great because we have different cultures from the West”. Both Confucianism and Buddhism emphasise collective identity more than individual identity. Therefore, there is a tendency for Confucian societies to be more conformist. The concept of ego is not encouraged in Buddhism because clinging to the idea of ego is the origin of all sorts of trouble and confusion. Therefore, to ‘let go’ of the ego is the first step towards salvation. Madsen (2007) argues that, during the process of modernisation, most Asians prefer to enjoy the liberation and autonomic freedom while avoiding the liabilities of modernity. Under the influences of modernisation and globalisation, people are seeking an alternative way to adapt Confucian ideals to modern societies. For Madsen, religious groups in Taiwan are trying to “expand Confucian, Buddhist and Daoist discourse in such a way as to accommodate desire for individual freedom and equality” (Madsen 2007 p.4). What comes before individual freedom and equality is a harmonious familial relationship and a holistic society.

As it faithfully represents and reconstructs the past, Da-Ai Drama preserves a lot of traditional values. For the audience, traditional values are fading in the process of modernisation. Therefore, Da-Ai Drama can be full of educational meaning, especially when it ‘faithfully’ reconstructs the past. For Lin, generational differences create different watching experiences and the family values represented in Da-Ai Drama are closer to their experiences:

“Nowadays, the young generation doesn’t experience it [tolerance]. In my generation, we were born in the fifties, we experienced it from Da-Ai Drama. My parents’ generation and mine are more connected and traditional. For example, the daughters-in-law should be filial to the mothers-in-law. It’s compulsory. But people nowadays think: you have a mother, me too, so they wouldn’t treat the mothers-in-law and their natal mothers in the same

way. What I experience from Da-Ai channel is the real life. It might be because that is the way we live.” (Lin)

When asked what she thinks tradition is, Lin gives examples of children or the younger generation being obedient to their elders. Narrating her experiences with her mother and her mother-in-law, Lin has been obedient and submissive to her elders. Although she expects her children to do the same for her, she acknowledges the difficulties of getting the younger generation to be obedient. It seems that the traditional value of filial piety is fading.

When asked about the family values represented in the dramas, Ling strongly criticised some leading characters for devoting too much time to Tzu-Chi's voluntary work, and neglecting their familial responsibilities. Assuming childcare and education are the primary tasks for married women, Hsieh-Ling responds:

“I can't agree with the volunteers who fully devote themselves to the voluntary work because if there are too many activities to participate in outside the family, you neglect the children. I think family is definitive; taking good care of the family is a contribution to society. There are too many parents who focus primarily on jobs and now the voluntary work. But each of us only has twenty-four hours a day. Take care of the family first and, if you have extra time, help others. To fulfil your [familial] duties well is a contribution to society, and to the country. It is no different than helping others because they are your children.”

Focusing on the topic of family as the central figure in society, Ling, a retired civil servant, learns from Da-Ai Dramas that

“We should balance between our career and the family. I think it is parents' duty and responsibility to educate their children [morally]. That is, if parents devote more time to their children, our society will become better. Because I used to work full-time, I feel that if I could have spent more time on my children, things might be different.”

Hsieh-Ling makes this comment because the drama that was on at the time of the interview talks about a young volunteer who fully devotes her time to the Tzu-Chi organisation and leaves her teenaged children to step in the wrong direction. All these problems and conflicts are solved at the end of the drama. The leading character finds a balance between the voluntary work and her family. It is Tzu-Chi's agenda that every volunteer has to fulfil their familial duties before participating in voluntary work. Not only are women required to finish their duties in the family but also men. In *Xi-gu A-ma*, there is a storyline about a male volunteer who neglects his pregnant wife at the beginning of his participation in the Tzu-Chi organisation. At the end he learns to balance his time between his family and Tzu-Chi's voluntary work. One of my interviewees, Yao, shares a similar view. Yao has participated in a great deal of voluntary work, and she insists:

"I didn't steal time from my family time or family work. I had done all the household chores before participating in voluntary work. I did not blindly follow religious activities, and leave the household chores behind."

Although Tzu-Chi encourages people to *do* good deeds, the family is in the central place of the Tzu-Chi agenda. Traditionally, people who are interested in Buddhism can choose to live a monastic life (leave the family). However, as Chinese society consists of families, to leave the family and live a monastic life is against Confucian values of filial piety, especially for men who are responsible for continuing the patrilineage. Vegetarian Halls, as mentioned in Chapter 3, become an alternative option for most women. Lay Buddhist groups like Vegetarian Halls or sutra chanting groups enable women to "develop a Buddhist religiosity without leaving the family" (Weller 1999 p. 94). Following this tradition, Tzu-Chi's approach raises less resistance or controversy in a society where conformism is emphasised more.

Impressed and touched by *Cao-shen chun-hui*, an internet user (mimocat) orders a DVD set and plans on sending it to the States where his/her sister lives:

"I hope she can tell other Chinese about this drama and I hope my cousin, who's about to study in Tzu-Chi's Chinese school, can watch it as well. I hope these traditional and good ways can be implanted in their minds and be passed down from generation to generation." (03.10.2005)

As a Buddhist organisation largely consists of lay people, the agenda is not to search for an “other-worldly” salvation or “other-worldly” religious practices. Therefore, it promotes a way to practise Buddhism in daily life, without sutra chanting or worshipping rituals. The Eightfold Path teaches Buddhists to behave righteously and the easiest way for them to know the righteous way is to behave according to Confucian ethics. Tzu-Chi’s large appeal to the Taiwanese is its ability to avoid conflicts with existing social norms. However, the drama analysis shows that Da-Ai Drama does not represent the traditional values without adaptations.

One drama tells the story of how a woman has suffered in order to give birth to a male heir and how women are oppressed under the concept of *zhong-nan ching-nu* [重男輕女].¹¹² An internet user (jinger1219) is sympathetic to the story because her mother and grandmother are victims of this as well. Her grandmother had six daughters. Only her last child was male. (jinger1210) says:

“...although my mum was born in modern society, she can’t help being influenced by the concept. After having three daughters, it was my parents’ regret not to have a son.”

And so, her parents worked on having a male baby. Her brother finally came when her mum was forty. When talking about this with her mother, (jinger1210) said:

“You have to tell me the secrets of giving birth to a male heir. It’s better to have the first child as a male one so that I don’t have to suffer that much.”

Admitting to the influence of this practice, (jinger1210) continues to argue that:

“I am not saying that women are useless while men are useful with ‘that thing’. In a gender-equal society like this, there are a lot of girls who are successful whereas there are rebellious and bad sons. The reality is simple.

¹¹² The phrase summarises women’s status in Confucianism. *Zhong-nana* means prioritise men while *ching-nu* means marginalize women.

Men *chu*¹¹³ wives but women *jia* husbands. After women *jia* her husband, she has to serve her parents-in-law and offer worship to her husband's ancestors. If there isn't a male heir, who is going to be in charge of all this. This tradition and moral order is unchangeable in Taiwan." (25.07.2009)

Responding to this article is a short comment from (shujadzia):

"...although everyone is aware of women's rights, women are still discriminated against in marriage. The concept of *zhong-nan ching-nu* can never be wiped out in Chinese societies." (25.07.2009)

When facing the 'sexist' tradition, people tend to accept it pessimistically while acknowledging that the contemporary world is a gender-equal society where women enjoy more freedom. Like an interviewee previously mentioned, Lin struggles between the more conservative older generation and the more liberal younger generation. The struggle does not exist in our parents' generation only. People in my generation face similar struggles when we are growing up in families that stress the traditional values while receiving education that teaches liberalism and democratic ideology. For people of my generation, to establish an individual identity is a struggle between the traditional and the modern. The traditional values evolve round the family. The comments in this section show that 'tradition' is a changing concept that can be defined in different ways. Da-Ai Drama can be interpreted as conservative and oppressive to women because of its faithful portrayal of the past; however, it can be interpreted the other way around as keeping and maintaining the 'good' parts of the tradition.

Human Bodhisattvas—Saint-like figures. Although Da-Ai Drama is based on real events, minor adaptations are inevitable. The minor changes in the stories tend to construct a saint-like figure for the leading character. How does the audience respond to these adaptations?

A blogger posted an article on his watching experiences of *Cao-shan Chun-huei*, one of the best known Da-Ai dramas. The title of his article states a strong argument: "A drama cannot be a drama without a bad guy? Take a look at *Cao-shan Chun-huei!*"

¹¹³ Both *chu* and *jia* mean "marry." However, *chun* means a man who brings home a woman while *jia* means a woman who goes to the man's family.

The author is impressed by *Cao-shan Chun-huei* because it manages to touch his heart without casting a typical character that evilly treats the leading characters. For the author, there seem to be tremendously evil people in melodramas, prime-time TV dramas, and TV news; however, the author states: "Where on earth have all the bad guys gone? I have never met one in my life". And one of the author's friends replies that it is difficult to distinguish good people and treacherous guys in real life (Portnoy). Since Da-Ai Drama tries to represent reality as faithfully as possible, the blurry line between good and evil is also represented in the dramas.

A male interviewee who watches Da-Ai dramas via webcasting says:

"I think it certainly edits the parts containing dirty words and violent scenes. That is, the negative contents are filtered (for the purpose of showing the positive stuff). Actually, bearing this in mind, you will know it's better for the audience." (James)

For James, the adaptations are necessary because some of the scenes would have a negative impact on the audience. Aiming to make a positive impact on society, Da-Ai Drama has to edit and modify inappropriate scenes. The Eightfold Path has taught Buddhists to have righteous views, thoughts and speech. Therefore, the dramas have to fit these criteria. Instead of seeing it as a reality show or a pure documentary of Tzu-Chi members' lives, Hsieh thinks it appeals to the audience in docudrama form:

"I believe there must be some adaptations in the dramas so that it's watchable for the audience. Without the adaptations (in the conversation), it's nothing different from our daily lives and less attractive. Look at the *Still Thoughts* used in the conversation. I don't think they have this kind of wisdom to say those words in real life. The editing and adaptation make the dramas more touching to the audience's hearts. Although we don't really care about appearance in Buddhism, it is definitely more attractive to have good-looking people in the dramas. For example, if there is someone who doesn't know about Da-Ai Drama, s/he might follow the drama just because s/he has seen the actor or actress before." (Hsieh)

Hsieh's comment shows how Da-Ai Drama embeds Tzu-Chi's doctrines by using *Still Thoughts* as the characters' lines. Da-Ai Drama cleverly blends Master Zheng-Yan's thoughts and teachings into Tzu-Chi members' life stories. Even if the audience never reads *Still Thoughts*, they have a chance to hear them and learn them while watching the dramas. Another important appeal pointed out by Hsieh is the advantage of the docu-drama form, the charisma of the actors and actresses. The attraction of actors and actresses can be interpreted as a Buddhist concept, dharma gate. In order to attract a broader public to Buddhism, Bodhisattva manifests itself in various human forms to teach them Buddhist doctrines. Da-Ai Drama is, therefore, used by the Tzu-Chi organisation (as one of the means) to spread Buddhist teachings (via media). This is why I argue in Chapter 3 that a mono-medium approach to study religion is not enough to understand religions in the contemporary world.

There are people who dislike the overly edited plot of the brighter side of humanity. Having an opposite attitude towards the adaptations of Da-Ai Drama, Yo has a comment shared by a lot of the internet users:

"I like the realness in the drama but sometimes it can be too...idealistic or romantic. The bright side of humanity is celebrated too much in the drama."
(Yo)

What she means by the brighter side of humanity is the leading characters' abilities and attitudes towards abusive husbands or parents-in-law. Acknowledging the brighter side of Da-Ai Drama, an internet user (Nai-zui-bao-bao) comments:

"Da-Ai Drama is way too perfect. More like a myth. But they are indeed real events. After all, there are a lot of good people in the world." (14.05.2008)

Responding to the critiques like Yo's comment, Jing believes that:

"We can't say it's impossible. There must be someone who is perfect, depending on whether you believe it or not. We have to learn from the dramas. Although we can't be as perfect as them, we'll change when watching it for a long time."

The misconduct of abusive husbands or parents-in-law is ignored by the audience who sees the story from the leading characters' points of view. Jing's readings on the idealistic scenes fit in with the educational purpose set up by the production end. The dramas faithfully present the difficult times overcome by the leading characters. By engaging the audience in the process of transformation in the leading characters' lives, Da-Ai Drama tries to transform the audience morally and leaves the judgements to the audience.

The adaptation or minor changes of the stories aim to bring the brighter side of humanity to the audience. Rather than creating a typical role for evil guys, Da-Ai Drama tends to focus on the wisdom and tolerance of the leading characters. Although there are a lot of comments about Da-Ai Drama being too romantic and lacking in the darker side of humanity, an internet user (6898) argues that:

"I don't think it is too romantic. It is true that people in the 1930s and 40s acted and thought in a simpler way. Nowadays, influenced by modernisation, people don't know how to cherish what they have. The older generation misses Taiwanese society in the past when watching *Cao-shen chun-hui*. They feel like returning to their past. My mum told me this drama reminds her of her childhood. Society was similar to what is depicted in the drama. Instead of saying the drama depicts an unrealistic society, we should say it is society that has changed. It has changed so much that we don't believe in the *real* existence of those kind and generous people."
(10.10.2006)

The narrative pattern of Da-Ai Drama constructs saint-like figures for the leading characters. The leading characters set up a model of human Bodhisattvas. Combined with the appeal of 'ordinariness' and 'genuineness' the image of human Bodhisattvas works to encourage the audience to practise the Bodhisattva's path.

Self-Reflection. The realness of the stories and the saint-like figures of the leading characters encourage the audience to reflect upon themselves. The self-reflection can be seen as a way to practise Buddhism. Seeing the Da-Ai channel as a Buddhist channel, James believes that:

“...it is simply that the [Da-Ai] channel tells you to do good deeds. Gradually, you change your mind. As you have been practising for a while, your behaviour will change how you think. Then, you become better.” (James)

The previous sections have shown various issues dealt with in Da-Ai Drama. Different from commercial TV dramas, the issues in Da-Ai Drama are daily issues such as education, health, marriage and so on. Weaving Buddhist concepts into the dramas, the dramas become the best place for education and self-reflection. In the previous section, I have given an example of an interviewee who uses Da-Ai drama to educate her children. As the audience is attracted to Da-Ai Drama because it is close to their daily experiences, their reflexivity plays a heavy role in the watching experience. Da-Ai Drama becomes a chance to educate the younger generation for the parents.

“Sometimes I burst into tears when watching the drama and my children will ask me what happened. I shared my thoughts with them. For example, in *Ai you ni lai zuo ban*,¹¹⁴ there are four sisters who are close to each other and my son asked me, ‘Are you not close to your sisters as well?’ I gave him an affirmative answer and told him he has to remain close to his brothers in the future as well. I think they wouldn’t listen to me if I kept telling them the appropriate way to do things. Letting them watch the dramas is more effective.” (Hsieh)

Feeling that parents should morally educate the children, Hsieh shows her children the dramas rather than lecturing them. Not only does Hsieh use the drama to educate her children, she uses it to teach her sister as well. Having a sister who does not get along well with her mother-in-law, Hsieh tells her sister the plots of Da-Ai Drama and lets her sister learn how to ‘let go’ of the negative feelings towards her mother-in-law.

“The plot broadcast yesterday reminds me of people around me. I told my younger sister who has prejudice against her mother-in-law. I told her the plot and how people in the drama forgive and tolerate others. Leaving the hatred behind is a relief to oneself. There is a saying in the drama that if

¹¹⁴ *Ai you ni lai zuo ban* [愛有你來作伴] is the drama that was on when I interviewed her.

she could forgive her mother-in-law, she would relieve the person she hates and herself from hatred.” (Hsieh)

Using the drama as a source, Hsieh is able to tell her sister who is in a similar situation to change her mind and become happier. Because the dramas are stories that have happened, it is more useful to give people advice by giving a real example. Master Zheng-Yan does not teach doctrines. All she does is to use examples to advise her followers, and shows that is easier for people to understand Buddhist doctrines in daily life. When stuck in difficult situations or complicated relationships, people need advice from others. If there is no one to talk to, Da-Ai Drama offers the audience a chance to see how other people get through difficulties using their wisdom. By sharing Tzu-Chi members' life stories with a broader public, Da-Ai Drama uses the strategy Master Zheng-Yan uses to educate her followers. Instead of embedding difficult and complicated Buddhist doctrines, Da-Ai Drama embeds these teachings in daily life stories.

As a devoted Buddhist, Liu occasionally pays worship to Buddhist temples; most of the time, she stays home listening to the cassettes which are lectures on Buddhist doctrines. With the convenience of Da-Ai TV, Liu watches Master Zheng-Yan's teachings on these doctrines every day. For her, watching the Da-Ai channel can be reflexive.

“Sometimes I am quick-tempered and get angry at my children. After watching Da-Ai TV, I think being angry or scolding my children generates bad karmas. So I have to 'practise' [Buddhist doctrines] more.” (Liu)

Seeing Da-Ai TV as a Buddhist channel, Liu likes the fact that “the programmes are more meaningful and they comfort your mind after watching them. I feel comforted because I reflect on myself and try to correct my wrongs to put my mind at rest. After watching it, I feel I have to let go of all the troubles and persistence” (Liu). Seeing how other people got through difficult situations with wisdom, Liu compares herself with the leading characters and finds her own weakness.

When asked about her most impressive drama and why it is impressive, Liu answers *Ming-yue zhao hong-chen* because she learns the way to get along with her mother-in-

law. Having conflicts with her mother-in-law, Liu thinks that what *Ming-yue* inspires her to do is:

“I might owe my mother-in-law [in the last life]. It’s because of this drama that I try to put up with my mother-in-law. Sometimes I can’t let it go. But seeing how the leading character made it, why can’t I? I want to clear up all the debts I owe her so that we don’t get connected in the next life. This is a huge aspiration.”

The conflicts between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law have long been a challenge for married women. Struggling between beloved husbands and critical or fussy mothers-in-law at the same time, married women have to learn how to play the roles of wives and daughters-in-law. In a society where harmonious relationships are the ideal and the family as a unit is revered, people need to find a peaceful way to solve problems. *Da-Ai Drama* teaches the audience such a way.

Having watched *Da-Ai Drama* for years, (shew) thinks:

“...watching *Da-Ai* is a result of karma. There were many classics came out when I needed support the most. I can’t say I’m a faithful supporter of *Da-Ai* but I appreciate these hard works that have comforted my mind. A few years ago, I was not happy with my job and found it hard to fit into the working environment. The fifteen-minute talk by Master Zheng-Yan inspired me at the right time. Following her talk was *Cao-shen chun-hui*, the easy and peaceful companion of an-hour long drama which eased my wounds at that time.”

After sharing her watching experiences on *Xi-gu A-ma*, s/he continues:

“...the thing I learnt from all these years of watching *Da-Ai* is to transform my mind. Life is short so we have to grasp the chance to do things. It’s never too late to begin as long as you are willing to do it.” (17.10.2008)

Somewhat similar to religious experiences, the audience finds their troubled minds calming down whilst watching. As Da-Ai Drama offers the audience a chance to reflect upon themselves through watching, Da-Ai Drama functions as an easily-approached practice of Buddhist doctrines. Through watching the dramas, the audience starts to examine their behaviour and change their minds. The central agenda of the Tzu-Chi organisation is to learn Buddhist doctrines through *doing* good deeds. Instead of searching for an ultimate transcendence in complicated debates on Buddhist philosophy, Tzu-Chi urges its followers to go back to the simplest *action*. Da-Ai Drama becomes a field for religious practices where the audience can start to behave righteously in daily life. I am not saying that every audience changes their mind and behaves righteously after watching it. However, the dramas can be seen as a religious field where the audience as well as the leading characters share life stories and form a discourse on therapeutic culture.”

An internet user (icged) reflects on himself/herself after being impressed by a scene where the husband told his pregnant wife not to work too hard because she could not earn much from the work. The pregnant wife told her husband, “Without the accumulation of these pennies, how can we have money?” (icged) is impressed by the scene because it is what his/her mother would say.

“The story reminds me of my family and I start to repent for irritating my parents when I was young. Although the drama doesn’t have melodramatic elements like abusive mothers-in-law or disloyal husbands in commercial dramas, it is worthwhile for people to think about their lives.” (22.07.2008)

There are many situations in life when the audience does not understand why they are treated in a bad way. Throughout the dramas, the audience comes to understand the reasons for their situations. The understanding brings the audience to resentment or self reflection because they realise why people around them behave in a certain way. In the previous subsection, I mentioned some interviewees who had negative experiences watching certain plots. On the contrary, there are people who think in a positive way when watching miserable stories:

“I think I am much happier than others after watching Da-Ai Drama. I shouldn’t have complained so much.” (246578 20.04.2007)

When seeing the difficult time people had in the past, the audience realises how rich they are nowadays. This is one of the central messages of the Tzu-Chi organisation: to be less greedy and to be satisfied with one's present situation. The sharing of life stories is an important part for Tzu-Chi members. The sharing is a way to let others who are confused find a way out through those life stories. As most of the Tzu-Chi members are housewives, most of their troubles and confusion are centred on the family. Therefore, the issues tackled in the dramas are also issues centred on the family.

Conclusion

The literature has shown that religions in Taiwan tend to syncretise; therefore, people who term themselves as Buddhists might be different from the Buddhist scholars' points of view. As I have argued in earlier chapters, the textually based studies of Buddhist women cannot truly represent the multifaceted experiences of Buddhist women in Asian countries. The social context plays an important role in women's religious experiences, so it is important in understanding women's status in a religious tradition. Most of my interviewees who term themselves Buddhists also practise folk religious rituals such as visiting folk religious temples and holding ancestor worship.

For example, Tshu terms herself as a Buddhist because she believes it is a tradition passed down from her parents and her ancestors. The only religious activity she participates in is sutra chanting in a Daoist temple in the neighbourhood. For her, sutra chanting is a way to calm down and to find a spiritual reliance on the world. Although she does not understand the meanings of these sutras, she enjoys what she is doing and believes it is her way of showing her religiosity. There are interviewees who simply switch to the Buddhist channel or buy cassettes to listen to teachings from Buddhist masters. The format to practise Buddhism is flexible, increasing the difficulty to define 'Buddhist women'. Furthermore, their understanding of good deeds is based on the existing discourses on Confucian ethics. The interwoven relationships between Buddhism and Confucianism make it necessary to discuss Confucian ethics while analysing Buddhist women in Confucian societies. Only by understanding the complicated relationships between Confucianism and Buddhism can Buddhist feminists find a standpoint to argue for gender equality for Buddhist women in Asian countries.

The re-constructed reality in Da-Ai Drama is an approach to manifest human life as a pool of bitterness. Through watching others' life stories, the audience understands their lives in a Buddhist context. To return to the quote at the beginning of this chapter, Da-Ai Drama manifests the causes and effects of human life. The situation in this life was written in the last life. It is not impossible to make this life better. Da-Ai Drama transmits the concept of finding weaknesses in daily life and amending wrong-doings. The meanings of "good deeds" or righteous behaviour vary according to people's definitions but, mostly, the audience refers to Confucian virtues. Therefore, Da-Ai Drama and the Tzu-Chi organisation slightly alter the existing discourse without challenging or critiquing it. By representing the reality with minimal adaptations, Da-Ai Drama is an edutainment form of drama. The mixture of reality and the fictional provides the audience with an educational function as well as leisure time entertainment.

Claiming to be a Buddhist organisation following the trend of Humanistic Buddhism, Tzu-Chi places its religious concern on "this-worldly" affairs. Rather than searching for salvation from gods or goddesses after death, the central concern of Humanistic Buddhism is human beings and the world where human beings live. The field for meditation and the practice of Buddhism lies in this world, our daily life, instead of temples. The Tzu-Chi organisation has provided a good place in which members can experience Buddhist teachings through doing charity work and other voluntary work. With Da-Ai Drama, people can now receive information at home. People who are not involved in any Buddhist activities still regard themselves Buddhists. This is the meeting point of technology and religion. The educational function supplied by Da-Ai Drama enables the audience to reflect upon themselves and practise Buddhist concepts in daily life.

What attracts the audience most is the representation of reality. For most audiences, the reconstructed reality is similar to their daily experiences. Nostalgia is felt by people across generations and the impact is carried on into their daily lives. Learning to cherish the present and stop complaining about their lives is one impact. Da-Ai Drama leads the audience to a spiritual journey. In this journey, the audience calms themselves down and reconsiders what they really want in life. As religion is seen as a spiritual reliance and guidance for people to find out the meaning of life, watching Da-Ai Drama can be seen as a spiritual search. Considering the issues of generational differences, Da-Ai Drama is a religious response to modernisation in Taiwan. As the audience is aware of the generational differences represented in the dramas, the generation gaps can be seen as a struggle to find a balance between the traditional

and the modern. The dual opposition between material wealth and spiritual comfort resembles the contrast between the past and the present. Although people have different views towards the detailed representation of the past, the media representation reminds the audience of the social changes. Seeing the rapid social changes brought about by the liberal market and democracy, the audience starts to reflect upon their personal pursuit of wealth.

The interviews have shown that a modernised consumer society is seen as evil and corrupt because it is where people care only about their own business, and consumerism leads people to endless purchasing behaviour. There seems to be a duality between modern and traditional. What modernity offers is a better material life but a poorer spiritual life. By contrast, agricultural society offers a rich spiritual life but nothing in the material life. Reviving traditional values is a way to save people's corrupt and polluted minds. The Tzu-Chi organisation urges a return to simplicity in daily life and a purification of the mind. To "let go" of material pleasure is the first step. The action of "letting go" can mean physically abandoning the pursuit of material pleasure and it can be expanded to mentally "letting go" of cravings and desires. The audience learns to "let go" of their egos as one of the most important lessons learnt from the dramas.

Seeing the real stories from other people encourages the audience to believe in their potential. While Da-Ai Drama provides a media environment to act, think, and speak righteously, the audience learns to see through the causes and effects of their troubled minds. The monastic practices of Buddhist doctrines are transformed into the secular sphere and become secular practices for the audience. After the audience learns to "let go" of their troubled minds, they start to help other people. Some of them participate in Tzu-Chi's voluntary work while some of them use Da-Ai Drama to educate more people. The transcendental sense of Nirvana is realised in the secular sphere as a harmonious and peaceful world.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

For the purpose of studying Buddhist women from a different angle, I started this research by watching Da-Ai Drama. Throughout the viewing process, I had doubts on academic constructions of victimised women. It is not a denial that not a single woman suffered from Confucian or Buddhist patriarchy. However, I started to examine my position as an 'elite' feminist after I began my fieldwork. I changed my attitude on critiquing Confucian and Buddhist patriarchy. My position as a feminist researcher was often challenged by female interviewees; or, my educational background confused them a lot. During my fieldwork, I played the role of listener because I gradually came to the realisation that they did not understand feminism and I did not understand their lives even though I am a woman. My doubts about myself started the process of merging the media discourse, the religious discourse, and the gender discourse in this thesis. Using the visual materials and online data, I hoped to find out an alternative way to examine and explain gender construction as well as oppression in Confucianism and Buddhism.

I would like to start the concluding chapter with a few notes on my fieldwork. For my interviewees who term themselves as Buddhists, I have the impression that Buddhism can be practised in various ways: from reading Buddhist canons; attending worshipping rituals; participating in sutra chanting activities; listening to Buddhist Masters' cassettes; to watching Buddhist channels. Lay Buddhists acquire Buddhist knowledge and doctrines from the tool that suits them best; therefore, a standard way to understand Buddhism is impossible among lay people. Buddhist doctrines may remain the same, but the interpretations of them and the practices vary from time to time. Entering a media age, the religious symbols can be transmitted through various media. Some of my interviewees can barely understand Buddhist canons without the guidance of explanations from Buddhist Masters so they turn to cassettes or TV to seek for explanations. Some of my interviewees learn Buddhist doctrines by themselves via written texts of Buddhist canons or lectures on Buddhist channels. During the interviews, they shared their understandings of Buddhism with me. What they define as a good Buddhist is a morally perfect person in this world. Instead of seeking an 'other-

worldly' salvation in religion, these people see Buddhism as a way to practise and perfect their personality. Residing in a Confucian society, my interviewees refer to Confucian ethics as a guidance to morally cultivate and perfect themselves. This shows that studies of religions cannot possibly be detached from the socio-cultural contexts.

As I have argued in Chapter 3, religions are activities that consist of religious texts, the monastic system, and the laity. The focus of this thesis—the Tzu-Chi organisation—largely consists of lay people, among whom women are the majority. Da-Ai Drama offers visual materials to examine lay women's lives and practices of Buddhism in Taiwan. Da-Ai Drama is also a very good example of how religious organisations use media to spread their beliefs and agenda in the contemporary world. This thesis has looked into three selected Da-Ai dramas for a further understanding of the media depiction of lay Buddhist women's life stories as well as the embedded Tzu-Chi agenda. The media texts of Da-Ai Drama show how gender is constructed in the family and best explains the *fen*-based ethic which is proposed in Chapter 2. Through analysing the media content of Da-Ai Drama, the Tzu-Chi organisation's media strategy is explored. Appealing to the audience through its *realness* and *ordinariness*, Da-Ai Drama offers the lay audience an edutainment function by using the docudrama genre. Not only does this thesis focus on the media content, but it also explores the audience response. The docudrama genre of Da-Ai Drama has a didactic approach to the audience so that the viewing behaviour of Da-Ai Drama can be seen as a practice of Buddhism via TV dramas. In-depth interviews are used to explore general attitudes of the audience towards Da-Ai Drama. The interviews help to establish the socio-cultural context where the thesis resides. Starting from an understanding of the audience's attitudes towards religions, I have come to realise that religious practices of lay people can be flexible and multifaceted. To study a religious tradition one needs to draw in the socio-cultural context to the discussion because Buddhist traditions as well as Confucian traditions change with time. The written texts and canons can be followed strictly in some countries whilst being challenged in other parts of the world. The data from the interviews is a generalised understanding of Da-Ai Drama and its social context. Added to the interviews, I have collected data from online forums where the audience discuss specific dramas. Relating their personal experiences to the dramas, the audience finds spiritual comfort and encouragement in the leading characters' abilities to overcome difficult times and their persistence in the appropriate behaviour. By examining the media content as well as the audience response, I have answered the aims set up in Chapter 1.

First of all, the analysis of selected dramas examines gender and religious representation in Da-Ai Drama and the interactions between gender representation and religious representation. The analysis of Da-Ai Drama shows the way gender is constructed in the family. Chapter 2 has provided a theoretical framework of gender construction in Confucianism which has not been a fixed school of practice in the past two millennia. Although women seem to be oppressed when they are situated in the hierarchically minor position in the family, there are possibilities for them to advance to the most precious position in the family. Da-Ai Drama, a type of visual biography of Taiwanese women, shows how the daily practices can be different from the doctrinal teachings. The daily practice of the gender hierarchy does not always correspond to the textual discipline of Confucianism. Scholars, from the East and the West, who blame Confucianism for women's subjugated status in society should reconsider the accusation. The practices and the interpretations of gender in Confucianism change from time to time. An ahistorical analysis results in a huge gap between elite intellectuals and the grassroots women. Therefore, a textually based study of Confucianism cannot reflect the lived reality of women in Confucianism in the contemporary world. The media depiction of women in Taiwanese society shows the inadequacy of a textually based tradition to study Confucianism because the daily practices might be different from the doctrines.

Furthermore, the gender depiction in the dramas shows that women are the oppressed as well as the oppressors in the Confucian 'patriarchy'. The drama analysis in Chapter 5 demonstrates the way women are constructed in the family. Fulfilling obligations and duties is a way to climb up to a more powerful position in the hierarchy. Rather than understanding women within the framework of individualism, I argue that a *fen*-based ethic can better explain gender construction in Confucianism. With this understanding of a *fen*-based ethic, the depiction of gender roles in Da-Ai Drama can be better understood. The narrative of Da-Ai Drama follows the life passage of ordinary women; however, it shows the importance of women's contributions and efforts in looking after the family (i.e. their roles as wives and mothers). Although the dramas do not bring women out of the framework of the family, women are depicted as brave and tough through fulfilling their duties and obligations. By praising women's contributions to the family, Da-Ai Drama produces a different discourse on gender. On the surface, it seems that Da-Ai Drama promotes the traditional values of family in Confucianism. Some depiction of women's behaviour such as the attitudes of mothers-in-law towards daughters-in-law alters the traditional way of oppression. Da-Ai Drama does not merely

reinforce and promote traditional values but it offers a different perspective on traditional values to the audience. Rather than seeing Da-Ai Drama as promoting the traditional values, the emphasis on the Confucian values of the family is a strategy to embed Buddhist teachings on a broader public. The understanding and discussion of gender in Confucianism leads to the next discussion on the importance of the cultural context in the study of religions.

Similar to the critique on a textually based tradition of studying Confucianism in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 extends the argument to the study of Buddhism which should not only be open to multi-media approaches but should also take specific socio-cultural contexts into consideration. Buddhism is multifaceted not only in the sense of various schools of thought but also in the daily practices of lay people. In this thesis, the specific context of Confucianism should be brought into discussion when analysing the Tzu-Chi organisation and its use of media. Da-Ai Drama strategically approaches the audience from the ethical views of Confucian. The discussion on the gender depiction in Da-Ai Drama helps to map out the socio-cultural context of Da-Ai Drama. In Da-Ai Drama, the secular gender role of mother has a strong link with the nature of Bodhisattvas because of the selfless love towards others. The nurturing and caring nature of motherhood links lay women to the religious activities—the practices of Bodhisattva's path. In the last part of the narrative, these women are depicted as saint-like figures—human Bodhisattvas—because they have overcome all the difficulties in life. The endurance of these difficulties in the earlier part of their lives is interpreted and transcended into religious meanings. Rather than seeing women as putting up with difficult situations, I can see how Tzu-Chi transcends the everyday issues in a secular sense by testing and practicing in a religious sense. Showing these women's devotion and contribution in the Tzu-Chi organisation corresponds to Master Zheng-Yan's teachings on *DO* which is Master Zheng-Yan's interpretation of Humanistic Buddhism. Approaching the audience from the perspective of Confucian ethics, Master Zheng-Yan embeds Buddhist teachings in daily life. Not only does TV watching become a field to practise Buddhism, but the religious field extends to lay people's everyday behaviour. Chapter 6 has shown that the audience relate their experiences to the dramas. The implicit themes of doing good deeds and behaving well make the audience scrutinise their behaviour. The blurry line between the secular and the sacred leads to the second aim of this thesis.

Da-Ai Drama is a religious TV form other than Christian evangelism. The case study of Da-Ai Drama helps to analyse the interaction between media discourse, gender

discourse and religious discourse. As I have argued in the previous paragraphs, it is not enough to study Confucianism and Buddhism on a textually based tradition. Although there are studies on religions from a media approach, Buddhism is rarely discussed using a cultural study approach. Religions have changed their ways of circulating in the media age. Chapter 4 has shown the didactic approach and the healing function of reality TV. Using a docudrama genre, Da-Ai Drama blurs the line between fiction and reality. The dramatic elements open up to a broader audience while the truth status establishes the plausibility of the stories in the audience's mind. Chapter 6 shows that the verisimilitude of Da-Ai Drama creates a nostalgic sense for the audience and a discourse on material wealth versus spiritual comfort is constructed. Master Zheng-Yan encourages her followers to give away material wealth for the calmness of the mind. The study of Da-Ai Drama also shows a different Buddhist experience following the teachings of Humanistic Buddhism. As *DOing* Buddhism is emphasised in Master Zheng-Yan's teachings, the dramas show the audience how to practise Buddhist teachings from personal perfection to voluntary work. Not only are fact and fiction blurry in Da-Ai Drama but the secular and the sacred are as well. The lay characteristic of Buddhism in Taiwan shows the risk of using a textually based tradition to study Buddhist women. A mono-medium approach ignores a) the cultural text where lay women live; and b) the gap between daily practices and the religious text. The study of Da-Ai Drama explores the intricate relationship between religious women and their socio-cultural context.

The importance of the socio-cultural context leads to my answer to the third question on the media representation of gender and religion, reflecting dominant ideologies of gender and religion. The docudrama form of Da-Ai Drama creates a series of visual biographies of Tzu-Chi members, mostly Taiwanese women. The docudrama form is used on purpose to create the ordinariness and realness. Master Zheng-Yan hopes to create a Tzu-Chi canon by recording Tzu-Chi members' stories. A therapeutic culture is formed through the sharing of Tzu-Chi members' life stories. It provides a healing power for the members as well as the audience. The interviewees and the online users share their similar experiences when discussing the dramas. The dramas as well as the audience form a unique narrative structure to tell and share life stories within the framework of Buddhism. By adapting real events on the screen, Da-Ai Drama presents the stories of many ordinary Taiwanese women. The interwoven relationship between religious and social contexts can be seen in the dramas where the leading characters practise Buddhism in daily life. The way Da-Ai Drama engages the audience in the watching experience not only promotes the organisation itself but also celebrates the

abilities of its female members. The detailed and realistic portrayals of Da-Ai Drama inform the audience about the systems of Tzu-Chi's charity work as well as the different aspects of Tzu-Chi's social services and disaster relief. Tzu-Chi's agenda of *DOing* Buddhism is reiterated throughout the narrative of the dramas, embedded with Master Zheng-Yan's teachings and interpretation of Humanistic Buddhism. The audience members show a similar pattern of changing their minds and behaviour after watching the dramas. The blurry line between the secular and the sacred enables the celestial Bodhisattvas to be interpreted and acted out in the secular sphere and transform into human Bodhisattvas. Although the viewers have doubts about the saint-like figures in the dramas, they are inspired and encouraged by the leading characters' stories because they are based on ordinary people like themselves.

The strong link between the secular discourse (i.e. Confucianism) and the religious discourse (i.e. Buddhism) makes the religious agenda of Da-Ai Drama seem to be conservative. Although Da-Ai Drama seems to present a more conservative and traditional set of values, it does add new perspectives on the existing discourse on gender roles. It reverses the traditional view that women are subjugated to the family by showing the audience how the leading characters overcome difficulties in their lives. The toleration of all sorts of difficulties is then interpreted as being the obstacles on the path of Bodhisattva. By praising women's efforts in the family, Da-Ai Drama 'empowers' women in a different way (i.e. via promoting the gender roles as wife and mother). Da-Ai Drama offers a negotiation approach towards the secular settings and the religious teachings. For the Tzu-Chi organisation, the interpretation of a 'this-worldly' heaven is manifested by various types of social service in Taiwan, as well as in other parts of the world.

This thesis questions the textually based and institutionally oriented assumption of religions by presenting a case study of media usage of a religious organisation. Da-Ai Drama cannot represent all kinds of Buddhist media in Taiwan; however, an examination of Da-Ai Drama shows that social and cultural contexts play important roles in studying religious traditions. Rather than preaching difficult Buddhist concepts or embedding complicated Buddhist philosophy in the dramas, Da-Ai Drama shares Tzu-Chi members' stories in a docudrama form. As an international organisation with a Buddhist agenda, the Tzu-Chi organisation and Da-Ai Drama sets up a different way of practising Buddhism in the media age. By using visual materials and online data, this thesis tries to establish an unconventional way to study religion and religious women in the media age. Examining gender construction in Da-Ai Drama invites us to reconsider

what 'tradition' and 'conservative' mean in the contemporary world. This thesis has dealt with two huge schools of thoughts on philosophy, Confucianism and Buddhism, which have different disciplines and ways to applications. Placing this thesis in a specific context, Taiwanese society, provides a view that has seldom been covered in Anglophone academia. The overlap between the secular context and the religious doctrines varies from culture to culture. By emphasising the agency of lay women's participation in religious activities, this research shows that religious usage of media appeals to a larger group of grassroots women by adding a new interpretation to the existing discourse. The large appeal to housewives of the Tzu-Chi organisation provides a different perspective for elite feminists to reconsider and readjust their strategies to connect with the grassroots women. The results of this thesis invite religious scholars to re-examine research methods as well as academic construction on women. Also, the example of Da-Ai Drama shows a unique feature of Buddhism in the contemporary world which conveys a heavy lay characteristic. The lay characteristic feature and the matriarchal nature of the Tzu-Chi organisation provide a good example for feminist scholars to study religious women in Buddhism, which might be different from the discourse of 'victimised' women in the Buddhist world.

Future Suggestions

Within the time frame and the length of this thesis, there are several topics that have not been fully developed but require greater consideration in future research. Firstly, from a media perspective, there is the influence of media globalisation in forming a Pan-Asian identity. The circulation of media products in various Asian countries creates a Pan-Asian identity in popular culture. Studies on this type of Pan-Asian identity have not flourished enough to bring religion into discussion. However, the success of the Indonesian Da-Ai TV network and the exportation of Da-Ai Drama show the potential for circulating religious symbols via media products on a global level. Therefore, a Pan-Asian identity can be examined and worked on from different perspectives, such as religious studies and feminist studies. Secondly, the issue of globalisation brings us to the discussion on Da-Ai and Tzu-Chi's influence in Chinese immigrant communities across the world. Although this thesis has touched upon the relevant issue, it has not explored the impact of religious activities on the formation of immigrant identity in the media age. Nowadays, the religious field functions as a communal centre from a local level to an international level. The impact of religious media on the immigrant communities is worth studying. Thirdly, the influence of a Pan-Asian identity on gender

construction can be studied via the approach of online communities. The overlap between the local and the regional forms a vibrant conversation in the course of globalisation.

From a feminist perspective, this thesis proposes a different angle to analyse the gender construction in Confucianism. However, a thorough examination of the Confucian texts in Sinic and Anglophone academia is necessary in order to construct a feminist framework that is compatible with the Confucian culture. This thesis provides an observation of gender construction from the media depiction and its impact on the audience. I would like to suggest further research in linking this media strategy to feminist movements. From a religious study perspective, this thesis offers a media approach to examine religious organisations and religious women. Da-Ai Drama is only one of the many different programmes on the Da-Ai TV network. To thoroughly understand how the Tzu-Chi organisation uses the media to appeal to a broader public, it is important to include different types of programmes into our studies. Not only should the research focus on TV programmes, but the studies on the religious use of media should open up as many media platforms as possible. A case study of Da-Ai Drama shows only one perspective of media use by a religious organisation. It would be better to conduct a comparative research on different religious channels in order to compare media use by Buddhist organisations in contemporary Taiwan.

As for the research methods, this research uses the most convenient way of recruiting interviewees and collecting data. However, this thesis shows that generational differences are also an important part of the viewing experience. I would further propose a focus on group interviews conducted in the family setting, in order to examine the conversation across the generations after watching Da-Ai Drama. Not only can the research take place in a family setting, but it can also be set where people from the same generation share their viewing experiences. As sharing stories is a part of the purpose of Da-Ai Drama, then being able to see how the audience share their life stories and viewing experiences would help to explore how the therapeutic culture works on the audience.

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Appendix A. History of Imperial China

History of Imperial China		
Dynasty	Confucianism	Buddhism
Ancient (-206 B.C.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confucius (551 B.C.- 479 B.C.) established the framework of Confucianism. 	
Han (206 B.C.- 220 A.D.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confucianism was elevated as state ideology, from state institutions to the examination system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Buddhism is recorded to enter China in the 1st century.
Three Kingdoms (220-280); Jin (265- 420); South North Dynasties (420-581)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The war period started and Confucianism as a state ideology was questioned and collapsed. <i>The Learnings of Mysterious</i>, consisting of large amount of Daoist philosophy, was popular among elite intellectuals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The popularity of <i>The Learnings of Mysterious</i> enabled Buddhism to borrow Daoist terms. Buddhism started to spread among peasants and elites. Bhikkuni Sangha was established in Chinese soil in 433.
Sui (581-617); Tang (618- 907)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One of the Sui emperors promoted Buddhism combined with Confucianism. Tang emperors were said to be the descendants of Lao-zi, the founder to Daoism while the emperors ruled the nation by Confucianism and sponsored Buddhism. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It was the golden age of Buddhism in China because of more accurate translations on Buddhist sutras. Various Buddhist schools developed and Chinese Buddhism began to spread to other parts of East Asia.
Song (960-1279); Yuan (1206-1368); Ming (1365-1662); Qing (1662-1911)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The rise of Neo-Confucianism blended Buddhist doctrines with Confucian teachings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Buddhist institutions and doctrines were standardized by the government in Song Dynasty. Lay Buddhist organizations became prominent, particularly in charitable works, in Ming Dynasty.
Republican Era (1911-)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 1910s and 1920s, intellectuals started to critique Confucianism as backwardness and looked into Democracy and Science ,which were Western philosophies, to establish a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Master Taixu (1889-1947) advocated Humanistic Buddhism in early 20th century. Master Yin-shun (1906-2005)

modernised state. (It was known as May Fourth Movement.)

- The result of the civil war split up Taiwan and China in 1949. (KMT government revived Confucian teachings in Taiwan while Mao, zedong promoted social communism in China.)

expanded the theoretical framework of Humanistic Buddhism.

- Tzu-chi organization was founded by Master Zhengyan in 1966 in Taiwan.

Appendix B. Table of Interviewees' Characteristics

NAME	GENDER	AGE	RELIGION	LOCATION	TIME
Bao	Female (Married)	50+	Buddhism	A café at her volunteering work's place	23. Jan. 2009
Chen	Male (Married)	50+	Buddhism	A café at her volunteering work's place	20. Jan. 2009
Hsieh	Female (Married)	40-50	Buddhism	Ms. Hsieh's home	29. Dec. 2008
James	Male (Single)	30-40	Buddhism	James' working place	14. Jan. 2009
Jing	Female (Married)	30-40	N/A	Jing's home	23. Dec. 2008
Lin	Female (Divorced)	50+	Buddhism	A café at her volunteering work's place	9. Jan. 2009
Ling	Female (Married)	50+	Buddhism	A café at her volunteering work's place	16. Jan. 2009
Liu	Female (Married)	50+	Buddhism	Ms. Liu's home	2. Jan. 2009
Tsai	Female (Married)	50+	Buddhism	A café at her volunteering work's place	16. Jan. 2009
Xu	Female (Married)	40-50	Other	Ms. Xu's home	19. Jan. 2009
Yao	Female (Married)	50+	Buddhism	A café at her volunteering work's place	9. Jan. 2009
Yo	Female (Separated)	30-40	Buddhism	Yo's home	24. Dec. 2008
Yu-Hui	Female (Married)	40-50	Buddhism	Jing-si Book	9. Jan. 2009
Yuan Yuan	Female (Married)	30-40	Buddhism & Daoism	Yuan Yuan's store	31. Dec. 2008

Appendix C. Interview Questions

- Please briefly introduce yourself.
- I'd like to know what you think about Da-Ai TV network before we discuss Da-Ai Drama. How do you define Da-Ai TV? Do you think it's a Buddhist channel, or, a general TV channel like all others. In general, is there any religious messages embedded in the programmes broadcasted in Da-Ai TV? If so, what are them?
- Apart from Da-Ai Drama, do you watch other programmes in Da-Ai TV?
- How long have you been watching Da-Ai Drama? Do you remember when you first started watch it? Compared with other prime-time dramas, what made you choose Da-Ai?
- As prime-time dramas are usually watched by the whole family, do you watch with your family? Do you discuss with your family members?
- As we all know, Da-Ai dramas are based on true events, how do you see the dramatic elements and the truth claim?
- As for the contents, what is your opinion about the familial values embedded in Da-Ai Drama?
- What do you think about the female characters in these dramas? And, what do you think about their transitions after participating Tzu-Chi's activities?
- Do you relate your personal experiences to the dramas? How?
- How do you link the familial values we've discussed earlier to Tzu-Chi's agenda embedded in the dramas?
- Please feel free to give any comment on Tzu-Chi or Da-Ai Drama.

Appendix D. Users from Online Forums

USER NAME	TOPIC OF THE ARTICLE	POSTED ON [DATE]	WEBSITE	ACCESSED ON [DATE]
5214	[國語戲劇] 台灣八點檔～進步還退步？[Mandarin dramas: Taiwanese prime-time dramas--a progress or a retrogress?]	22. Apr. 2008	http://www.karayou.com/viewthread.php?tid=220293&extra=&page=1	11. Feb. 2009
6898	看過「大愛電視」真人真事劇情[After watching <i>Da-Ai TV</i> : the plots based on real events.]	10. Oct. 2006	http://www.wahas.com/viewthread.php?tid=190020	11. Feb. 2009
212649	[國語戲劇] 台灣八點檔～進步還退步？[Mandarin dramas: Taiwanese prime-time dramas--a progress or a retrogress?]	13. Feb. 2008	http://www.karayou.com/viewthread.php?tid=220293&extra=&page=1	11. Feb. 2009
246578	看過「大愛電視」真人真事劇情 [After watching <i>Da-Ai TV</i> : the plots based on real events.]	20. Apr. 2007	http://www.wahas.com/viewthread.php?tid=190020	11. Feb. 2009
9113050	看過「大愛電視」真人真事劇情 [After watching <i>Da-Ai TV</i> : the plots based on real events.]	25. Jan. 2007	http://www.wahas.com/viewthread.php?tid=190020	11. Feb. 2009
嘉雲 [Jia-ying]	矽谷阿嬤心得分享區 [Forums for <i>Xi-gu A-ma</i>]	29. Oct. 2008	http://tcnw.wikispaces.com/%E5%BF%83%E5%BE%97%E5%88%86%E4%BA%AB%E5%8D%80	21. Jul. 2009
aaamay	Re: [討論] 大家喜歡大愛台的哪幾部電視劇?? [Discussion: Which <i>Da-ai Drama</i> does everyone like?]	26. Sep. 2005	telnet:// ptt.cc TaiwanDrama	15. Mar. 2009
accidents	[閒聊] 大愛的流金歲月 [Chat: <i>Liu-jin sui-yue</i> from <i>Da-ai</i>]	18. Jul. 2005	telnet:// ptt.cc TaiwanDrama	15. Mar. 2009
Bob	矽谷阿嬤心得分享區 [Forums for <i>Xi-gu A-ma</i>]	05. Nov. 2008	http://tcnw.wikispaces.com/%E5%BF%83	21. Jul. 2009

			E5%BE%97% E5%88%86% E4%BA%AB% E5%8D%80	
channey	[閒聊] 請問有關大愛電視 [Chat: Some questions on <i>Da-ai TV</i>]	9. Apr. 2008	telnet:// ptt.cc TaiwanDrama	15. Mar. 2009
cheng2	看過「大愛電視」真人真事 劇情 [After watching <i>Da-Ai</i> <i>TV</i> : the plots based on real events.]	30. Apr. 2007	http://www.wahas.com/viewthread.php?tid=190020	11. Feb. 2009
chloe5678	[心得] 千歲綁萬佛 [Report: <i>Qian-sui bang qian-fuo</i>]	2. Jan. 2009	telnet:// ptt.cc DaAiTv	16. Mar. 2009
dar5103	[心得] 一個十九歲得學生看 春風伴我行 [Report: A 19- year-old student watches <i>Chun-feng ban wo xing</i>]	30. Jun. 2009	telnet:// ptt.cc DaAiTv	5. Nov. 2009
dofeeeee	Re: [心得] 大推~生命的陽 光^^ [Re: Report: Recommendation-- <i>The</i> <i>sunlight in the life ^^</i>]	8. Jul. 2007	telnet:// ptt.cc TaiwanDrama	15. Mar. 2009
F911	對於華視八點檔要撥韓劇有 何看法 [What's your opinion on CTS's decision to broadcast Korean dramas in prime-time?]	17. Feb. 2009	http://www.twbs.tw	22. Jul. 2009
Frances	[大愛電視] 明月照紅塵 [<i>Da-ai TV</i> : <i>Ming-yue zhao</i> <i>hong-chen</i>]	20. Nov. 2005	http://fangsblog.pixnet.net/blog/post/705224	11. Feb. 2009
hythyt	草山春暉 第50集 [<i>Cao-</i> <i>shan chun-hui</i> , ep. 50]	28. Sep. 2005	telnet:// ptt.cc TaiwanDrama	15. Mar. 2009
hythyt	[閒聊] 推薦大愛八點檔「黃 金線」 [Chat: Recommendation on <i>Huang, Jin-xian</i> From <i>Da-</i> <i>ai</i>]	23. Feb. 2008	telnet:// ptt.cc TaiwanDrama	22. Jul. 2009
iachi	Re: [心得] 推薦給您>>大愛 台的大愛的孩子 [Re: Reports: Recommendation on <i>Da-ai's Children</i> from <i>Da-ai TV</i>]	18. Oct. 2004	telnet:// ptt.cc TaiwanDrama	15. Mar. 2009
icged	Re: [大愛] 有人在看情緣路	22. Jul. 2008	telnet:// ptt.cc TaiwanDrama	15. Mar. 2009

	嗎 [Re: Da-ai: Is there anyone watching <i>Qing yuan lu</i> ?]			
jayclub	[心得] 感恩 大愛劇場 [Report: Thanks to <i>Da-ai Drama</i>]	28. Feb. 2006	telnet:// ptt.cc TaiwanDrama	15. Mar. 2009
JEGO10 21	Re: [大愛] 推薦 走過好味道 [Re: Da-ai-- Recommendation on <i>Zou go hao wui dao</i>]	2. Sep. 2008	telnet:// ptt.cc TaiwanDrama	15. Mar. 2009
jessiele e428	Re: [心得] 大愛電視台 「生命的陽光」 [Re: Report: Da-Ai TV channel-- <i>The sunlight in the life</i>]	21. Nov. 2007	<u>telnet:// ptt.cc</u> <u>TaiwanDrama</u>	15. Mar. 2009
jinger12 19	[心得] 很有感觸的一部優質好戲 [Report: a touching good drama]	25. Jul. 2009	<u>telnet:// ptt.cc</u> <u>DaAiTv</u>	5. Nov. 2009
joub	[國語戲劇] 台灣八點檔～進步還退步? [Mandarin dramas: Taiwanese prime-time dramas--a progress or a retrogress?]	23. Apr. 2008	<u>http://www.karayou.com/viewthread.php?tid=220293&extra=&page=1</u>	11. Feb. 2009
kirkkirkk k	Re: [心得] 大推～生命的陽光^^ [Re: Report: Recommendation-- <i>The sunlight in the life</i> ^^]	4. Jul. 2007	telnet:// ptt.cc TaiwanDrama	15. Mar. 2009
kirkkirkk k	Re: [討論] 推薦大愛電視--鐵樹花開 [Re: Discussion: Recommendation on <i>Tie-shu hua-kai</i> from <i>Da-ai TV</i>]	13. Apr. 2007	telnet:// ptt.cc TaiwanDrama	15. Mar. 2009
koichi01 01	看過「大愛電視」真人真事劇情 [After watching <i>Da-Ai TV</i> : the plots based on real events.]	20. May. 2008	<u>http://www.wahas.com/viewthread.php?tid=190020</u>	11. Feb. 2009
KUNEV ASE	[閒聊] 雜感 [Chat: Random thoughts]	1. Jan. 2009	telnet:// ptt.cc DaAiTv	16. Mar. 2009
Leon	矽谷阿嬤心得分享區 [Forums for <i>Xi-gu A-ma</i>]	07. Nov. 2008	<u>http://tcnw.wiki spaces.com/%E5%BF%83%E5%BE%97%E5%88%86%E4%BA%AB%E5%8D%80</u>	21. Jul. 2009

II2266II	[心得] 大愛的黃金線 [Report: <i>Huang, Jin-xian</i> from <i>Da-ai TV</i>]	22. Feb. 2008	telnet:// ptt.cc TaiwanDrama	22. Jul. 2009
mimocat	草山...終於結尾了 [Cao-shan...finally ends!]	3. Oct. 2005	telnet:// ptt.cc TaiwanDrama	15. Mar. 2009
Minjhing	矽谷阿嬤心得分享區 [Forums for <i>Xi-gu A-ma</i>]	08. Nov. 2008	http://tcnw.wikispaces.com/%E5%BF%83%E5%BE%97%E5%88%86%E4%BA%AB%E5%8D%80	21. Jul. 2009
Misako	以不完美成就完美--草山春暉!!! [To complete perfection by imperfections: <i>Cao shan chun hui</i>]	2. Oct. 2005	telnet:// ptt.cc TaiwanDrama	15. Mar. 2009
monsterba	Re: [閒聊] 大愛的流金歲月 [Re: Chat: <i>Liu-jin sui-yue</i> from <i>Da-ai</i>]	9. Aug. 2005	telnet:// ptt.cc TaiwanDrama	15. Mar. 2009
nathanlee	[推薦] 大愛劇場明月照紅塵 [Recommendation: <i>Ming-yue zhao hong-chen</i> from <i>Da-ai Drama</i>]	28. Oct. 2005	http://blog.roodo.com/nathanlee/archives/648097.html	11. Feb. 2009
nc20021001	看過「大愛電視」真人真事 劇情 [After watching <i>Da-Ai TV</i> : the plots based on real events.]	15. Oct. 2006	http://www.wahas.com/viewthread.php?tid=190020	11. Feb. 2009
nhk12444	[國語戲劇] 台灣八點檔~進步 還退步? [Mandarin dramas: Taiwanese prime-time dramas--a progress or a retrogress?]	22. Apr. 2008	http://www.karayou.com/viewthread.php?tid=220293&extra=&page=1	11. Feb. 2009
nickboy996	看過「大愛電視」真人真事 劇情 [After watching <i>Da-Ai TV</i> : the plots based on real events.]	26. Mar. 2007	http://www.wahas.com/viewthread.php?tid=190020	11. Feb. 2009
nma	Re: 生命的陽光 [Re: <i>The sunlight in the life</i>]	21. Jun. 2007	telnet:// ptt.cc TaiwanDrama	15. Mar. 2009
olivinemy	Re: 大愛八點檔--回甘人生 味 [Re: <i>Da-ai drama: Hui gan ren sheng wei</i>]	12. Sep. 2007	telnet:// ptt.cc TaiwanDrama	15. Mar. 2009
peichuan	Re: [心得] 大愛電視台 [生	20. Jun. 2007	telnet:// ptt.cc	15. Mar. 2009

	命的陽光]！！ [Re: Report: <i>Da-ai TV--The sunlight in the life ^^</i>]		TaiwanDrama	
pomppomm	[心得] 矽谷阿嬤 [Report: <i>Xi-gu A-ma</i>]	10. Oct. 2008	telnet:// ptt.cc TaiwanDrama	21. Jul. 2009
Portnoy	沒有反派不成戲？看看「草山春暉」吧！ [A drama can't do without a bad guy? Take a look at <i>Cao-shan chun-hui</i>]	4. Sep. 2005	http://www.big-sound.org/portnoy/weblog/001067.html	11. Feb. 2009
rainling	[心得] 回甘人生味 [Report: <i>Hui gan ren sheng wei</i>]	10. Oct. 2007	telnet:// ptt.cc TaiwanDrama	15. Mar. 2009
sean0270	看過「大愛電視」真人真事劇情 [After watching <i>Da-Ai TV</i> : the plots based on real events.]	4. Feb. 2008	http://www.wahas.com/viewthread.php?tid=190020	11. Feb. 2009
sherry7912	[心得] 旻真收到蠟筆那段戲 [Report: The scene which Min-zhen receives crayons]	4. Oct. 2009	telnet:// ptt.cc DaAiTv	5. Nov. 2009
shew	[討論] 矽谷阿嬤 [Discussion: <i>Xi-gu A-ma</i>]	19. Sep. 2008	telnet:// ptt.cc TaiwanDrama	21. Jul. 2009
shew	[心得] 鄧導鏡頭下的大愛 [Report: <i>Da-ai</i> through Director Deng]	17. Sep. 2008	telnet:// ptt.cc TaiwanDrama	21. Jul. 2009
shujadzi a	Re: [心得] 很有感觸的一部優質好戲 [Report: a touching good drama]	25. Jul. 2009	telnet:// ptt.cc DaAiTv	5. Nov. 2009
smileyboy	Re: [情報] 7/15起 大愛頻道 [人生旅程--緣] [Re: Information: <i>Yuan</i> starts on 15th of July on <i>Da-ai TV</i>]	16. Jul. 2006	telnet:// ptt.cc TaiwanDrama	15. Mar. 2009
sonichiro	Re: [心得] 大愛電視台「生命的陽光」 [Re: Report: <i>Da-Ai TV</i> channel--The sunlight in the life]	21. Nov. 2007	telnet:// ptt.cc TaiwanDrama	15. Mar. 2009
sshow	[心得] 晚晴 [Report: <i>Wan qing</i>]	20. Mar. 2007	telnet:// ptt.cc TaiwanDrama	15. Mar. 2009
starstar se	[國語戲劇] 台灣八點檔～進步還退步？ [Mandarin dramas: Taiwanese prime-time dramas--a progress or	24. Apr. 2008	http://www.karayou.com/viewthread.php?tid=220293&extra=&page=1	11. Feb. 2009

	a retrogress?]			
stone1997	看過「大愛電視」真人真事劇情 [After watching <i>Da-Ai TV</i> : the plots based on real events.]	29. Apr. 2007	http://www.wahas.com/viewthread.php?tid=190020	11. Feb. 2009
sweet330	[心得] 大愛台--陽光下的足跡 [Report: <i>Da-ai TV: The footprints under the sun</i>]	28. Nov. 2007	telnet:// ptt.cc TaiwanDrama	15. Mar. 2009
w2008d	Re: [心得] 黃金線 [Report: Huang, Jin-xian]	2. Feb. 2009	telnet:// ptt.cc DaAiTv	22. Jul. 2009
wilma	Re: [閒聊] 大愛的流金歲月 [Re: Chat: <i>Liu-jin sui-yue</i> from <i>Da-ai</i>]	20. Jul. 2005	telnet:// ptt.cc TaiwanDrama	15. Mar. 2009
wingofsky	看過「大愛電視」真人真事劇情 [After watching <i>Da-Ai TV</i> : the plots based on real events.]	12. Oct. 2006	http://www.wahas.com/viewthread.php?tid=190020	11. Feb. 2009
ycchang	Re: [討論] 矽谷阿嬤 [Re: Discussion: <i>Xi-gu A-ma</i>]	19. Sep. 2008	telnet:// ptt.cc TaiwanDrama	21. Jul. 2009
yuchiehhsieh	[心得] 真情伴星月 7	7. Apr. 2009	telnet:// ptt.cc DaAiTv	5. Nov. 2009
九把刀 [Jui-Ba-Dao]	消費悲傷 [Consuming Sorrow]	13. Aug. 2006	http://news.chinatimes.com/Chinatimes/Philology/Philology-Coffee/0,3406,112006081300319+1105130102+20060813+news,00.html	11. Feb. 2009
嘉嘉 [Jia-jia]	矽谷阿嬤心得分享區 [Forums for <i>Xi-gu A-ma</i>]	19. Sep. 2008	http://tcnw.wikispaces.com/%E5%BF%83%E5%BE%97%E5%88%86%E4%BA%AB%E5%8D%80	21. Jul. 2009
奶嘴寶寶 [Nai-zui-bao-bao]	看過「大愛電視」真人真事劇情 [After watching <i>Da-Ai TV</i> : the plots based on real events.]	14. May. 2008	http://www.wahas.com/viewthread.php?tid=190020	11. Feb. 2009
岱佳	矽谷阿嬤心得分享區	28. Oct. 2008	http://tcnw.wikispaces.com/	21. Jul. 2009

	[Forums for <i>Xi-gu A-ma</i>]		E5%BF%83%E5%BE%97%E5%88%86%E4%BA%AB%E5%8D%80	
廷蘋	對於華視八點檔要撥韓劇有何看法 [What's your opinion on CTS's decision to broadcast Korean dramas in prime-time?]	23. Feb. 2009	http://www.twbs.com	22. Jul. 2009
心上秋	【國語戲劇】台灣八點檔～進步還退步？ [Mandarin dramas: Taiwanese prime-time dramas--a progress or a retrogress?]	22. Apr. 2008	http://www.karayou.com/viewthread.php?tid=220293&extra=&page=1	11. Feb. 2009
惟成	矽谷阿嬤心得分享區 [Forums for <i>Xi-gu A-ma</i>]	31. Oct. 2008	http://tcnw.wiki-spaces.com/%E5%BF%83%E5%BE%97%E5%88%86%E4%BA%AB%E5%8D%80	21. Jul. 2009
明晉 [Ming-Jin]	矽谷阿嬤心得分享區 [Forums for <i>Xi-gu A-ma</i>]	20. Sep. 2008	http://tcnw.wiki-spaces.com/%E5%BF%83%E5%BE%97%E5%88%86%E4%BA%AB%E5%8D%80	21. Jul. 2009
松鼠line	對於華視八點檔要撥韓劇有何看法 [What's your opinion on CTS's decision to broadcast Korean dramas in prime-time?]	27. Feb. 2009	http://www.twbs.com	22. Jul. 2009
舞言弄色	看過「大愛電視」真人真事劇情 [After watching <i>Da-Ai TV</i> : the plots based on real events.]	10. Oct. 2006	http://www.wahas.com/viewthread.php?tid=190020	11. Feb. 2009

Appendix E. On Emptiness

The founder of the Madhyamika school (Middle way), Nagarjuna, systemized doctrines of the Perfection of Wisdom with a focus on the doctrine of emptiness (sunyata) (Strong, 2002: 146; O'Grady, 2005: 176-177). The Sanskrit word for emptiness is "sunyata" which literally means something that is swollen from the outside but is hollow inside (Conze, 1951: 130-131; Nagao, 1991: 209). When Western scholars encountered sunyata, a significant religious symbol in the Mahayana tradition, difficulties in translating this religious symbol into a different linguistic and religious context occurred (Low, 2006: 130). Some may translate "sunyata" as "relativity" while the most prevalent translation is "emptiness" (ibid, 146). When understanding "sunyata" as "relativity", one sees "sunyata" as a description on the dynamics of reality. Instead of seeing reality as a fixed or unchangeable truth, Nagarjuna treated it as a relative and interdependent truth. However, this sense of "relativity" is not enough to describe Nagarjuna's further understanding of "sunyata". The most prevalent translation, "emptiness", expresses a sense of negation, has brought forth critique for its assumed nihilism. However, nihilism is a false accusation of "emptiness" for it should not be used as a negative term that rejects substantiality and essence of all things. Emptiness is either nihilism or eternalism (Streng 1967, 79). Cooper puts Western scholars' interpretation of "emptiness" into three categories; transcendentalists, who see emptiness as a reference to an inexpressible Absolute; nihilists, who understand Ultimate truth as a reality-less-ness; and quietists, who equate emptiness with dependent origination that brings peace and liberation. In *Emptiness: Interpretation and Metaphor* (2002), Cooper criticizes quietists' interpretation of emptiness for its failure to illuminate the soteriological role of emptiness in Buddhism. Cooper's article implies that a correct understanding of the doctrine of emptiness is necessary as it is significant in the soteriological theme in Buddhism. Siderits (2003) criticizes the semantic interpretation of treating emptiness as key element in enlightenment of the Mahayana schools and tries to suggest a correct interpretation of the doctrine of emptiness. I have doubts about this focus on soteriological significance of the doctrine of emptiness, for the salvation theme is not significant in Mahayana Buddhism. Although the Bodhisattva ideal is set out to save all sentient beings from suffering by postponing the Bodhisattva's nirvana, Williams has pointed out that since sentient beings are infinite, it is an impossible task for the Bodhisattva to attain Buddhahood (1989: 52). What's more important here is that not only is sentient beings infinite but also the Bodhisattvas. Practicing the Bodhisattva path is seen as the most important theme in Mahayana Buddhism and it is open to all lay people. The tricky question is: will anyone ever attain Buddhahood if s/he follows the teachings of the Bodhisattva path. Mahayana teachings

encourage enlightened beings return to mundane world rather than going to heaven or paradise out of sympathy and compassion for all sentient beings. When developing into Humanistic Buddhism, the theme of going to an other-worldly heaven or paradise becomes a subtle issue. Studying on the soteriological theme in Buddhism is a fallacy that examines an Eastern philosophical system through a Western lens. This might mislead the whole understanding of emptiness. Instead, it should be used as a way to apprehend ultimate reality in Buddhist teaching (Streng, 1967: 21).

When examining the doctrine of emptiness in the scriptures, philosophical arguments on its seemingly nihilism because of its absolute negation of the substantiality of all things neglect the fact that the doctrine of emptiness is not about ontological examination. Instead, it is “a meditative object for the practitioner to aid him in the abandonment of desire and attachment.” (Nagao, 1991: 210) Philosophical inquiries into the doctrine of emptiness were later formulated and developed by Nagarjuna, based on the prajnaparamita scriptures. In Nagarjuna’s teaching of the Middle Way, emptiness is understood as a negation and absence of essence of beings in order to explain dependent origination or co-arising. Therefore, emptiness is not non-existence, but lack of independent or autonomous being. That is, entities are not self-standing. Instead, they are dependent on conditions. (Streng, 1967: 163; Nagao, 1991: 212; Burton, 2001: 177) The dialectic of Nagarjuna presents the ‘tetralemma’ which includes every possible case: being, non-being, both being and non-being, neither being nor non-being (Nagao, 1991: 213). Hence, emptiness is often associated with non-duality because all dualities are annihilated. Although Nagarjuna’s concepts of the Middle Way deal with philosophical issues of the doctrine of emptiness, his aim is to offer religious insight to liberate all beings from their selfish selves and their false attachment to the world (Streng, 1967: 169).

It seems like gender does not play an important role in this teaching of emptiness because in the doctrine of emptiness, gender or sex is empty and lack of existence. I would like to use this doctrine of emptiness to further explain gender in the Buddhist view. A truth or reality of gender or anything else is unattainable for it does not exist. The doctrine of emptiness demonstrates that all phenomena are not permanent and are without substantiality. Therefore, gender attributes, maleness or femaleness, do not exist. All these are nothing but illusion (Paul, 1985: 217). Clinging on “a” truth or “a” reality falls into a fallacy that causes a fixed and unchanged matrix, as we shall see in Butler’s demonstration of gender performative. Following the logic of Madhyamaka, gender can be explained like this. A true or genuine gender attribute like femininity or

masculinity does not exist. The lack of inherent gender attributes means that gender attributes are mere conceptual constructs or our mental fabrications. Abandoning thoughts on gender attributes, as well as abandoning all outer forms, is a step nearer to attaining enlightenment. However, conflicts arise when laywomen encounter their social roles. As Lu's study shows us, women would have to split their bodies into a social body and a religious one. This shows us how religious symbols are transformed into lay meaning in a mundane world. As Humanistic Buddhism advocates, an earthly heaven is meant to be built in this world. How are gender roles going to posit in this worldly heaven?

Although female rebirth is seen as inferior than male, because women have five particular types of suffering that are related to reproduction, physiological "inferiorities" do not stop Mahayana Buddhism from granting women equal spiritual power to men. Women and men have equally spiritual power and strength to enlightenment. Soteriologically speaking, sex and gender play insignificant role in attaining enlightenment (Harvey, 2000: 357). Every sentient being, male or female alike, is considered to be a potential bodhisattva (Paul, 1985: 106). Despite the fact that women are granted the same spiritual strength as men, they are limited by their social roles related to reproduction and motherhood (Paul, 1985: 60). On the issue that whether women can become a Bodhisattva or attain Buddhahood, there are different views in Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism. In Theravada Buddhism, there is no need for many bodhisattvas; therefore, female is less likely to become a Bodhisattva. However, since the Bodhisattva path is open to every one in Mahayana Buddhism, women are included (Harvey, 2000: 373; Paul, 1985: 106). The discussion of gender and sexuality in Buddhism neglects an essential teaching in Buddhism. That is, to follow the soteriological path, men and women alike have to eliminate or reverse their sexuality to pursue an asexual ideal (Paul, 1985: 77). In Buddhism, the ultimate enlightenment is beyond duality; therefore, when attaining Buddhahood, a sentient being is both male and female, and neither male nor female. It is emptiness and it is empty of emptiness. What's more interesting in this discussion of gender does not lie in religious teachings itself, but how this religious teaching influences lay women in the mundane world.

Appendix F. The Four Noble Truths

The previous section shows that the doctrines of Chinese Buddhism belong to the school of Mahayana Buddhism; however, the syncretisation of Buddhism in China develops its own feature. After the contextual information of Chinese Buddhism and Taiwanese Buddhism this section deals with basic doctrines in Buddhism. Chapter 5 shows how the narrative structure of Da-Ai Drama corresponds with the concept of *The Four Noble Truths*, which are the basic doctrines in Theravada Buddhism as well as Mahayana Buddhism.

The Four Noble Truths — Suffering (Dukkha); Suffering's Origin; Suffering's Cessation (Nirvana); The Path — summarises the Buddhist explanation of human life and the way to practise Buddhism.

The First Noble Truth: Suffering (Dukkha). Human beings suffer because the ego itself consists of five elements that are constantly changing. Only when an individual realises the causes of sufferings can he/she begin the process to stop the suffering.

The Second Noble Truth explains the origins of suffering in human beings' cravings for or clinging on to a certain object or ideology. Human beings suffer because of their desire and cravings for happiness, love, or life without knowing that nothing lasts. The cravings and desire are what start the cycle of reincarnation because human beings act according to their desire, not aware of the bad karma and bad consequences. Rather than negating physical suffering, the Four Noble Truths teach Buddhists to understand the causes and effects of suffering. Only when they understand the causes and effects can they learn the ultimate truth.

The Third Noble Truth, Suffering's Cessation, offers an explanation of the Buddhist concept of Nirvana. Nirvana is the ultimate truth that explains the relativity of every event (karma, causes and effects). It is a transcendence above duality and binary. It is not to be free from suffering or bitterness. It is a state, free from complexes, when an individual finally understands all the causes and effects. Suffering and troubles are always there but an understanding of the cause-effect relationship could rid an individual of the troubling and confusing state. One of the emphases of Humanistic Buddhism is that the state of Nirvana can be reached in this world. Using Buddha as

an example, Master Yin-Shun explains that Buddha reaches the state of Nirvana in the human world. Different from other religions, the ultimate state of Buddhism, salvation in the Christian sense, does not have to wait until after death.

The Fourth Noble Truth, The Path, leads people to the ultimate truth, Nirvana. The Path is often called the Eightfold Path; that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. By practising the Noble Eightfold Path, an individual is practising Buddhism. These doctrines are ways to discipline Buddhists in their daily lives. The Eightfold Path aims to discipline Buddhists physically and mentally. To summarise, the Fourth Noble Truth – The Path - teaches Buddhists to act and think righteously so that they can avoid making bad karma. By avoiding making bad karma wisdom grows in the peaceful mind. The human mind can be seen as a pond. Only by practising the righteous way can the pond become a still one. The flower of wisdom will grow out of the still pond of human minds.