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TZU-CHI



USA Journal

The Journey to Enlightenment Exhibition

The 2026 Tzu Chi Global Symposium for Common Goodness

Under One Sky: Music Connects Hearts at Harvard

One Global Family, 60 Years of Compassion



CONTENTS

03 | Editor's Note
By Anik Ghose



COVER STORY
**Journey to Enlightenment:
From Buddhist History
to Compassionate Action**
Written by Ida Eva Zielinska

24 | SYMPOSIUM PORTRAIT
2026 TZU CHI GLOBAL SYMPOSIUM FOR
COMMON GOODNESS:
Part I:
Applied Buddhism in an Anxious World
Written by Ida Eva Zielinska

46 | **Part II:**
Bringing the Dharma Into Everyday Life
Written by Ida Eva Zielinska

66 | **Part III:**
Designing Buddhist Futures
Written by Ida Eva Zielinska

86 | FEATURE STORY
**Under One Sky:
Music Connects Hearts at Harvard**
Written by Chen Chen
Edited by Adriana DiBenedetto

94 | PORTRAIT STORY
**One Global Family,
60 Years of Compassion**
Written by Adriana DiBenedetto

112 | Tzu Chi USA Directory

Cover: A lotus-shaped candle glows during Tzu Chi's 2026 Buddha Day, Mother's Day, and Global Tzu Chi Day celebration at Tzu Chi USA National Headquarters in San Dimas, California. *Photo/Shuli Lo*

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This year marks two extraordinary milestones: the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation’s 60th anniversary and the 90th birthday of its founder, Venerable Dharma Master Cheng Yen. Together, these occasions invite us to reflect not only on six decades of compassionate action, but also on the enduring vision that has guided Tzu Chi’s journey from a small group of nuns and female lay followers in Hualien, Taiwan, to the international humanitarian organization it is today. In commemorating these milestones, this special issue of *Tzu Chi USA Journal* brings together stories that explore the past, present, and future of applied Buddhism, while asking how timeless wisdom can continue to inspire meaningful responses to the challenges of our time.

Our cover story, “Journey to Enlightenment: From Buddhist History to Compassionate Action,” takes readers inside an immersive exhibition presented at Harvard University by the Buddhist Tzu Chi Charity Foundation and the Cognitive Aesthetic Media Lab at Harvard’s Faculty of Arts and Sciences. Opened in conjunction with the 2026 *Tzu Chi Global Symposium for Common Goodness*, which was held at Harvard from May 7 to 9, the exhibition traces more than 2,500 years of Buddhist history while illuminating the spiritual foundations of Tzu Chi’s humanitarian mission. The cover story and four companion features reflect the depth and breadth of this landmark gathering, where scholars, practitioners, artists, and thought leaders explored how Buddhist wisdom can inform the way we address contemporary issues.

“Applied Buddhism in an Anxious World” examines how Buddhist teachings, scholarship, and practice can address the moral and ethical questions facing the world today. “Bringing the Dharma Into Everyday Life” focuses on Dharma Master Cheng Yen’s teachings and how they shape Tzu Chi’s humanitarian service, spiritual cultivation, religious community, and practice of compassion in action. “Designing Buddhist Futures” turns to the symposium’s closing conversations on how Buddhist principles can inform design, creativity, and new ways of seeing and living in the world. “Under One Sky: Music Connects Hearts at Harvard” takes readers into the May 9 concert at Harvard Art Museums’ Calderwood Courtyard, the culminating event of the symposium, where musicians from Chinese, Indian, Japanese, and Western traditions created an expression of exchange, connection, and shared aspiration.

Completing the issue, “One Global Family, 60 Years of Compassion” turns to Tzu Chi’s 2026 Buddha Day, Mother’s Day, and Global Tzu Chi Day celebrations across the United States. Connected through synchronized ceremonies with the Jing Si Abode, Tzu Chi’s global headquarters in Hualien, Taiwan, the story follows volunteers, families, faith leaders, and community members of all ages as they gather in prayer, gratitude, and reflection. It also highlights Panda Restaurant Group’s donation of the “Kindness In Motion” food truck, a mobile kitchen that will help Tzu Chi USA provide hot meals during disaster relief and community outreach.

May this issue honor Dharma Master Cheng Yen’s vision while renewing our shared aspiration to bring wisdom into daily life, respond to suffering with compassion, and work together toward a more peaceful and caring world. 🌱

by **Anik Ghose**

Journey to Enlightenment:

From Buddhist History to Compassionate Action

Written by Ida Eva Zielinska



Visitors experience *Journey to Enlightenment: A Multimedia Exhibition on Buddhist Cultural Heritage* at Harvard University during the 2026 Tzu Chi Global Symposium for Common Goodness. Photo/Lily Chen

To bring Buddhist ideas to life in an exhibition like this, I think it truly is giving a body, giving a practice, giving a presence to Buddhism in a way that otherwise might not be the case.

Exhibition Visitor

“

On May 9, *Journey to Enlightenment: A Multimedia Exhibition on Buddhist Cultural Heritage* opened at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, during the 2026 Tzu Chi Global Symposium for Common Goodness. Co-curated by the Cognitive Aesthetic Media Lab at Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences (CAMLab) and the Buddhist Tzu Chi Charity Foundation, the exhibition traces more than 2,500 years of Buddhist art, architecture, and scripture. Coinciding with Tzu Chi's 60th anniversary in 2026, it offers a timely opportunity to reflect on the spiritual principles that have guided its global humanitarian work from the beginning.

The Journey to Enlightenment immersive art exhibition presents a contemporary interpretation of Buddhist heritage through the lens of modern technology. Through this innovative expression, we are invited to enter more deeply into the meaning of the Buddhist scriptures, while reflecting the spirit of the Bodhi-sattva path as practiced by Tzu Chi volunteers under the guidance of Master Cheng Yen over the past 60 years. It is a spiritual epic spanning over two and a half millennia, truly worthwhile for everyone to come and experience.

Power Yen

*Chief Executive Officer
Buddhist Tzu Chi Charity Foundation*

”

An Auspicious Encounter

The story of how *Journey to Enlightenment* came to life began with what may have seemed like a chance meeting between two scholars, and perhaps something more. Several years ago, Eugene Y. Wang, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Professor of Asian Art at Harvard University and Founder and Director of CAMLab, met Rey-Sheng Her, Deputy CEO of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Charity Foundation, who was then a visiting scholar at Harvard. Wang described it as “an interesting, happy occasion.”

Founded at Harvard in 2019, CAMLab explores how research, technology, and storytelling can open new ways of experiencing cultural heritage. When Wang introduced Her to the lab’s work, the encounter became the starting point for what would eventually become *Journey to Enlightenment*. “The Tzu Chi Foundation engaged artists working in traditional media. And yes, it has worked. But he felt that what we have been doing

breaks new ground and signals a new direction. He clearly saw the potential of this medium,” Wang recalled. “So we started conversations. He was convinced that we could do really interesting things.”

In fact, Her saw CAMLab’s immersive approach to storytelling as part of the long evolution of how Buddhist teachings and history have been transmitted across time. “We had oral communication after the Buddha reached nirvana,” he noted, referring to the roughly 400 years of oral transmission before the teachings were written down in what is now Sri Lanka. “And then we had print technology, then radio, then TV, then the internet, and now we have an immersive exhibition. It’s quite advanced and avant-garde media that can tell the story of Buddhism, Buddha, Master Cheng Yen, and Tzu Chi.”

In Wang’s view, the collaboration also carried a deeper sense of alignment. “Buddhism always believes in causal conditions. Things happen for a good reason. Certain things didn’t seem to be aligned, but then they were,” he said, noting that Master Cheng Yen’s path had been

Chenchen Lu, CAMLab Co-Founder and Associate Director, mingles with guests during the opening ceremony and dinner for *Journey to Enlightenment* on May 8, 2026. Photo/Daniel Ferrara



profoundly shaped by the *Lotus Sutra* and that his own scholarly work likewise began there. “Once these alignments take place, you start to wonder what leads to it. There’s a certain kind of happy, unintended causal alignment that seems to be at work that none of us saw coming. Since that alignment is already a fact, we can probably just go with it.”

And go with it they did. “For four years, they put effort into that,” Her explained. “Their team came to Tzu Chi to understand our spirit, our work, our premises, and to meet with Master Cheng Yen. They came up with the storytelling and combined it with ancient Buddhist sacred sites. So I think this is an extraordinary combination for the art, and for Buddhism, and also for Tzu Chi practices.”

“*Journey to Enlightenment* has been the longest, largest project we’ve worked on,” said Lorna Campos, CAMLab’s Financial & HR Manager. “From the beginning to now there have been dozens of individuals with different expertise that have been involved.” Although the core lab team is small, Campos shared, it is highly competent and dedicated, with people willing and able to “wear many different hats,” all of which benefited an undertaking of this scale.

Guiding this far-reaching endeavor were Wang and CAMLab Co-Founder and Associate Director Chenchen Lu. Together, they envisioned CAMLab as, in Lu’s words, “an interdisciplinary platform where we can translate academic research into contemporary and cutting-edge experiences of traditional art and sites through immersive projection, 3D technology, and other new technologies.” *Journey to Enlightenment* offered a rich opportunity to do just that, and each brought particular strengths to the venture. Wang contributed a deep understanding of Buddhist art, philosophy, and sacred imagery, while Lu brought her background in architecture and design to help give those ideas visual and spatial expression.



▲ Eugene Wang, Founder and Director of CAMLab, addresses guests at the opening ceremony for *Journey to Enlightenment* on May 8, 2026. Photo/Daniel Ferrara



◀ Rey-Sheng Her (left), Deputy CEO of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Charity Foundation, contemplates the completed *Journey to Enlightenment* exhibition, a milestone in Tzu Chi’s collaboration with Harvard’s CAMLab. Photo/Wendy Tsai



An aerial view of one of the Buddhist sacred sites featured in *Journey to Enlightenment* appears within the immersive projection space, transporting audiences to places connected to Tzu Chi's spiritual roots.
Photo/Jennifer Chien

Establishing the Storyline

The process began with shaping the exhibition's narrative and identifying the deeper Buddhist structure that would guide it. "Initially we had a team working on the Tzu Chi story. In the end I felt that what happened with Venerable Cheng Yen, what happened with the organization, has a certain trajectory that seems to reinforce a deep structure. It has a certain scenario that was repeatedly evoked and rehearsed in Buddhism and Buddhist art, with regard to the *Lotus Sutra* and other scenarios," Eugene Wang said. "So when one reads the history of the Tzu Chi organization, Venerable Cheng Yen's life story and so forth, it's almost like no one wrote a script, but the organization kind of enacted that script. There was a moment of recognition."

The exhibition's storyline was never conceived as a simple linear presentation. Wang's scholarship helped inform that approach. "I was attracted to Buddhist art for its sense of multiple perspectives... the universe as some kind of multiverse. It's a flexibility in shifting viewpoints." He found a similar logic in the *Lotus Sutra*, which

departs from the more linear story model found in earlier Buddhist texts. "It's no longer about one Buddha. It's about multiple Buddhas. It's no longer about one planet. It's about multiple planets. It essentially pulls down the single world model. It's a constant shift of perspectives, the dismantling of time-space." That way of thinking, with its shifting viewpoints and layered realities, has informed CAMLab's work and would also shape *Journey to Enlightenment*.

"We were very fortunate to have many chances to meet Master Cheng Yen and receive her suggestions and guidance in the design of this exhibition," Chenchen Lu shared. "It's not only about history, it's really about how we use this exhibition to influence contemporary action. Master Cheng Yen instructed us to send a concrete and clear message instead of abstract concepts to the contemporary audience. So based on this guideline, we chose eight different sites, and each site echoes one aspect of Tzu Chi's spiritual roots. In each section, we try to convey straightforward messages that will inspire action and guide the audience on how to practice Buddhism in daily life."

An Eightfold Presentation

Rather than functioning as a conventional museum exhibition in which visitors simply look at objects, *Journey to Enlightenment* unfolds more like an immersive spiritual journey, even a modern pilgrimage. As visitors move through its eight sections, they can recognize how ancient Buddhist values are carried into today's world through Tzu Chi's humanitarian efforts.

Bodh Gaya and the Origin of Awakening



A digital rendering of the Mahabodhi Temple appears in the Bodh Gaya section of *Journey to Enlightenment*. Photo/Harvard FAS CAMLab



Tzu Chi volunteers pray at the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodh Gaya, the sacred site associated with the Buddha's enlightenment.
Photo/Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation

Located in Bihar, India, Bodh Gaya is revered as the place where Siddhartha Gautama, the historical Buddha, attained enlightenment beneath the Bodhi tree. The Mahabodhi Temple preserves the Vajrāsana, or "Diamond Throne," believed to mark the site of that awakening. As a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Bodh Gaya commemorates the transformation of suffering into insight and the beginning of the Buddhist path.

In the exhibition, this foundational moment is paired with Master Cheng Yen's own awakening to human suffering and her vow to help relieve it. The message is simple, as compassionate action begins with seeing suffering clearly and allowing that recognition to awaken the heart.

Sarnath and the First Turning of the Dharma Wheel



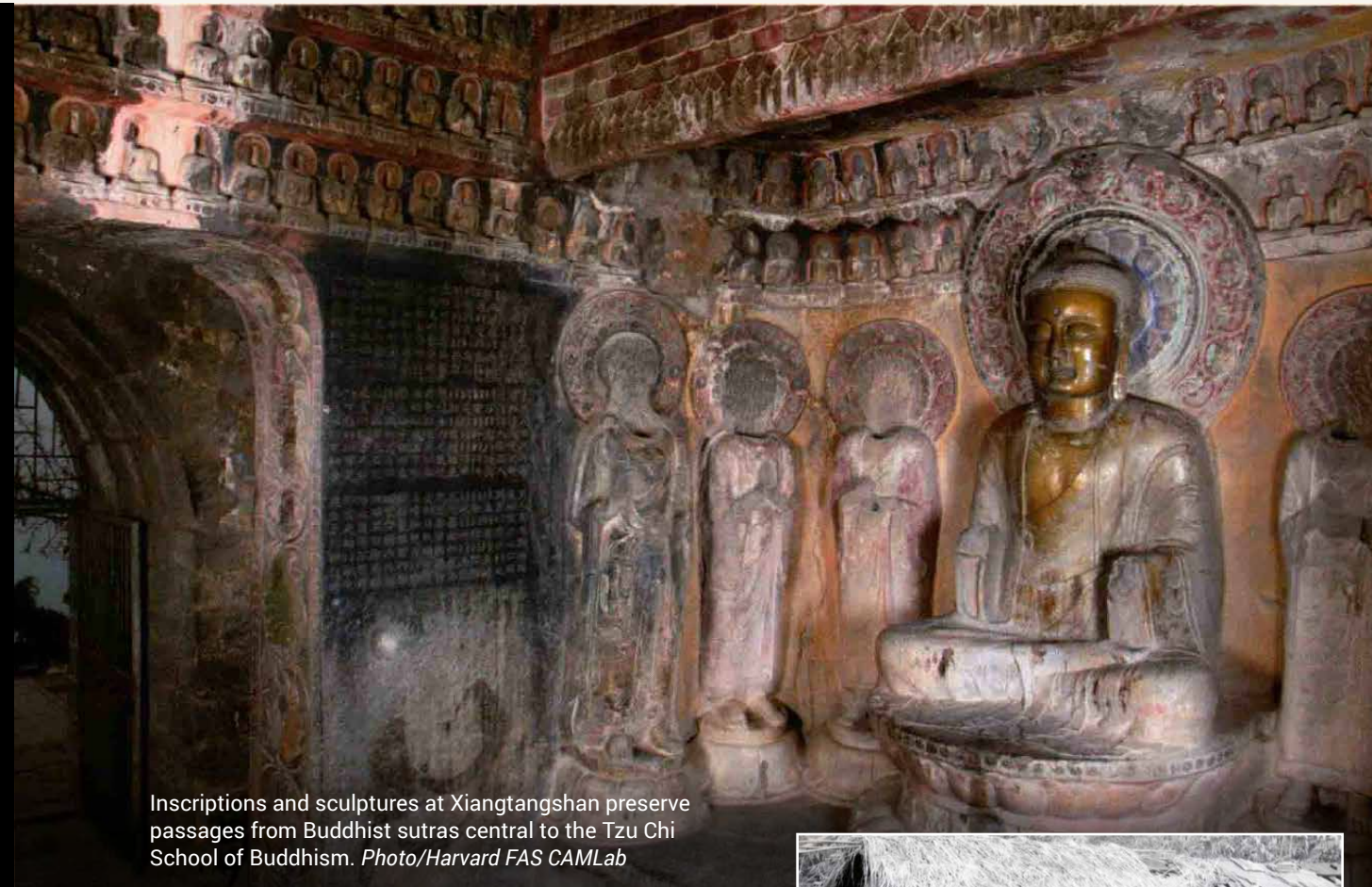
A sculpture depicts the Buddha's first teaching at Sarnath, known as the "First Turning of the Dharma Wheel." Photo/Harvard FAS CAMLab

Near Varanasi in northern India, Sarnath is home to the ancient Deer Park, where the Buddha delivered his first teaching after enlightenment. That event, known as the "First Turning of the Dharma Wheel," established the early Buddhist community. The site later flourished as a major center of teaching and pilgrimage, and its surviving stupas, monasteries, and archaeological remains reflect its lasting importance as a place where the Dharma was first shared with the world.

In the exhibition, that moment is paired with Master Cheng Yen teaching beneath a tree in Luye, Taiwan. The meaning of Luye in Chinese is associated with deer, creating a connection across time and space between the ancient Deer Park at Sarnath, where the Buddha first shared the Dharma, and Luye, where Master Cheng Yen's early teachings helped establish Tzu Chi's Dharma lineage and modern humanistic Buddhist practice.



The exhibition connects the Buddha's first teaching at Sarnath with Master Cheng Yen's early teachings beneath a tree in Luye, Taiwan. Photo/Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation

Xiangtangshan and the *Lotus Sutra* Traditions

Inscriptions and sculptures at Xiangtangshan preserve passages from Buddhist sutras central to the Tzu Chi School of Buddhism. Photo/Harvard FAS CAMLab

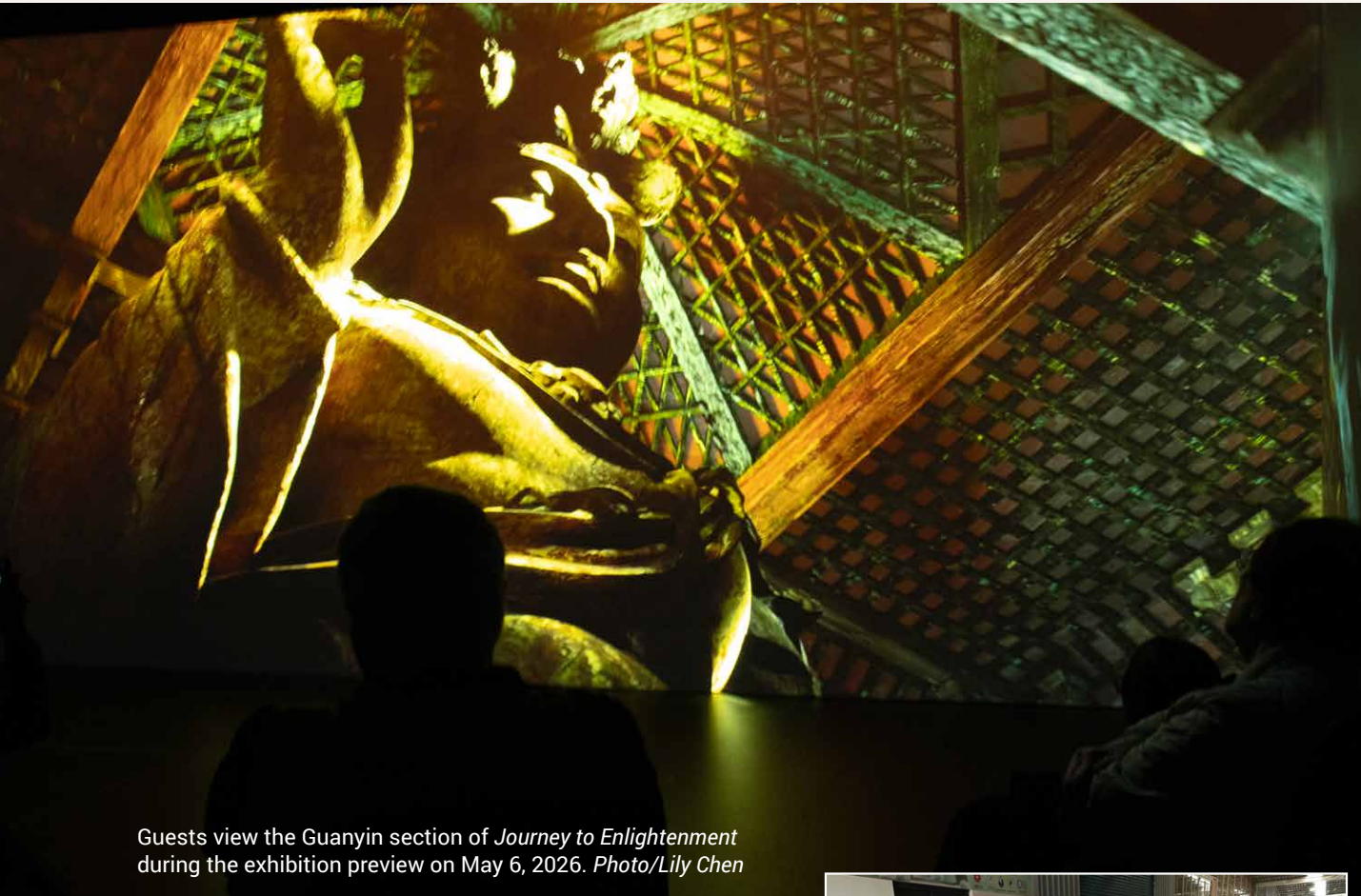
Located in Hebei province in northern China, the cave temples of Xiangtangshan, "Mountain of Echoing Halls," preserve early inscriptions of the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Sutra of Infinite Meanings*, teachings that remain central to the Tzu Chi School of Buddhism. There, Buddhist teachings were not left only to recitation or study, but given physical and visual form in the caves themselves, creating a setting for contemplation and practice.

In the exhibition, that movement from scripture to practice is paired with Tzu Chi's emphasis on applying the Dharma in daily life. The message is that sutras are not only meant to be read, but expressed through compassionate service.



Master Cheng Yen visits care recipients in Tzu Chi's early years, reflecting how sutra teachings can take shape through compassionate action. Photo/Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation

Dule Temple and the Spirit of Guanyin



Guests view the Guanyin section of *Journey to Enlightenment* during the exhibition preview on May 6, 2026. Photo/Lily Chen

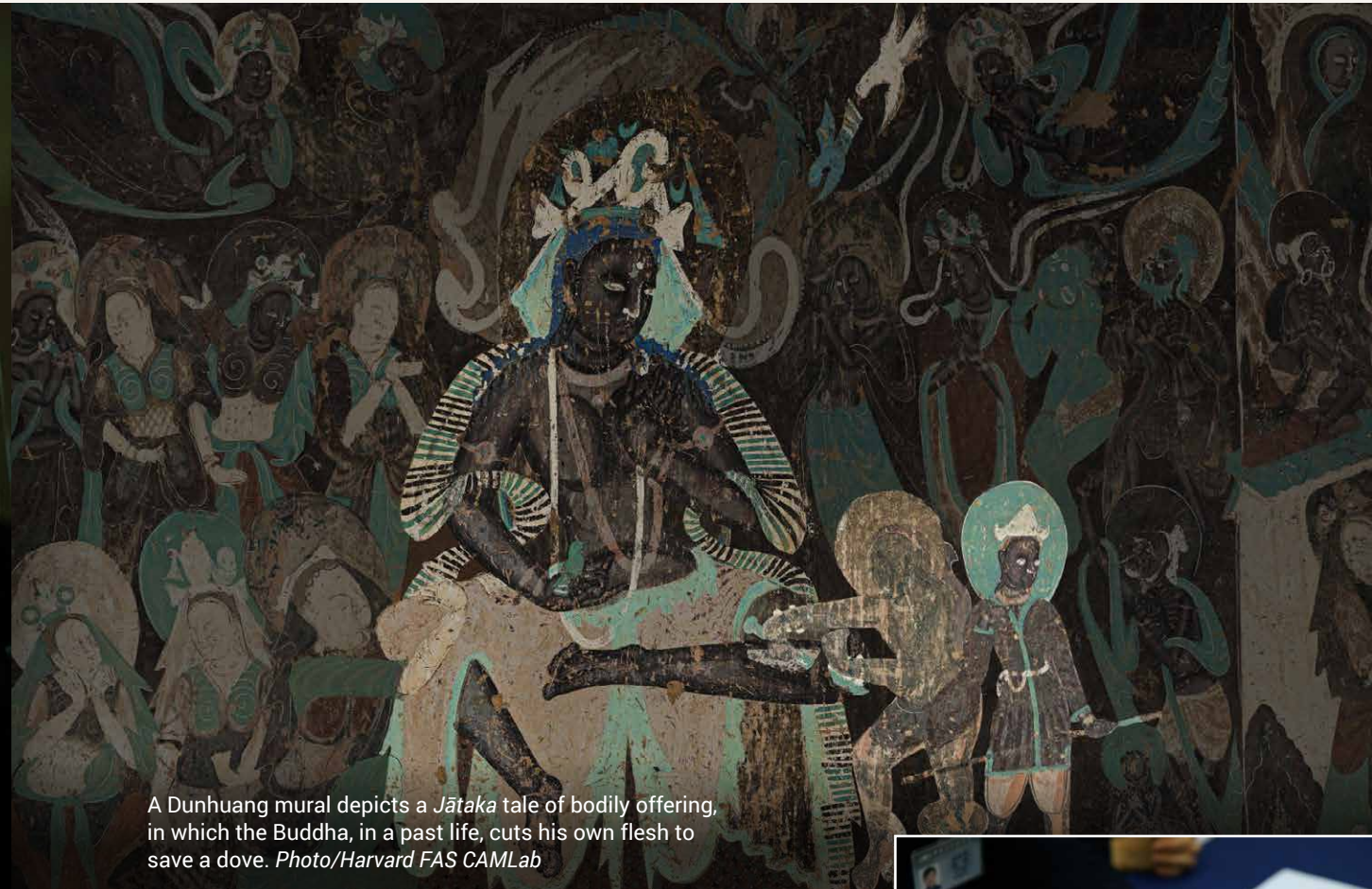
Located in Jizhou, Tianjin, China, Dule Temple, or "Temple of Solitary Joy," is home to the Guanyin Pavilion and its monumental statue of Guanyin, the bodhisattva of compassion. With multiple heads and hands, the statue gives visual form to Guanyin's vow to respond to suffering in many ways.

In the exhibition, Guanyin is connected with Tzu Chi's work in the present. "In ancient times, people used the multiple heads and hands to express Guanyin's power and spirit of helping all kinds of sentient beings facing different disasters," Chenchen Lu explained. Today, Tzu Chi volunteers are presented as the hands through which Guanyin's compassion continues to act in the world.



Tzu Chi volunteers around the world embody the spirit of Guanyin's many hands, bringing compassion into action through service. Photo/Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation

Dunhuang and the Ethics of Giving



A Dunhuang mural depicts a *Jataka* tale of bodily offering, in which the Buddha, in a past life, cuts his own flesh to save a dove. Photo/Harvard FAS CAMLab

Located at the edge of the Gobi Desert in northwestern China, the Mogao Caves at Dunhuang form the largest surviving Buddhist cave complex in the world, with 492 preserved painted caves created over the course of a millennium. "They were actually shrines made in cliffs away from urban centers," Eugene Wang noted. "At some point, people started to decorate the caves with paintings. It's not just to beautify. It was more of a way of programming a space, allowing things to be imagined and transformed."

Cave 254 features *Jataka* stories of self-sacrifice and bodily offering, giving visual form to the Buddhist ideal of selfless giving. In the exhibition, that ideal is paired with Tzu Chi's practices of bone marrow, organ, and full body donation. The message is that compassion can take material form through giving, even beyond one's lifetime.



A Tzu Chi bone marrow donor card reflects one form of giving highlighted in *Journey to Enlightenment*. Photo/Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation

Borobudur and the Fifty-Three Visits



Guests view the Borobudur section of *Journey to Enlightenment* during the exhibition preview on May 6, 2026. Photo/Wendy Tsai

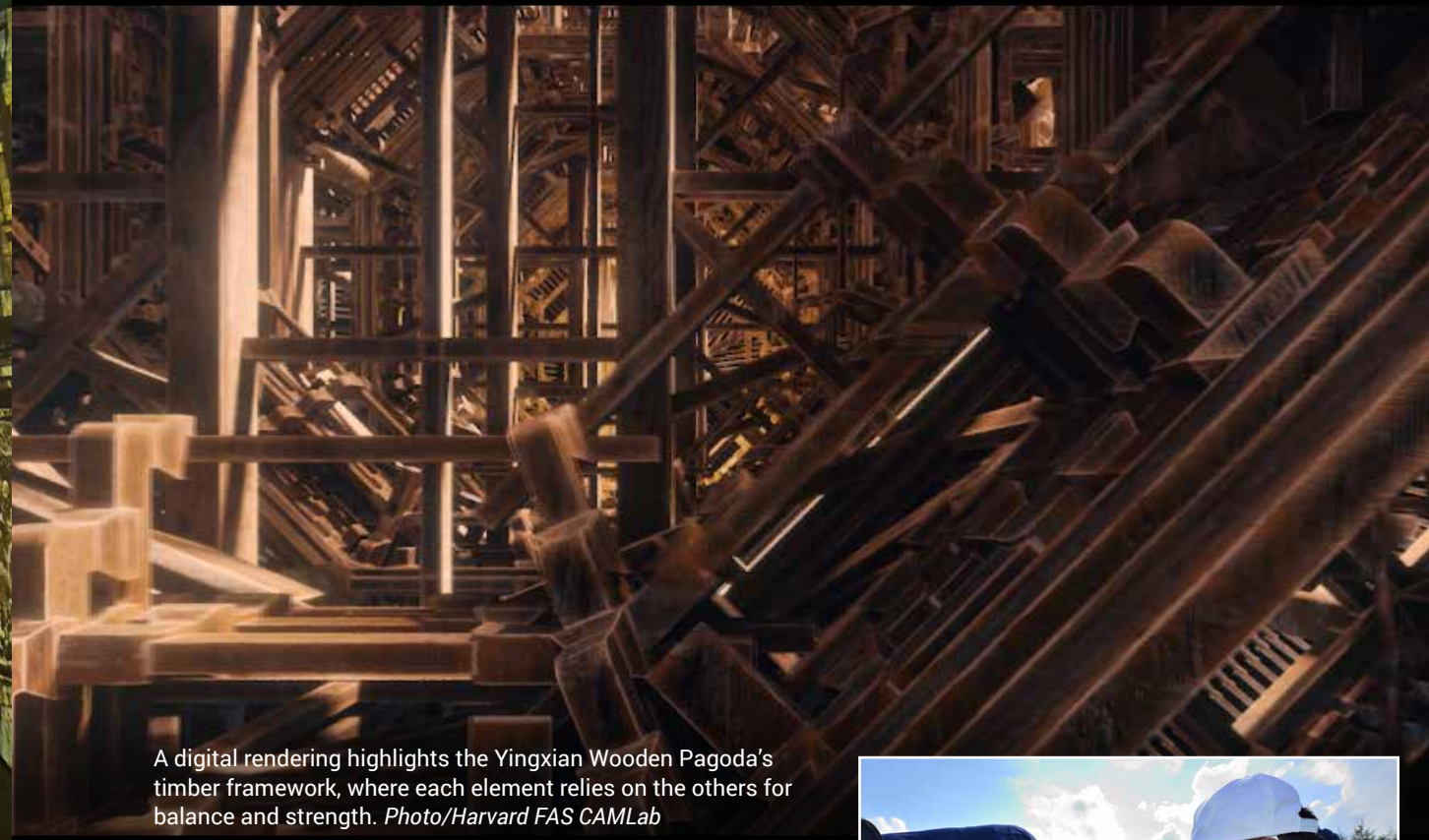
Located in Central Java, Indonesia, Borobudur remains the largest Buddhist monument in the world. Designed as a three-dimensional mandala, it integrates architecture, movement, and sacred narrative into a spiritual journey, guiding pilgrims upward through a sequence of images and spaces meant to instruct as well as inspire.

In the exhibition, Borobudur is paired with the story of the Fifty-Three Visits, in which the young pilgrim Sudhana travels from teacher to teacher in search of the Bodhisattva path. For Tzu Chi, that search suggests that wisdom is not confined to temples or scriptures, but can be found through everyday encounters and service. The message is that spiritual practice unfolds in the world, and that all people can become our teachers.



Tzu Chi volunteers share Master Cheng Yen's Jing Si Aphorisms with students, passing on Buddhist wisdom through words of guidance and care. Photo/Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation

Yingxian Wooden Pagoda and Interconnected Compassion



A digital rendering highlights the Yingxian Wooden Pagoda's timber framework, where each element relies on the others for balance and strength. Photo/Harvard FAS CAMLab

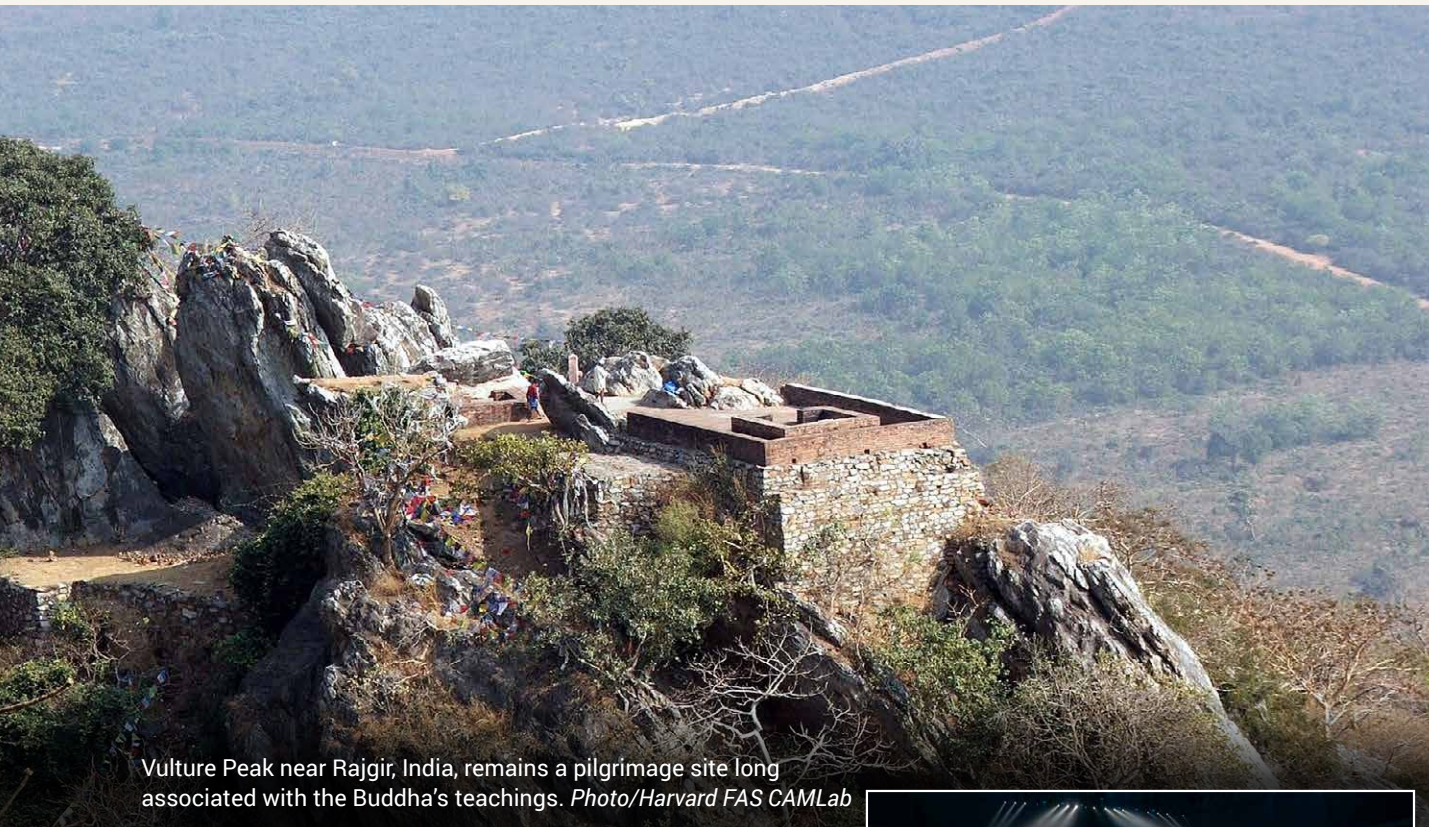
Located in Shanxi province in northern China, the Yingxian Wooden Pagoda remains the tallest and oldest surviving wooden pagoda in China. Constructed without nails, its intricate timber framework reveals a system of structural interdependence, with each element relying on the others for balance and strength. In Buddhist thought, such interconnection points to a larger truth, that all things arise in relation to one another and no part stands alone.

In the exhibition, that vision of interdependence is paired with Tzu Chi's global humanitarian network. Just as each element of the pagoda supports the whole, each act of compassion contributes to a larger web of relief and care. When disasters strike, volunteers, donors, and communities across continents work together, turning compassion into organized action.



Tzu Chi volunteers and local community members join a coastal cleanup in Taiwan, turning compassion into collective action. Photo/Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation

Vulture Peak and the Future of Compassion



Vulture Peak near Rajgir, India, remains a pilgrimage site long associated with the Buddha's teachings. Photo/Harvard FAS CAMLab

Located near Rajgir in the Indian state of Bihar, Vulture Peak, or *Gr̥dhrakūṭa*, is one of the most important sites where the Buddha taught and is associated with major *Mahāyāna* texts such as the *Lotus Sutra*. Beyond its historical role, it has long symbolized an enduring place of teaching and transmission, one in which the Dharma is understood not as confined to a single place or moment, but as something that transcends time and space.

In the exhibition, that larger horizon is paired with Tzu Chi's steadfast commitment to putting compassion into action wherever suffering appears. The Bodhisattva path becomes a living practice carried forward whenever people respond to the needs of the world. Thus, *Journey to Enlightenment* concludes not with an ending, but with an invitation for visitors to consider how they, too, might carry that spirit forward.



Tzu Chi volunteers perform an adaptation of the *Sutra of Infinite Meanings*, embodying the Dharma through collective practice. Photo/Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation

A Complex Production Process

Journey to Enlightenment's expansive, layered vision required an intricate process of research, design, and production, beginning with an assessment of the Buddhist sites and artifacts it draws from. Spanning more than 2,500 years of history, they reflect the values, aesthetic ideals, and devotional imagination of the eras that produced them, yet many have also been weathered by time, damaged by conflict, or fragmented through looting and dispersal.

As Rey-Sheng Her noted, the reasons for that damage are varied. "A lot of Buddha caves or Bodhisattva caves are located in a geologically very unstable area. The wind, the rain might wear out those statues of stone. War is also crucial, leading to the looting and destruction of those Buddha statues. So there is a geological reason and also a political reason. And the most important reason is people lose faith. That's the main reason why in a lot of places, the Buddha statues have been abandoned or destroyed."

Bringing the sites and artifacts into the exhibition required more than documentation. It meant finding ways to recover and reconstruct them so they could once again be experienced as meaningful environments rather than as scattered remains. "In a typical CAMLab project on Buddhist cultural heritage sites, we usually start from a digitization of the entire site. We integrate 3D scans, photogrammetry, aerial footage, all this new technology in documenting these sites, and we translate this data into a high-resolution 3D model," Chenchen Lu explained. "However, usually these sites are damaged. So we have to rely on



Eugene Wang stands within the projected imagery of *Journey to Enlightenment*, which gives form to his vision for the exhibition. Photo/Tzu Chi USA Video Team

Harvard's extensive resources in historical and archaeological archives to do more architectural modeling and reconstruct the original conditions of the site when it was first built."

Lu pointed to the Xiangtangshan caves as one of the exhibition's most demanding reconstruction efforts. Because the site was heavily damaged in the early 20th century, many sculptural elements were cut away and dispersed into museum collections around the world. Reconstructing it digitally therefore meant working on two fronts at once: documenting the caves in their present condition, and collaborating with museums and scholars to locate, digitize, and virtually reunite missing heads and fragments with the site they once belonged to. "It's almost like we are diving into the ocean of the museum collections. Many scholars have been contributing to this effort across the world."

Eugene Wang added that the goal went beyond recovering appearances. "Our interest is not merely to restore the look of the damaged caves and the fragmented parts of the Buddha bodies. Our goal is to reconstruct the imaginary space that these Buddha figures or other art forms try to evoke. We are trying to create an experience that is spiritually elevated, aesthetically engaging. It's a way of getting people to a state of mind."

From Reconstruction to Shaping an Experience

With the 3D models in place, the next step was a collaborative brainstorming process between researchers and designers. “We have to design how to tell the story of this site,” Chenchen Lu said. “We have the 3D digitization database of the site, and now we are basically creating an experience. That involves creating a storyboard. Then we move on to visual and audio production. We work very closely with our interdisciplinary team to render out each clip, and this is usually a back-and-forth process. It is really through multiple iterations of brainstorming, testing, and polishing that we finally arrive at the multimedia exhibition that creates an immersive, multi-sensory experience for the audience to invite them into that site immersively through new technology to experience the story and core values behind it.”

ChaiYee Leow, Research Associate on the project, emphasized that the exhibition rests on generations of prior effort. The Buddhist sites it draws from didn't simply



Technician and Designer Lilith Ren (right) confers with Chenchen Lu during the highly technical production process of bringing *Journey to Enlightenment* to life. Photo/Tzu Chi USA Video Team

survive unchanged, but have been excavated, documented, reconstructed, and protected by archaeologists, scholars, and monastics. That long process made the exhibition possible while also leaving the team with an enormous body of material to choose from. “If we need to narrow down the materials we show to the public and not overwhelm people, we have to choose the best of the best,” Leow said. From Borobudur alone, there were roughly 460 relief panels, but only about ten could be included in the exhibition.

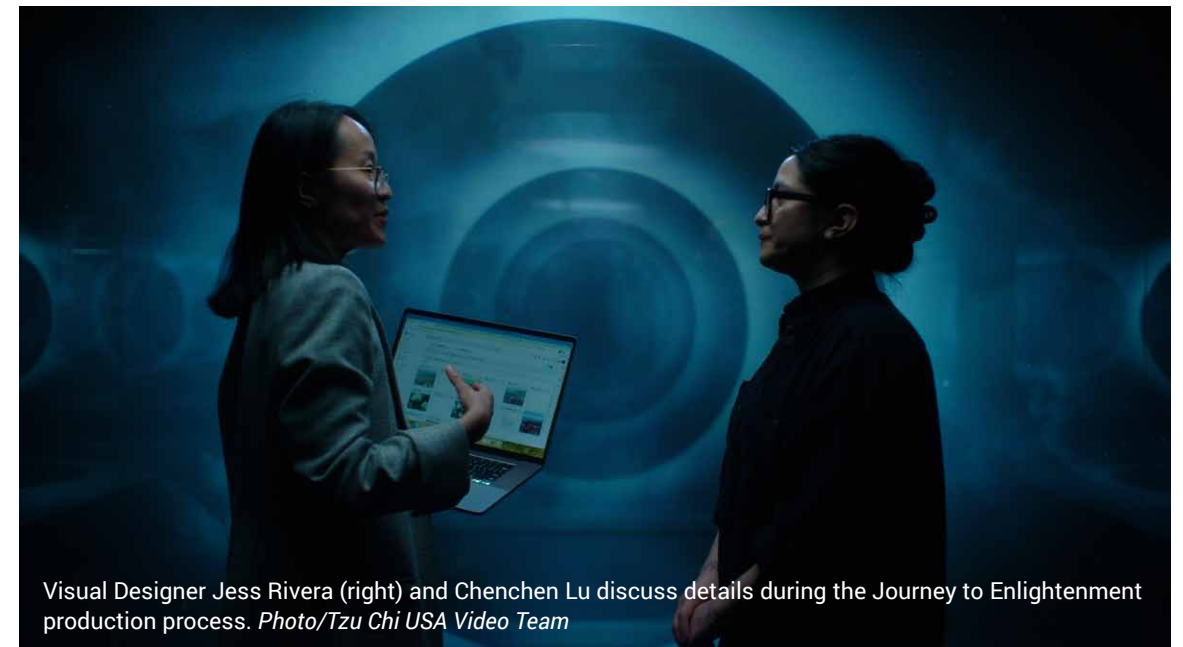
Lilith Ren, Technician and Designer on the project, described it as technically complex, requiring constant testing, troubleshooting, and adaptation across multiple media formats, software systems, and installation setups. “My background is really as a digital artist, so that very technical stuff was new territory for me to explore. But I think it was also super rewarding to actually put my work onto the screens.” Without a background in Buddhist history, Ren also faced a steep learning curve in the subject matter and had to build her understanding of the *Lotus Sutra* from the ground up, relying on CAMLab's researchers and academic resources to help shape the narrative.

As one example, Ren described reworking the Burning House parable from the *Lotus Sutra* into a more linear, immersive sequence. Drawing on cave painting imagery and guidance from CAMLab researchers, she isolated key elements in the story, then used light, motion, and environmental effects to convey the danger of beings trapped in a burning house and the promise of rescue. In Buddhist terms, the parable warns of living blindly amid suffering while showing how the Buddha guides beings toward liberation through skillful means.

Ren also reflected on why Buddhist narratives still matter in the present, suggesting that contemporary methods can help make them newly accessible to modern audiences. For her, the enduring value lies in the spirit carried within those stories, even as each generation encounters them differently. “Those stories won't fade out. They never did. They rebloom, because each time we approach them, we bring new meanings based on the world or the century we live in.”



A digital image based on Dunhuang Mogao Cave 420 reveals part of CAMLab's process of translating the Burning House parable from the *Lotus Sutra* into an immersive exhibition sequence. Photo/Harvard FAS CAMLab



Visual Designer Jess Rivera (right) and Chenchen Lu discuss details during the *Journey to Enlightenment* production process. Photo/Tzu Chi USA Video Team

Engaging Contemporary Audiences

Jess Rivera, Visual Designer on the *Journey to Enlightenment* production team, described her work as “converting traditional media into new media generative artworks.” The

challenge lay in transforming historical material through contemporary techniques such as creative coding and AI-driven processes, opening new ways for audiences to encounter it. The effort, from recovering

the stories to reimagining them through new media, was ultimately in service of creating a compelling audience experience.

Eugene Wang pointed out that the exhibition was designed to reach audiences across cultures and generations. "It is a universal language that we're speaking. It's sight and sound, and it doesn't involve verbal translation. It's a structure of experience that we're presenting to our audience. For anyone who comes in, so long as they can follow that flow experientially, then we've done our job. Then the exhibition will be successful."

Wang hoped that this approach would resonate especially with younger audiences, which he saw as important to Tzu Chi's future. "If we don't do something very meaningful and really also speak their language, share the same kind of wavelength that they have, then we might lose them. It is ultimately about attracting the future.

So to some extent, one might say that this is looking back at history, but in the meantime, it's also looking forward."

That concern for future generations also shaped how Powen Yen, CEO of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Charity Foundation, understood the partnership behind *Journey to Enlightenment*. "Through our collaboration with Harvard University's CAMLab, we have employed advanced technology to preserve these invaluable Buddhist historical relics. In doing so, we created an enduring preservation of history, enabling future generations not only to behold these precious cultural legacies, but also to more fully comprehend the original intent of the Buddha's teachings."

Moreover, *Journey to Enlightenment* places Tzu Chi within the full span of Buddhist history. "It is only 60 years old, but it connects to the deeper tradition of Buddhism. This tradition goes back 2,500 years," Chenchen

Lu said. She also pointed out that the sites presented span South Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia. "We hope this diverse and global Buddhist art also reflects Tzu Chi's global scale, and the spirit that brings together Buddhists from different corners of the world so that we can all work together to continue the Dharma tradition."

In that broader frame, the exhibition shows the Tzu Chi School of Buddhism as a socially engaged form of practice. "Master Cheng Yen brings Tzu Chi volunteers to carry the Buddhist spirit and altruism into the real world," Rey-Sheng Her said. "In ancient times, divinity was embedded in architecture; nowadays the divinity of Buddhism is embedded in the secular world. That is Tzu Chi's very important practice."

The Exhibition's Journey Begins

While *Journey to Enlightenment* opened to the public on May 9, 2026, participants in the *Tzu Chi Global Symposium for Common Goodness* were able to preview it on May 6 and were later invited to an opening ceremony and dinner on May 8. "Today is a very meaningful day," Chenchen Lu remarked at the opening event. "We reached a milestone. And also, we feel like this is the beginning of the journey." Indeed, it was, as symposium participants became the exhibition's first viewers and began to share their responses.

William A. McGrath, Assistant Professor of Buddhist Studies at New York University, was struck by the immersive environment and the collective attention it fostered. "There's a certain reverence that comes when I'm in a room, particularly with a group of other people, and we're experiencing this together," he said. "There's no fast-forward button, there's no pause button. I get a text message, I ignore

▼ Participants in the 2026 *Tzu Chi Global Symposium for Common Goodness* listen to remarks at a May 8 gathering marking the opening of *Journey to Enlightenment*. Photo/Daniel Ferrara



Guests contemplate Buddhist teachings through the sites featured in *Journey to Enlightenment* during the exhibition preview on May 6, 2026. Photo/Wendy Tsai



William McGrath (left), Assistant Professor of Buddhist Studies at New York University, recognizes the shared sense of reverence fostered by *Journey to Enlightenment*. Photo/Wendy Tsai

the message, because I'm here in the presence of these Buddha images, experiencing something that otherwise I would be unable to. I think making a physical space, a physical practice space – a physical practice space, we might even say – out of this exhibition, transforms it into something utterly more meaningful."

Justin R. Ritzinger, Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Miami, also reflected on how the exhibition's immersive approach to Buddhist storytelling opened a new kind of experience. "You have images from different angles. You're sort of moving through space, or being drawn through, and it does an interesting job of evoking certain feelings," he described. "I'm somebody who is very textual. I live and die by the word and not by the image, and so when I read about things like Buddhist visualization practices, it's impressive, but

▼ Justin Ritzinger (left), Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Miami, appreciates *Journey to Enlightenment*'s multimedia storytelling. Photo/Jennifer Chien



it's very foreign to me. I think that being drawn into something that is immersive in this way is probably the closest that I'm going to be able to come to that kind of a visualization practice."

Ritzinger was especially struck by the section associated with engravings from the Buddhist canon, particularly the *Sutra of Infinite Meanings*, a foundational text for Tzu Chi. "It was a real chance to both see it and hear it, because it's being chanted at the same time."

McGrath drew deeper meaning from noticing that many Buddha statues at one of the sites featured in the exhibition were missing their heads. "In a way, there's something very poetic there. It speaks to the state of Buddhism in the world today to a certain degree. In some ways, it has been decapitated. The heads are kept in these museums throughout the world. And what I see Tzu Chi doing is recapitulating

Buddhism, reconnecting Buddhism in ways that are truly profound."

Yen likewise understood the exhibition's images not only as works of art, but as vessels of Buddhist meaning, practice, and transmission.

The Buddha images we behold today are, in truth, creations of later generations shaped by their understanding and realization of the Buddhist scriptures, as well as their contemplative imagination of the Buddha's form. From these murals and sculptures, what we truly apprehend is the boundless wisdom and compassion of the Buddha. Their significance transcends mere aesthetic appreciation; they serve as a source of spiritual awakening and a medium of compassionate education. This, indeed, reflects the One Great Cause for which the Buddha appeared in this world.

Poweren Yen

Chief Executive Officer
Buddhist Tzu Chi Charity Foundation

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Following its U.S. debut at Harvard, where it remains on view through August 2026, *Journey to Enlightenment* opened on May 10 at the Jing Si Abode in Hualien, Taiwan, the spiritual home of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation and the residence of Dharma Master Cheng Yen. It remains on view there through December 15, 2026. It will also be presented at the National Science and Technology Museum in Kaohsiung, where it will be on view from August 1 to November 1, 2026. 🌿



▲ A visitor experiences the *Sutra of Infinite Meanings* section of *Journey to Enlightenment*, which combines visual and auditory elements to present sacred scripture. Photo/Jennifer Chien



Rey-Sheng Her, Deputy CEO of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Charity Foundation and Convener of the Tzu Chi Academic Committee, gives his opening remarks. Photo/Wendy Tsai

With the panelists seated beside him, moderator Parimal Patil, Professor of Religion and Indian Philosophy at Harvard University, introduces the session "Philosophical and Ethical Foundations of the Bodhisattva Path" on the opening day of the 2026 Tzu Chi Global Symposium for Common Goodness. Photo/Wendy Tsai

2026 Tzu Chi Global Symposium for Common Goodness: Part I

Applied Buddhism in an Anxious World

Written by Ida Eva Zielinska

In today's world, Tzu Chi volunteers care for those unrelated to them as if they were family and feel for their suffering as their very own. This is what the Buddha taught.

Venerable Dharma Master Cheng Yen
Founder
Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation

Presented in a video message that opened the 2026 Tzu Chi Global Symposium for Common Goodness at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Venerable Dharma Master Cheng Yen's words offered more than a greeting. As Tzu Chi marks

its 60th year in 2026, they framed the deeper purpose of the gathering, inviting participants to explore how the Buddha's teachings can move from scripture into action, from personal faith into collective responsibility, and from compassion into concrete service.

Tzu Chi began convening the *Global Symposium for Common Goodness* in 2021 in Taiwan, as a platform to examine how Buddhist wisdom and values can respond to the needs of their time. From May 7 to 9, 2026, that ongoing dialogue came to Harvard University, where the Buddhist Tzu Chi Charity Foundation (BTCCF) and the

Cognitive Aesthetic Media Lab (CAMLab) at Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences co-hosted the symposium under the theme "Applied Buddhism and the Contemporary Bodhisattva Path: Exploring the Future of Buddhism."

In his opening remarks, Rey-Sheng Her, Deputy CEO of BTCCF and Convener of the Tzu Chi Academic Committee, gave voice to the urgency of that inquiry. "We are living in an era of deep division, tension, and opposition. In such a time, we enjoy a prosperous material life, and yet we also face immense conflict and uncertainty between cultures, between rich and poor, and between humanity and the environment and technology," he said. "As a Buddhist community and as scholars of Buddhism, can we offer light to this chaotic time? Can we bring spiritual nourishment and peace to an uncertain and anxious world?"

The collaboration between BTCCF and CAMLab offered a particularly fitting framework for beginning to address those questions. Stephen Teiser, D.T. Suzuki Professor

in Buddhist Studies at Princeton University, pointed out that the two institutions are bringing “past and present into a very productive, philosophical, and practical relationship,” grounded in “a spirit of free, independent, open, academic inquiry.” He also highlighted their interdisciplinary approach, which recognizes the integrity of the humanities as a discipline and integrates subjects such as mythology, art, performance, media studies, philosophy, politics, education, health care, gender, race, and social class.

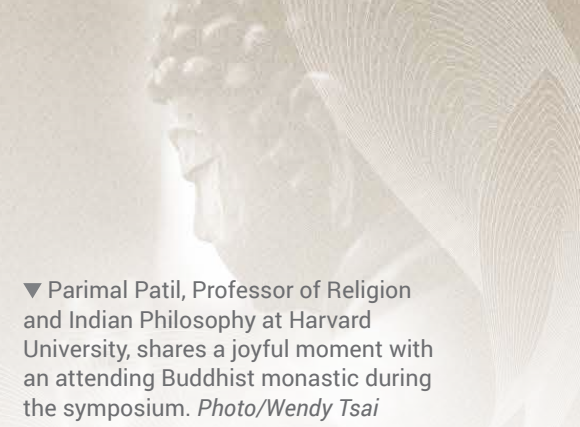
At the same time, the symposium’s focus on applied Buddhism raised a larger question of why Buddhist traditions remain relevant to the present and future. “There are many ways to learn from Buddhism and Buddhist traditions in service of our lives in the 21st century. Scholarship devoted to this expresses a principled commitment to think not only about what Buddhism and Buddhist traditions have

been, but also about what they can be,” noted Parimal Patil, Professor of Religion and Indian Philosophy at Harvard University. Such work matters, he added, because “Buddhism and Buddhist traditions are filled with alternative possibilities, blueprints, and resources for understanding and living in our world today.”

With that expansive frame in place, the symposium turned first, through a series of keynote addresses, scholarly papers, and roundtable discussions, to the meaning of applied Buddhism itself – particularly the Bodhisattva path, within which one seeks awakening not for oneself alone, but for the liberation and well-being of all sentient beings – as something that can be understood not only as a doctrine or ideal, but as a lived response to suffering, illness, social division, and urgent ethical demands.



▲ Participants arrive on Harvard University’s campus for the 2026 Tzu Chi Global Symposium for Common Goodness. Photo/Wendy Tsai



▼ Parimal Patil, Professor of Religion and Indian Philosophy at Harvard University, shares a joyful moment with an attending Buddhist monastic during the symposium. Photo/Wendy Tsai



Situating Applied Buddhism

In his keynote address, “Contemporary Interpretations of Buddhism: The Significance of Applied Buddhism,” Rey-Sheng Her approached the subject through a broad historical lens. “All religions must respond to the needs of their time in order to flourish and sustain their development, and Buddhism is no exception,” he said. Looking across history, he reflected on how Buddhism has flourished, declined, or renewed itself in relation to the needs of different societies, and how it might remain rooted in its core teachings while responding to the conditions of the present.

For Her, that response requires bringing Buddhist wisdom into present-day social structures and realities. “In recent years, the Tzu Chi School of Buddhism expanded beyond charity, medicine, education, humanistic culture, and environmental

protection, to include initiatives in goodness in economy, goodness in governance, tech for good, and spiritual care. This effort aims to bring Buddhist virtues and values into professional fields, integrate them into daily life, and embed them more deeply across all levels of society,” he explained.

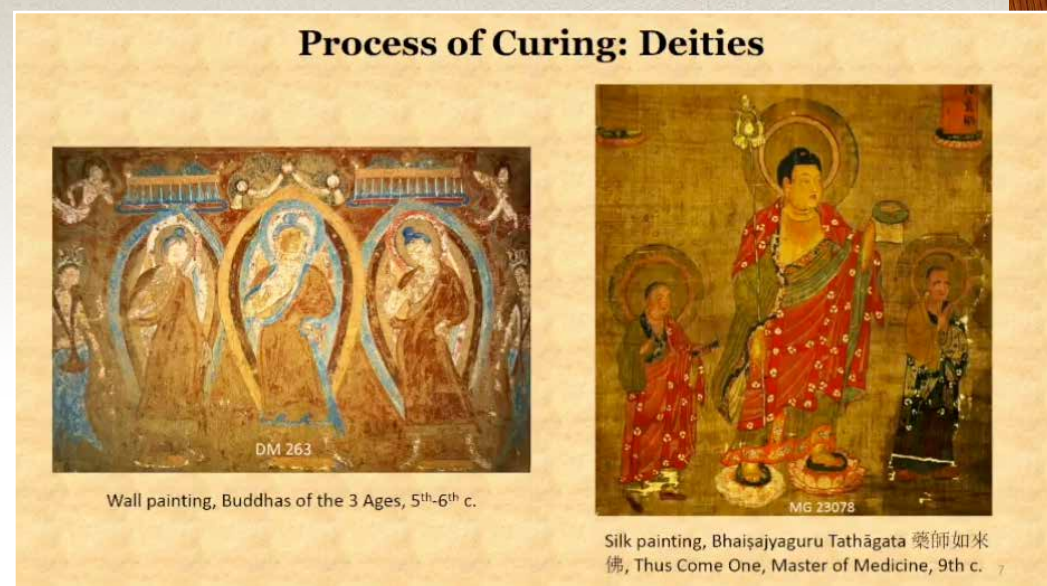
Her then situated this expansion within the urgent conflicts facing humanity. “We are concerned with the six major conflicts facing the human world: conflict between humanity and the environment, conflict between humanity and technology, conflict between rich and poor, and conflict between races, religions, and nations. How Buddhist thought can respond to and address these issues has become a vital area of research and practice in contemporary applied Buddhism,” he emphasized. “Unleashing Buddhist



▲ Rey-Sheng Her and Eugene Wang, representing the Buddhist Tzu Chi Charity Foundation and CAMLab at Harvard’s Faculty of Arts and Sciences, address guests during a dinner held on May 7, the first day of the 2026 Tzu Chi Global Symposium for Common Goodness. Photo/Wendy Tsai

▼ As Stephen Teiser (second left) and Rey-Sheng Her (second right) look on, Debbie Lee (left), Chief Executive Officer of Tzu Chi USA, greets Eugene Wang (right) at the start of the 2026 Tzu Chi Global Symposium for Common Goodness at Harvard University. Photo/Wendy Tsai





Stephen Teiser presents Buddhas and Bhaiṣajyaguru, the Medicine Buddha, as part of a layered process of curing that included deities, ritual communities, and karmic relationships. *Presentation Slide/Stephen Teiser*



Stephen Teiser presents his keynote address on Buddhist responses to epidemics as participants follow along during the symposium. *Photo/Wendy Tsai*

compassion and wisdom for human peace, prosperity, and common goodness is the common challenge for Buddhist scholars and practitioners worldwide.”

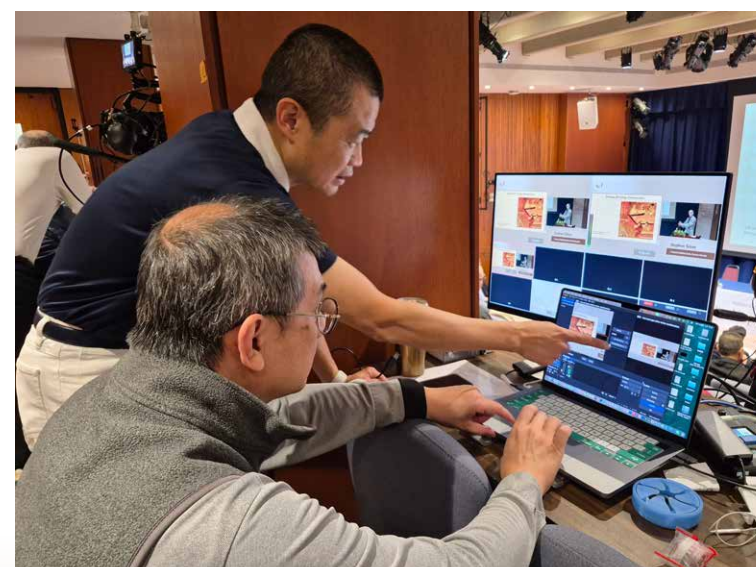
The goal, then, is not a departure from Buddhist tradition, but an effort to carry its wisdom and compassion into broader fields of human concern. The purpose of such engagement, Her stated, remains service rather than self-expansion. “When religion is engaged with the world, it transcends self-centeredness, prioritizing the salvation and relief of sentient beings over its own expansion.”

The symposium’s second keynote address, Stephen Teiser’s “Buddhist Responses to Epidemics: Past, Present, and Future,” offered one concrete case of applied Buddhism in relation to illness and epidemic disease. He began with Tzu Chi’s role in helping bring COVID-19

vaccines to Taiwan in 2021, then turned to premodern Chinese Buddhist sources to ask how Buddhist healing has changed across time and what continuities remain.

By juxtaposing the vaccine effort with ancient Chinese materials such as written sutras and paintings, Teiser invited listeners to consider both continuity and change. “There are similarities, but there are also significant differences,” he said. Drawing from healing liturgies, ritual texts, and visual depictions, he showed that Buddhist curing was a layered process involving deities, ritual communities, medicine, sutra chanting, monastic participation, and karmic relationships linking the sick person, their family, past adversaries, and all sentient beings.

His keynote returned these historical examples to questions facing Buddhism today, including whether modern forms of



Tzu Chi USA’s media team livestreams the symposium on YouTube, making it possible for viewers beyond Harvard University to join virtually. *Photo/Wendy Tsai*

Buddhism change how the act of giving is understood in the context of medicine and care. “Should we reverse the direction of donation and think of the recipients not as recipients, but as the real donors? Are doctors the ones truly receiving the benefit from their patients?” Teiser asked. In raising these questions, he brought the history of Buddhist healing into conversation with the present field of applied Buddhism, where illness becomes a field for rethinking giving, receiving, benefit, and care.

From there, the symposium moved from applied Buddhism as a response to illness and social need toward the deeper philosophical and ethical questions that shape the Bodhisattva path itself. The next panel examined how Buddhist teachings on skillful means, equality, Buddha nature, and future-oriented devotion might inform lived practice.



Jonathan Gold, Professor of Religion and Director of the Center for Culture, Society and Religion at Princeton University, presents "Upāya Without Closure: Coercion, Trauma, and the Contemporary Bodhisattva Path." Photo/Hector Muniente

Philosophical and Ethical Foundations of the Bodhisattva Path

Jonathan C. Gold, Professor of Religion and Director of the Center for Culture, Society and Religion at Princeton University, opened the panel with "Upāya Without Closure: Coercion, Trauma, and the Contemporary Bodhisattva Path," turning to the difficult terrain of social and political life. Bringing Buddhist moral psychology into dialogue with systems shaped by law, surveillance, borders, punishment, trauma, and fear, he asked, "What ought to count as effective action for a bodhisattva?"

Gold stated that Buddhist concepts such as no-self, emptiness, impermanence, and dependent origination can illuminate not only individual experience, but also social roles, identities, and institutions. Social

structures, in this view, are not fixed by nature; they are formed through causes and conditions, and therefore can be studied, challenged, and changed. Yet they can also become what Gold called "karmic infra-structures," preserving fear-based patterns of perception and response across institutions. "Chronic threat produces narrowed perception. Narrowed perception generates a demand for certainty. Certainty is stabilized through authority and force, and these structures in turn reproduce the very conditions of insecurity that sustain the cycle," he explained.

Against that tendency, Gold proposed "upāya without closure," a form of skillful means suited to compromised social and political conditions. Rather than seeking a pure position outside institutions, the Bodhisattva path requires acting within them while remaining alert to the ways force, fear, emergency, or even care itself can harden

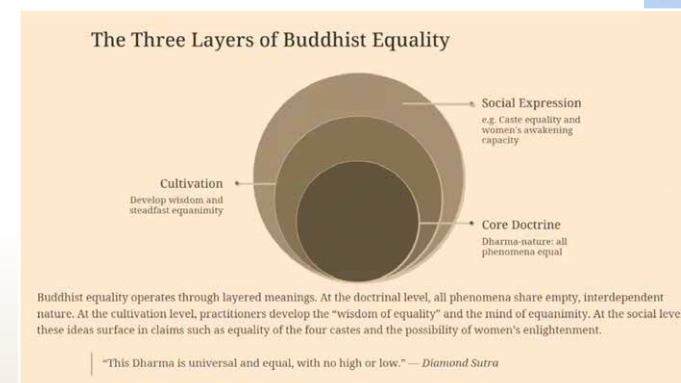
into certainty. "The contemporary bodhisattva path then is not a path of purity, but of disciplined non-reification," he said. "It's a commitment to remain responsive within conditions that can never be fully mastered while resisting the conversion of provisional judgments into unquestionable truths."

In "All Dharmas Are Equal, with No Distinction of High or Low: The Historical Connotations and Contemporary Significance of the Buddhist View on Equality," Jiade Shao, Associate Professor in the School of Philosophy at Nanjing University, juxtaposed the Buddhist view of equality with rights-based understandings of the term. "Natural questions arise: Has Buddhism promoted social equality in its historical development? Another question is, what are the similarities and differences between the Buddhist view of equality and modern Western concepts of equality? What can Buddhism offer to the pursuit of equality today?"

To answer these questions, Shao emphasized that Buddhist equality begins with inner cultivation rather than external sameness. "Early Buddhist equality is closer to an inner discipline of equality than to a modern doctrine of externally distributed rights," he said. Rather than simply erasing difference, this view includes calmness, equanimity, and the capacity to endure or transcend differences without being bound by them. It also rests on the Buddhist recognition that all sentient beings share the capacity for nirvana or awakening, grounded not in human rationality alone, but in the shared capacity to feel suffering.

Its broader value, Shao explained, lies in widening the discussion beyond legal rights and material distribution. Buddhist equality can complement modern frameworks by addressing the inner spiritual dimensions of equality, including the work of overcoming envy and jealousy, while also expanding the discussion beyond human-centered claims to include ecological concern and the relationships humans hold with other living beings and nature.

▼ Jiade Shao gives an overview of three layers of Buddhist equality, from core doctrine to inner cultivation and social expression. Presentation Slide/Jiade Shao



▲ Jiade Shao, Associate Professor in the School of Philosophy at Nanjing University, presents "All Dharmas Are Equal, with No Distinction of High or Low: The Historical Connotations and Contemporary Significance of the Buddhist View on Equality." Photo/Wendy Tsai



◀ A sculpture from Gandhara helps illustrate Yinggang Sun's discussion of the rise of the Bodhisattva ideal and its importance for Mahāyāna Buddhism. Presentation Slide/ Yinggang Sun



▲ Yinggang Sun, Professor in the School of History at Zhejiang University, presents "The Maitreya Bodhisattva Faith in Gandhara and Its Influence on East Asian Civilization." Photo/ Wendy Tsai

Wen-liang Zhang, Professor in the School of Philosophy at Renmin University of China, turned to Tathāgatagarbha, or Buddha-nature thought, as another foundation for understanding the Bodhisattva path in modern practice. In "Tathāgatagarbha Thought and the Contemporary Bodhisattva Path," Zhang traced how this lineage of Mahāyāna thought, which holds that all sentient beings possess innate wisdom, became especially influential in Chinese Buddhism and was reinterpreted through schools such as the Three Stages School, Chan, and Pure Land.

Zhang located the significance of Buddha-nature thought in its understanding of the shared nature of Buddhas and sentient beings. Because all beings possess the

potential for awakening, liberation is not only something bestowed by the Buddha upon those who suffer, but something sentient beings help bring forth in one another. "The relationship between the Buddha and sentient beings is not a uni-directional one – from Buddha, the savior, to sentient beings, the saved – but rather a reciprocal one where Buddha is sentient beings and sentient beings are Buddha, with sentient beings simultaneously being those who are saved and those who provide salvation."

This reciprocal understanding gives the Bodhisattva path a deeply practical dimension, placing awakening not beyond ordinary beings, but within the love and action they bring to others. "As long as every individual gives rise to the Bodhi heart, is willing to offer their love, and puts this

into action by saving others, they are a Bodhisattva; they are a Buddha." Zhang saw Tzu Chi's philosophy and practice as a contemporary expression of Tathāgatagarbha thought precisely because of its emphasis on "great love, equality, and the value of action."

Yinggang Sun, Professor in the School of History at Zhejiang University, approached the Bodhisattva path through archaeological evidence from Gandhara, an ancient Buddhist region that is now part of Pakistan and Afghanistan. In "The Maitreya Bodhisattva Faith in Gandhara and Its Influence on East Asian Civilization," Sun traced how images, coins, inscriptions, and colossal statues connected to Maitreya, the Future Buddha, reflected the rise of Bodhisattva devotion and its movement along the Silk Road into China, Korea, and Japan.

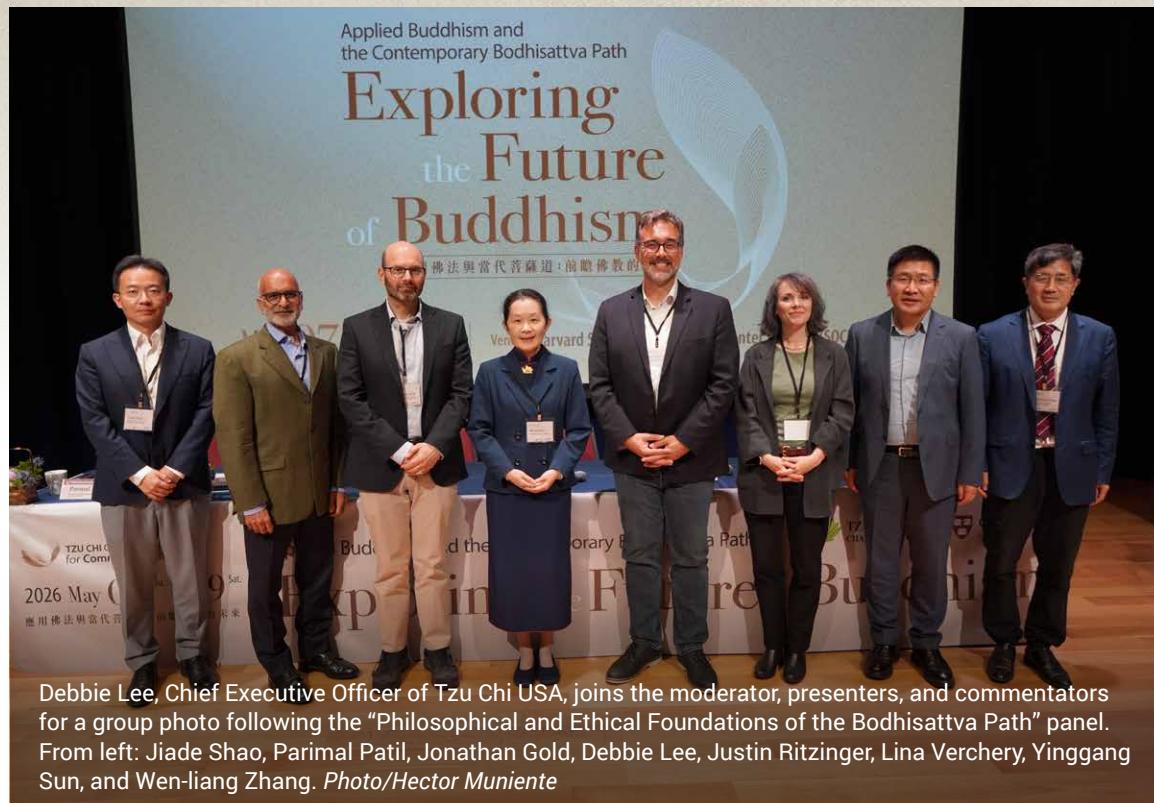
In Sun's account, Gandhara was more than a center of Buddhist art. "It can be said that Buddhism underwent a comprehensive and revolutionary transformation in Gandhara." These developments included written sutras, new images of the Buddha, the rise of Bodhisattva beliefs, and ideas later understood as part of the emergence of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

That transformation, Sun explained, helped shift Buddhism toward a broader vision of liberation. "In the Mahayana Buddhism that arose in Gandhara, the core belief and ideal shifted from pursuing individual self-salvation to advocating the salvation of all sentient beings." In this context, his paper returned the Bodhisattva path to one of its historical turning points, showing how the ideal of helping others moved across regions, images, and civilizations before becoming central to East Asian Buddhism.

Reflections on the Presentations

In their commentary on the panel's presentations, Lina Verchery and Justin R. Ritzinger considered how philosophical and historical inquiry might inform the Bodhisattva path in practice. Verchery, Senior Lecturer in the Study of Religion at Victoria University of Wellington, saw a common thread running through the papers in what she called the question of "moral aspiration." Drawing on the work of Ruth Levitas, a scholar of utopian thought, she described aspiration as arising from the gap between the ideal and the actual. Each presented paper, she observed, approached that gap in a different way, asking how Buddhist moral ideals can move from doctrinal or philosophical form into real-world application.

For Verchery, this gap was not simply a problem to be solved, but part of the very structure of the Bodhisattva path. Citing Levitas, she reflected on the phrase "not yet," with its double sense of future possibility and present incompleteness. In that space between the ideal and the actual, she found an echo of the session's larger themes, from Gold's refusal of ethical closure, to Shao's view of equality as including difference, Zhang's emphasis on the potentiality of sentient beings, and Sun's presentation of Maitreya as both Bodhisattva and Future Buddha. "When we ask ourselves in the coming days if we know what the contemporary Bodhisattva path and the future of Buddhism look like, perhaps we, too, can answer, 'not yet,'" she concluded.



Ritzinger, Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Miami, pressed the discussion toward practice, asking how philosophical and historical insights might be translated into practical action. “Religion offers not only a set of profound ideas, which obviously it does, but also ways of ingraining those in life worlds,” he said. Turning to Tzu Chi as an example, Ritzinger observed, “What makes Tzu Chi important and powerful is in part, of course, the ideas, which are wonderful, but what really gives it its traction is its ability to ingrain that in habitus,” meaning the embodied habits, emotions, and ways of life that sustain action. His comment brought the discussion back to the question of how Buddhist ideas can become symbols and lived forms capable of motivating and sustaining the Bodhisattva path into the future.

Ritzinger also returned to Wen-liang Zhang’s discussion of Tathāgatagarbha thought, finding in it a vision of what he called “a kind of Bodhisattva collective.” Rather than imagining Buddhist communities only through vertical relationships between practitioners, masters, Bodhisattvas, and Buddhas, Zhang’s account opened a more horizontal possibility, in which sentient beings help guide one another toward awakening. Yet that possibility also raised difficult questions. “If I and someone else, similarly deluded as I, are trying to form that, how do we guide ourselves into awakening?” Ritzinger asked. “How do we avoid a blind leading the blind situation, and also what might be gained and lost by shifting from that vertical to horizontal orientation?”

From there, the symposium carried this concern with embodied practice into questions of health, healing, ethical care, and the relationships that bind humans to other living beings and the natural world.

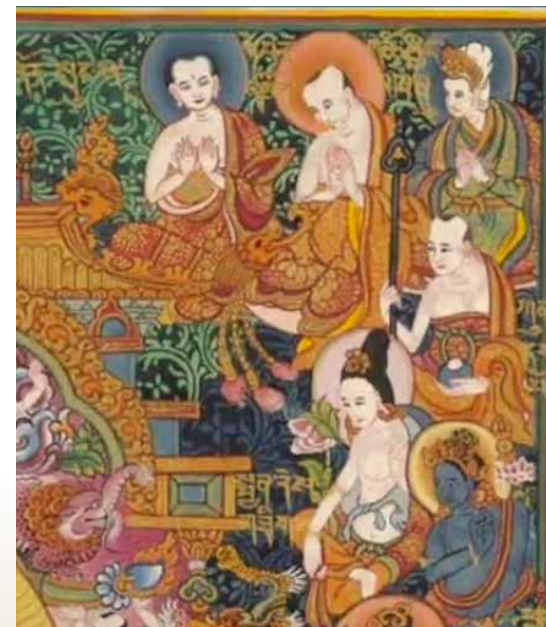
Buddhism, Health, and Ethics of Care

William A. McGrath, Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Assistant Professor of Buddhist Studies at New York University, opened the symposium’s consideration of health and care by turning to two paradigmatic Buddhist physicians, Jīvaka Kaumārabhr̥tya and Yutok Yönten Gönpo the Elder. Speaking from Tibetan-language sources, McGrath framed his paper, “From Lay Physician to Medicine Buddha: Ethics in the Lives of Jīvaka and Yutok,” around the relationship between the worldly and the sacred, and how it shaped Buddhist understandings of medicine.

In Jīvaka, McGrath found an early Buddhist model of medicine as a worldly practice carried out by a lay professional in service to the monastic community. Jīvaka cared for members of the Sangha, made donations, and became renowned as a

physician, yet the boundary between bodily healing and spiritual liberation remained clear. He could treat illness, but the Buddha alone addressed suffering at its deepest roots.

That distinction begins to blur in the Tibetan figure of Yutok, where healing, Buddhist practice, and awakening become more fully entwined. “In the life of Yutok, it’s more integrated, the worldly and the transcendent or even the sacred, and so the distinction begins to blur,” McGrath said. By placing Jīvaka and Yutok side by side, he traced a transformation in Buddhist medical ethics from a model in which medicine supports the Three Jewels – the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha – to one in which compassionate healing can itself become an expression of the Bodhisattva path.



Painted depictions show Jīvaka Kaumārabhr̥tya (left) and Yutok Yönten Gönpo the Elder (right), two Buddhist physicians discussed by William McGrath. Presentation Slides/William McGrath

FEATURE STORY



William McGrath, Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Assistant Professor of Buddhist Studies at New York University, presents "From Lay Physician to Medicine Buddha: Ethics in the Lives of Jivaka and Yutok." Photo/Hector Muniente

A later keynote during the symposium extended this inquiry into another dimension of Buddhist healing. In "Buddhism and Bedlam: Buddhist Monasteries and the Care (and Confinement) of the Insane," James Robson, Director of the Harvard-Yenching Institute, began by exploring how and when Buddhist traditions came to recognize severe mental illness as distinct from more general problematic states of mind. From there, his inquiry moved beyond diagnosis to the institutional structures that connected Buddhist monasteries with the treatment and support of those considered mentally ill across China, Taiwan, and Japan.

Focusing especially on Iwakura in northern Kyoto, Robson described how Buddhist temples became centers of treatment and refuge. As more people were brought there, nearby homes and residential care sites began taking in patients, who in many cases could take part in various forms of work and move freely throughout the village. This approach was rooted in ritual,

practical activity, and community life. "The one therapy that we do not find in any of these historical records is what? Meditation or mindfulness. It's about physical activity and getting people to do precise activities with their bodies rather than contemplating their mind, which would be probably disastrous," Robson observed.

In the early 1900s, as Japan sought to modernize, these older forms of support gave way to mental hospitals modeled on European institutions. By the 1950s, however, Europe and the United States had begun moving toward decarceration and community care, returning to something closer to what Iwakura had once offered. For Robson, that reversal showed that Buddhist tradition may still offer resources that are worth revisiting and learning from. "As those troubled people were put behind closed doors, out of view, out of the way of society, so too was the history of the confluence of Buddhist monasteries and madness locked away and hidden in the archives."



▲ James Robson highlights historical terms for madness and serious mental illness, from the Sanskrit Buddhist term *unmāda* to historical Chinese terms linked to qi imbalance, wind, phlegm, and extreme emotions. Presentation Slide/James Robson

▼ James Robson, Director of the Harvard-Yenching Institute, presents the keynote address "Buddhism and Bedlam: Buddhist Monasteries and the Care (and Confinement) of the Insane." Photo/Daniel Ferrara

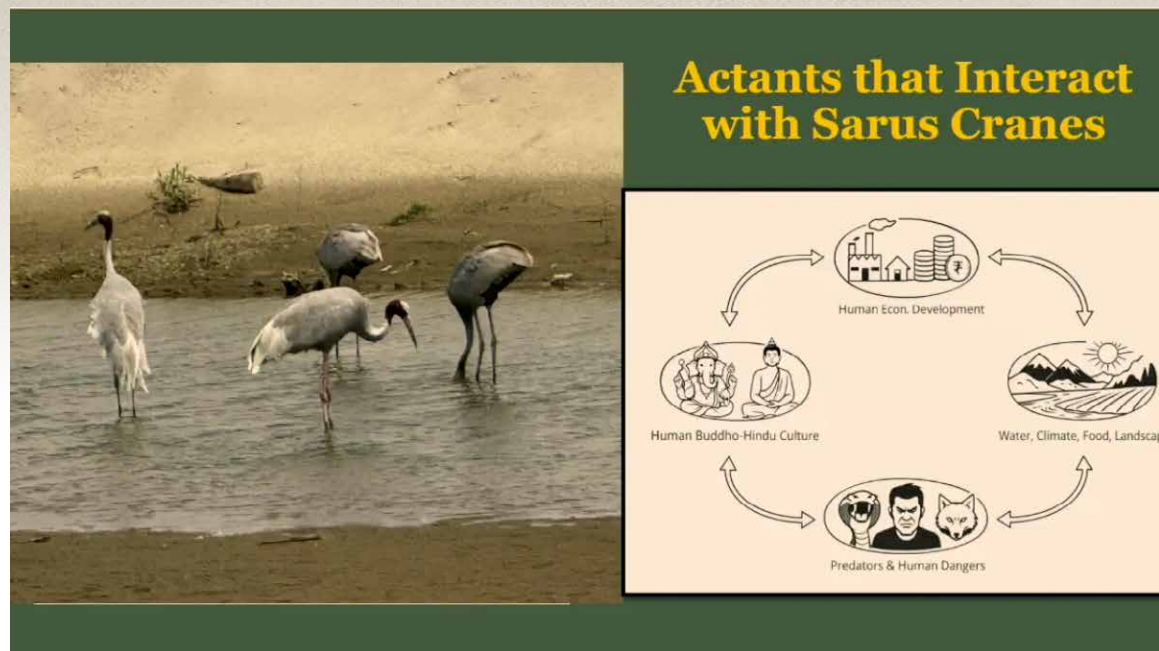


Pierce Salguero, Professor of Asian History and Health Humanities at Pennsylvania State University, Abington College, brought the discussion of Buddhist healing into the present-day United States. In "Beyond Mindfulness: Buddhism & Health in the US," he examined a wide range of Buddhist health and health-seeking practices, challenging the tendency to equate American Buddhism's role in health with meditation alone. Drawing on research into 45 Buddhist institutions in the Philadelphia area, Salguero focused especially on immigrant and Asian American communities, asking what everyday connections between Buddhism and medicine look like on the ground.

What emerged was a picture of temples, organizations, and service centers as active participants in medical outreach. In immigrant and Asian American communities, Salguero found that Buddhist institutions often help fill gaps in the mainstream healthcare system by offering ritual healing, practical support, cultural



Pierce Salguero's study of Buddhist health practices in the greater Philadelphia area includes 45 institutions, among them Tzu Chi USA's Philadelphia Service Center. Presentation Slide/Pierce Salguero



Mayfair Yang examines Sarus Cranes in Lumbini, Nepal, through a multispecies framework that includes habitat, human development, predators, and local Buddhist and Hindu culture. *Presentation Slide/Mayfair Yang*

familiarity, and help navigating medical services. In this view, these institutions function as largely invisible but critical nodes in the broader healthcare landscape.

In that context, Tzu Chi's medical outreach served as a particularly visible example. "I really think that it stands out as the preeminent example of charitable activities in health care, in the spirit of a bodhisattva mission," he said. Such work shows that Buddhist health practice in the United States is not one-size-fits-all, but is shaped by global Buddhist networks, local resources, and the strategic ways communities respond to suffering where they are.

Mayfair Yang, Professor of East Asian Languages and Cultural Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, expanded the symposium's discussion of care beyond human health and into the shared life of humans, animals, landscapes, and religious worlds. In "Chasing the Sarus Cranes: Buddhist and Hindu

Multispecies Assemblages in Lumbini, Nepal," Yang asked why 94% of Nepal's endangered Sarus Cranes live in the Lumbini area, the birthplace of Gautama Buddha, rather than in national parks where wildlife is formally protected.

To answer that question, Yang looked beyond ecology alone. She examined the cranes' habitat from multiple angles, including wetlands, rice paddies, food sources, climate, predators, and development, as well as the Buddhist and Hindu culture of local communities. Local farmers often share crops with the birds, protect their nests, and understand them as bearers of blessing, while Buddhist and Hindu narratives place the cranes within a moral world shaped by nonviolence, interdependence, and reverence for sentient beings. As one local resident told her, "We have many rivers and ponds here and the birds love the water. But the most important of all is that the local people treat them like gods and goddesses."

"The Sarus Cranes choose the Lumbini area not just due to the geo-environmental features. The birds like this area because it's also the religio-cultural landscape of the local people and their religious environmental ethics," Yang concluded. Her insight extended the ethics of care beyond human suffering, showing how religious culture can sustain protection for other forms of life.

Elise Anne DeVido, Associate Professor and Director of the Institute of Religion and Humanities at Tzu Chi University, continued the inquiry into Buddhism's relationship with nonhuman life through "A Study of the Concept of 'Animals Repaying Debts of Gratitude' in Tzu Chi Teachings." The phrase refers to stories in which animals respond to kindness by returning care, protection, or moral action, revealing bonds of gratitude between humans and other sentient beings.

Drawing on Chinese Buddhist literature and Master Cheng Yen's speeches and writings, DeVido considered what place animals occupy within a tradition so deeply focused on the human realm. "It's really time for us to take a better, closer look at animals. What are they doing in this Pure Land on Earth? Where are they?" Returning to a question raised earlier in the symposium, she also asked, "What does 'all sentient beings are equal' mean?"

In DeVido's view, stories of animals repaying gratitude open larger questions about compassion, karma, reciprocity, equality, and the limits of human-centered Buddhist ethics. Deeply rooted in Buddhist and Chinese traditions, these stories recognize animals as sentient beings capable of gratitude, loyalty, empathy, and suffering, even as they often portray them through human virtues such as filial piety and moral repayment. Master Cheng Yen's teachings,



Tzu Chi's sign language performance of "The Kneeling Lamb" presents an animal story of gratitude and filial piety, a theme Elise Anne DeVido examines in relation to Buddhist ethics and Tzu Chi teachings. *Presentation Slide/Elise Anne DeVido*

Applied Buddhism and
the Contemporary Bodhisattva Path

Exploring the Future of Buddhism

應用佛法與當代菩薩道：前瞻佛教的未來

May 07 - 08 Sat. Harvard Student Organization Center at Hilles (SOCH)



Freeman Su, Executive Director of Tzu Chi USA's Northeast Region, joins the moderator, presenters, and commentators for a group photo following the "Buddhism, Health, and Ethics of Care" panel. From left: William A. McGrath, Pierce Salguero, Yu-chen Li, Freeman Su, Janet Gyatso, Brooke Lavelle, Elise Anne DeVido, Mayfair Yang, and Rey-Sheng Her. Photo/Chien-Chih Lin

however, also press beyond that framework. In one striking teaching DeVido highlighted, Master Cheng Yen says, "Animals have their own world. We should not invade. We should not intrude upon it." For DeVido, such teachings invite a renewed dialogue between Buddhism and animal ethics, asking how the Buddhist claim that all sentient beings are equal might speak not only to animals' suffering and moral capacity, but also to their autonomy, difference, and place within a shared moral community.

Reflections on the Presentations

The panel's two commentators drew these four presentations into a broader reflection on the frameworks Buddhist traditions offer for care, whether directed toward

bodies, communities, animals, or the planet. Janet Gyatso, Hershey Professor of Buddhist Studies and Associate Dean for Faculty and Academic Affairs at Harvard Divinity School, returned first to the relationship between medicine and liberation. She asked where Buddhism moves beyond the pursuit of enlightenment into the practical realities of relieving suffering in everyday life. Tibetan medicine, she noted, offers one important example of this shift, as a tradition shaped by Buddhist thought yet concerned with physical medicine, professional ethics, and the concrete work of easing pain.

Gyatso also named a deep tension in Buddhist approaches to animals. Buddhism participates in human exceptionalism, since animals are traditionally understood as belonging to a lower realm

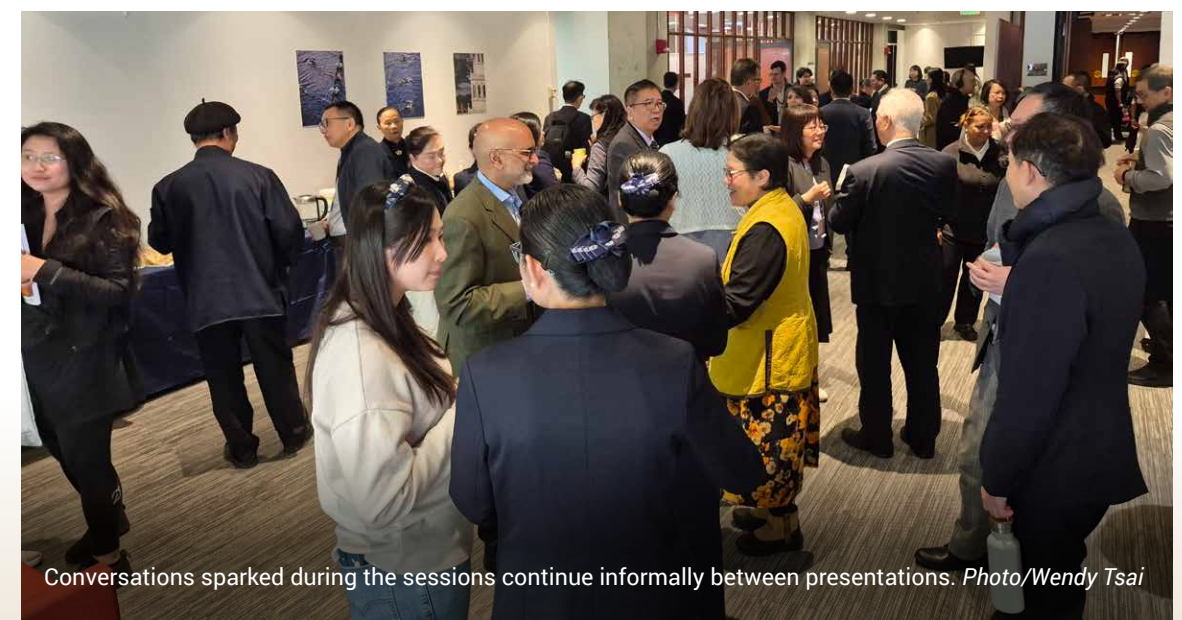
and unable to attain enlightenment in the same way humans can. "And yet, there also is this idea of compassion for all sentient beings," including the recognition that animals suffer. That tension made the moral crisis of human violence against animals impossible to ignore. "As Buddhists, I feel, and as human beings, we are responsible to change our ways," she urged, calling for greater attention to animals' "specific intelligences" and forms of value that may not fit human categories.

Brooke Lavelle, Buddhist Studies Program Manager at Union Theological Seminary, shifted the discussion toward the power of frames and frameworks in shaping how people understand health, healing, care, and what is possible. Citing disability justice writer Eli Clare's *Brilliant Imperfection*, she cautioned that ideas of healing and cure can carry hidden assumptions about "what counts as good, what counts as right, or, in some cases what counts as human or worthy of being saved." Rather than looking for one fixed Buddhist framework, Lavelle pointed to the diversity

of Buddhist traditions and asked which frameworks might help communities find coherence and respond to crisis from a perspective of care for all.

Among the panelists' responses, Pierce Salguero sharpened the point. "If pressed to define what is the core question, the core dynamic, the core issue across all of those various times and places, I would probably say it's getting clear on the relationship between healing and salvation," he said. "That's the central question that Buddhists have been asking for 2,000 years, and that's as true today in Taiwan as it is in Tibet in the 12th century, or in China in the fifth century, or in India in the BCE period. And they've been answering it in all kinds of different ways."

With that question still open, the symposium moved into a roundtable where scholars and practitioners turned more directly to how Buddhist ideas are studied, practiced, and brought into places of suffering and care.



Conversations sparked during the sessions continue informally between presentations. Photo/Wendy Tsai



Debbie Lee, Chief Executive Officer of Tzu Chi USA, presents Tzu Chi's model of compassion as a bridge between inner cultivation and action in the world. *Presentation Slide/Debbie Lee*

Studies and Practices of Applied Buddhism

Introducing the roundtable, James Robson framed the discussion as one that could look both to “practices that one finds in the past in the historical record” and to “the practices that are happening in the present period.”

Debbie Lee, Chief Executive Officer of Tzu Chi USA, presented Tzu Chi's work as a model for embodying Buddhist wisdom through service. “At Tzu Chi USA, we do not see Buddhism as distant or abstract. We practice it every day through helping people apply compassion.” Through Tzu Chi's four missions of charity, medicine, education, and humanistic culture, Lee explained, invisible values such as faith, compassion, and mindfulness take shape in the world. “Compassion becomes not just an idea, but action that works.” She framed Tzu Chi's

model as a bridge between inner cultivation and outer action, sustained by faith, vows, and practice, and strengthened by transparency and accountability that help build public trust. Recalling Tzu Chi's response to the January 2025 Los Angeles wildfires, she showed how that model moves from immediate relief to psychosocial care, reconstruction support, education, and long-term recovery. “Compassion means we stay,” Lee emphasized.

Wen-liang Zhang, Professor in the School of Philosophy at Renmin University of China, raised the question of how applied Buddhist studies relates to classical Buddhist scholarship, especially the study of doctrine, scripture, and philosophy. Hearing the presentations, he observed that Tzu Chi's applied Buddhism is not only a philosophy, but also “a philosophy of action.” He then pointed to the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Sutra of Infinite Meanings*, both central to Tzu Chi, as important ground for

further scholarly reflection on how scriptural teaching and contemporary practice illuminate one another.

Rey-Sheng Her approached that relationship through Master Cheng Yen's interpretation of the *Lotus Sutra*. “The sutra is not in the book. The sutra is in the heart of every sentient being,” Her said. In this understanding, service is itself a path of cultivation. “When we support others, we actually acquire wisdom and compassion. It's not because we've reached Buddhahood that we turn to the secular world to save sentient beings. We save sentient beings so that eventually we can attain the state of Buddhahood.”

Pierce Salguero returned to the historian's view and challenged the category itself. “Applied Buddhism is just simply Buddhism,” he said. From early Indian texts to Chinese Mahayana traditions, Buddhist kings, monastic hospitals, charities, and modern organizations, Salguero saw

long continuities in Buddhist engagement with health, healing, and social care. Yet he also recognized what is distinctive in Tzu Chi's contemporary form. “What might be new in Tzu Chi's case is new institutional structures. These are modern organizational strategies and tactics that enable Tzu Chi to be more efficient perhaps than medieval organizations might have been. The amount of impact that Tzu Chi can have is truly new.”

Monica Sanford, Assistant Dean for Multireligious Ministry at Harvard Divinity School, shifted the focus to the relationship between scholarship and practice. As a scholar of Buddhist chaplaincy and a Buddhist chaplain herself, she emphasized the need for both practitioners' insight and scholarly analysis. “There are things that only insiders can see, and there are things that only outsiders can see. And we need both,” she said. The task is not only to study Buddhist care from a distance, but to help practitioners use research to improve



practice itself. “It’s very powerful when we can connect the Dharma and the data,” she added, noting that research can help practitioners recognize Buddhist values not only as abstract teachings, but as patterns visible in lived practice.

Brooke Lavelle returned to the question of frameworks, reflecting on whether Buddhist work in the world is only about healing, or also about getting free. Drawing on her experience in contemplative education, health care, and movement chaplaincy, she considered how Buddhist traditions might help movements for justice and liberation sustain a broader moral imagination. “Rather than just fighting or resisting systems of domination and oppression, what would it look like to also develop these

skills to imagine alternatives and build capacity for them as a kind of equal practice?” she asked.

Andrew Her, a chaplain in the Department of Spiritual Care and Chaplaincy at NewYork-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center and a Tzu Chi commissioner, brought the discussion into the hospital room. Having grown up in Taiwan and in the Tzu Chi community, Her described navigating U.S. hospital chaplaincy as both an insider and outsider, carrying Buddhist and Tzu Chi formation into a field where patients often assume a chaplain is Christian. When patients are unsure why a chaplain has entered the room, Her makes clear that he is not there to convert them. “I’m just here for support, or some



Pierce Salguero, Professor of Asian History and Health Humanities at Pennsylvania State University, Abington College, speaks during the roundtable on “Studies and Practices of Applied Buddhism.” Photo/Hector Muniente



Roundtable participants gather for a group photo following “Studies and Practices of Applied Buddhism.” From left: James Robson, Andrew Her, Pierce Salguero, Rey-Sheng Her, Monica Sanford, Wen-liang Zhang, Debbie Lee, and Brooke Lavelle. Photo/Hector Muniente

accompaniment,” he tells them. In this setting, Buddhist practice moves across religious and cultural boundaries through presence, compassion, and respect for the patient’s own beliefs.

Taken together, the roundtable reflections showed applied Buddhism as both a field of study and a lived practice. It was not presented as a departure from Buddhist tradition, but as one way of naming its movement into hospitals, disaster zones, classrooms, communities, and places of social crisis. In an anxious world, the Bodhisattva path emerged not as a distant

ideal, but as a discipline of presence, learning, and action wherever suffering calls for care.

The next two articles in this series on the 2026 *Tzu Chi Global Symposium for Common Goodness* at Harvard University present the other central themes explored during this stimulating gathering, namely, Venerable Dharma Master Cheng Yen’s philosophy and leadership, and how Buddhist wisdom can inform new ways of designing, sensing, living with the natural world, and imagining the future. 🌱

2026 Tzu Chi Global Symposium for Common Goodness: Part II

Bringing the Dharma Into Everyday Life

Written by Ida Eva Zielinska



Having traveled from Taiwan to the United States for the 2026 Tzu Chi Global Symposium for Common Goodness at Harvard University, presenters Anwu Lin (second right) and Pei-Ying Lin (right) exchange ideas with monastics between sessions on May 8, when panels focus on Venerable Dharma Master Cheng Yen's philosophy and leadership. Photo/Wendy Tsai

I have often heard Dharma Master Cheng Yen teach that many classical sutras begin with the phrase, 'Thus have I heard.' In our time, under her guidance, the living sutra should be expressed as, 'Thus have I done.' Only by truly practicing the Bodhisattva path can we fulfill the profound meaning of bringing the Dharma into everyday life and manifesting as Bodhisattvas in this world.

“

Powen Yen
Chief Executive Officer
Buddhist Tzu Chi Charity Foundation

At the heart of Venerable Dharma Master Cheng Yen's teachings, and the Tzu Chi School of Buddhism and Jing Si Dharma Lineage she established, ancient Buddhist teachings are not only studied or recited, but applied through active service that relieves suffering, protects the environment, and responds to the needs of our time. This second article in the series covering the 2026 Tzu Chi Global Symposium for Common Goodness at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, follows the panels and discussions centered on the theme "Venerable Cheng Yen's Philosophy and Leadership," tracing how her teachings continue to shape Buddhist thought, humanitarian action, religious community, and visions of Buddhism's future.

The Lotus Sutra and the Thought of Master Cheng Yen

Rey-Sheng Her, Deputy CEO of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Charity Foundation and Convener of the Tzu Chi Academic Committee, opened the first panel with "The Vijñapti-Mātratā Thought of Dharma Master Cheng Yen." His talk explored how Master Cheng Yen understands Vijñapti-mātratā, or Consciousness-Only

thought, as a path for transforming defilement into purity and consciousness into wisdom.

Rather than treating this Buddhist framework as a matter of inner reflection alone, Her showed how Master Cheng Yen brings it into the Bodhisattva path, where consciousness is purified through action that benefits sentient beings in the human realm. In this view, goodness is not merely moral intention, but a necessary beginning that must be guided by principle in order to become a path of transformation.

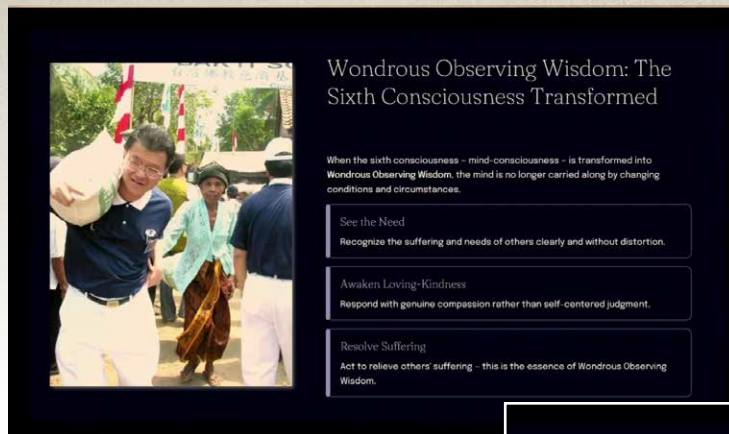
Doing good is part of being in the human world, so the human world is good for practice. As for evil, we must be proper and disciplined, and not allow ourselves to be defiled by evil. Goodness is what one should naturally do. 'At birth, human nature is inherently good' – one is originally meant to do good. But doing good alone is still not enough; this is goodness mixed with impurity, because we still do not understand principle. Because principle is not yet understood, it is easy to be led astray by temptation.

“

Venerable Dharma Master Cheng Yen
Founder
Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation

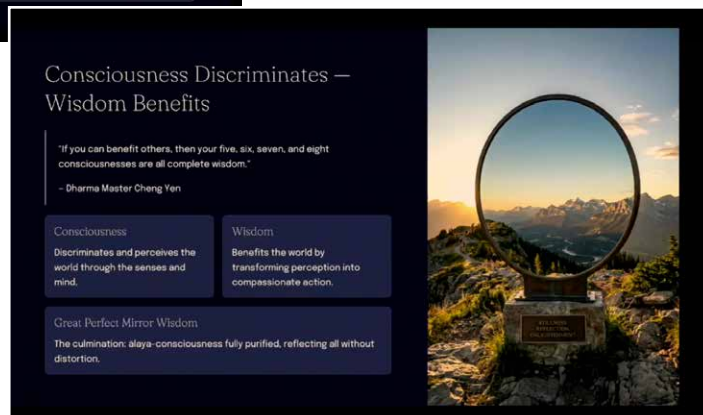


Participants follow presentations on Dharma Master Cheng Yen's philosophy and leadership closely, with some photographing slides to study later. Photo/Wendy Tsai



▲ Rey-Sheng Her shows how Dharma Master Cheng Yen interprets the transformation of the sixth consciousness into Wondrous Observing Wisdom as a path from perceiving suffering to relieving it through compassionate action. *Presentation Slide/Rey-Sheng Her*

▼ Rey-Sheng Her outlines the progression toward Great Perfect Mirror Wisdom in Dharma Master Cheng Yen's interpretation of Consciousness-Only thought as a path from defilement to purity and from consciousness to wisdom. *Presentation Slide/Rey-Sheng Her*



Her then moved carefully through the Consciousness-Only framework, outlining its eight layers. The first five consciousnesses correspond to the senses; the sixth, or mind-consciousness, interprets what the senses perceive; the seventh is associated with the sense of self; and the eighth, or storehouse consciousness, holds karmic seeds. In Master Cheng Yen's interpretation, these layers can be transformed into wisdom through Bodhisattva practice.

"Use your five consciousnesses to benefit others, not to attach to the defilements of the secular world. The eye beholds the suffering of beings. The ear hears the voices of beings. The nose perceives the conditions of beings. The mouth speaks wondrous and wholesome words, and the body performs good deeds to benefit sentient beings. In our sixth consciousness, our mind-consciousness, we inspire, help, and put things into practice," Her explained. "Dharma

Master Cheng Yen uses Consciousness-Only philosophy to explain the practice of benefiting others, and her exposition is very complete. Consciousness can discriminate in this world, but wisdom can benefit this world."

In "From Humanistic Buddhism to the Perspective of Religion of Dharma Master Cheng Yen," Chien-Te Lin, Professor and Director of the Institute of Religion and Humanities at Tzu Chi University, approached Master Cheng Yen's religious perspective through the tradition of Humanistic Buddhism. He traced this inheritance from Venerable Yin Shun, Master Cheng Yen's spiritual mentor, who gave her the directive to work "for Buddhism and for all sentient beings."

"From Dharma Master Cheng Yen's point of view, charity is a kind of skillful means. The major consideration is mental

purification, and wisdom cultivation is the ultimate target," Lin explained. In this sense, giving becomes a path of mutual transformation between giver and recipient, and compassionate service an entry point into deeper spiritual cultivation.

That understanding of religion also opens Tzu Chi's work to people of different faiths. Drawing on examples of Catholic, Muslim, and other religious leaders and practitioners who have worked with Tzu Chi, Lin showed how Great Love becomes a shared moral ground rather than a boundary marker. Because Master Cheng Yen understands religion in terms of life's guiding purpose and education for living, this cooperation is not incidental to Tzu Chi's identity, but part of its understanding of religious practice. "There's no difference among religions. When we have an open heart, all religions are the same. But when our minds are narrow, they appear different," Lin said, citing Master Cheng Yen's teaching.



▲ Chien-Te Lin shows how Master Cheng Yen's understanding of religion opens Tzu Chi's charitable practice to interfaith collaboration and shared service. *Presentation Slides/Chien-Te Lin*

Anwu Lin, Professor Emeritus at Tzu Chi University in Hualien, Taiwan, presented "The Integration of Non-Arising and Ever-Renewing Life: Tzu Chi's Practical Interpretation of the *Sutra of Infinite Meanings* – An Approach via the Three-State Theory of Being and the Synthesis of Confucianism and Buddhism." He examined Tzu Chi's practice through the three states in the theory, namely Source, Manifestation, and Actualization, while also considering how its approach brings together Buddhist and Confucian ideals.

At the center of his presentation was the eight-line verse from the *Sutra of Infinite Meanings* that Master Cheng Yen frequently refers to in her teachings:

With minds tranquil and clear, vows vast as the universe, they remain unwavering for countless kalpas. Infinite Dharma doors readily appear before them. They attain great wisdom and completely understand all Dharma.

▼ Chien-Te Lin presents "From Humanistic Buddhism to the Perspective of Religion of Dharma Master Cheng Yen." *Photo/Wendy Tsai*



Lin presented this verse as a complete sequence of spiritual cultivation. In his framework, the Jing Si Dharma Lineage embodies the realization of the Source, the Tzu Chi School of Buddhism represents the Actualization of practical resolve, and Tzu Chi's Four Missions demonstrate the Manifestation of infinite Dharma doors, allowing compassion to be expressed concretely while guiding practitioners toward great wisdom and understanding of all Dharma.

Lin also explored how Tzu Chi brings Buddhist compassion together with Confucian moral responsibility. Rather than limiting care to family, community, or kinship ties, Tzu Chi extends that care outward through unconditional loving-kindness. "Tzu Chi provides a comprehensive path from 'mental cultivation' to 'social praxis,' and from 'individual awakening' to 'collective healing,' ultimately advancing toward this ideal of Great Love." In this way, he linked Tzu Chi's practice back to the *Sutra of Infinite Meanings*, presenting its missions as a contemporary way to cultivate goodness and nurture awakening through compassionate action.

In "The Buddhist Nature and Universality of the Tzu Chi School of Buddhism Established by Dharma Master Cheng Yen Based on the *Lotus Sutra*," Jianming He, Professor of Buddhism and Religious Theories at the School of Philosophy, Renmin University of China, traced Master Cheng Yen's deep connection with the *Lotus Sutra*, from the beginning of her Buddhist practice to her understanding of the text as the spiritual foundation and action guide for Tzu Chi's missions.

In Master Cheng Yen's own account, her connection with the *Lotus Sutra* grew out of



Anwu Lin (left) participates in the discussions following the panel, with fellow presenter Jianming He seated beside him. Photo/Wendy Tsai

her search for how to fulfill the instruction she received from her mentor, Venerable Yin Shun, to work "for Buddhism and for all sentient beings." Jianming He quoted her directly. "With so many texts in the Buddhist canon, which direction should I take? I chose the *Lotus Sutra*. The principles of the *Lotus Sutra* are truly profound, yet the logic within it perfectly aligns with the concept of Bodhisattvas going amongst the people." That recognition laid the foundation for Master Cheng Yen's philosophy and leadership. "From the very beginning, I felt that to lead people on the Bodhisattva path, I should not preach overly profound theories to them; they just need to walk the path and do the work."

He also turned to the distinctive character of the Tzu Chi community, which he described as "simultaneously a sangha, a religious order, and a social organization." Its guiding principle of "inner cultivation of sincerity, integrity, faith, and honesty," combined with its "external practice of loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity," links personal purification with doing good in the world. Through this structure, Tzu Chi remains grounded in Buddhist practice while offering values that can resonate across Buddhist lineages as well as different religions, cultures, and societies.

Reflections on the Presentations

Following the presentations, the commentators offered reflections on the larger implications of the papers. Eugene Yuejin Wang, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Professor of Asian Art at Harvard University and Founder and Director of the Cognitive Aesthetic Media Lab in Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences, responded by shifting the discussion from Master Cheng Yen as a philosopher to her significance as an extraordinary reader of the *Lotus Sutra*.

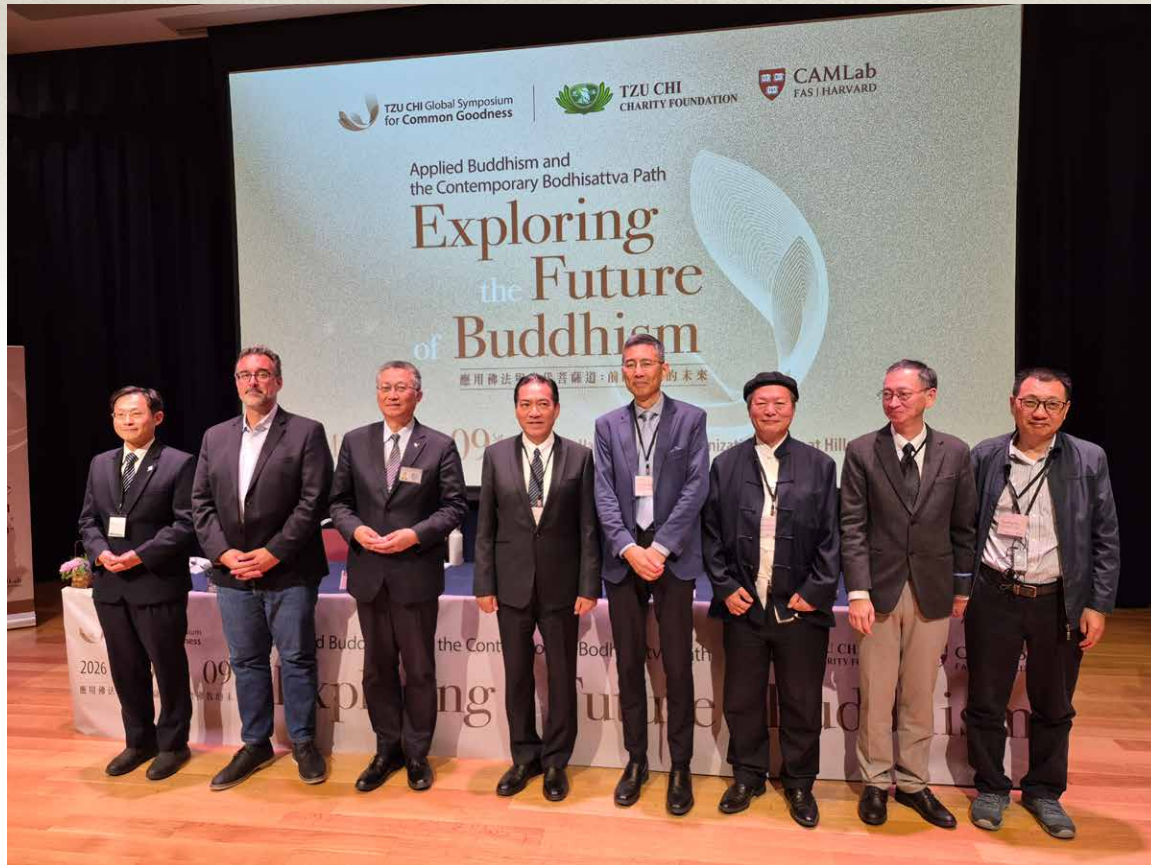
"Many people read through the *Lotus Sutra*. But Master Cheng Yen probably mattered more in human history than other readers, because we all know what happened decades and decades later, what the Tzu Chi Foundation has blossomed into, what organization it has become, and what... the kind of whole world that it built," Wang said. His point was not simply that Master Cheng Yen interpreted the *Lotus Sutra*, but that her reading generated a living world of

response, practice, and dialogue. Through her, the scripture became a catalyst for action far beyond the page.

Wang pointed to the residents of a Hansen's disease community who heard Master Cheng Yen's call to help build a hospital in Hualien and began donating their own savings. "The key there is that Master Cheng Yen instilled in them a sense of dignity. I think that was one of the keys, the human dignity that such giving could restore in people," he said. In this example, the meaning of the *Lotus Sutra* was not exhausted by doctrine, cosmology, or the stories within the text, but emerged through what it enabled people to do in the world. "It's not that the text gets translated into actions. It's more like the text gives certain cues. You act on certain cues and go on to do something extraordinary."

Following the panel on "The *Lotus Sutra* and the Thought of Master Cheng Yen," Eugene Yuejin Wang offers commentary on the broader implications of the presentations. Photo/Daniel Ferrara





Freeman Su, Executive Director of Tzu Chi USA's Northeast Region, joins the moderator, presenters, and commentators for a group photo following the panel "The Lotus Sutra and the Thought of Master Cheng Yen." From left: Chien-Te Lin, Justin Ritzinger, Freeman Su, Rey-Sheng Her, Eugene Wang, Anwu Lin, Wei-jen Teng, and Jianming He. Photo/Wendy Tsai

Weijen Teng, Professor and Dean of the Department of Buddhist Studies at Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts, returned to a broader question running through the four papers: How can engaged Buddhism remain spiritually grounded while responding concretely to suffering in the world? He cautioned against reducing Buddhism to a secular humanistic ethic, while also avoiding a metaphysics too distant from lived suffering. Master Cheng Yen's achievement, Teng observed, was that she had already embodied an answer before scholarship had fully developed the vocabulary to describe it.

The next group of presentations moved from the philosophical grounding of Tzu Chi's practice to its humanitarian reach in the world, with speakers considering how Tzu Chi's work reshapes ideas of security, compassion, ecological responsibility, and volunteer formation through a Buddhist practice of service.

Global Humanitarianism and Engaged Buddhism

William Yau Nang Ng, of the Department of History at National Taiwan Normal University, opened the panel with "Rethinking Human Security, Response, Relationality, and the Case of Tzu Chi," turning the discussion toward Tzu Chi's humanitarian practice. Beginning with the framework of human security, which shifts attention from state security to the vulnerability, dignity, and survival of human beings, Ng presented Tzu Chi as more than a functional non-governmental actor within global humanitarian systems. Rather, he proposed the concept of "Tzu Chi-style service Buddhism," a form of religiously grounded service that brings physical care, emotional support, and spiritual reassurance together.

Ng illustrated this through Tzu Chi's work after the 2004 tsunami in Aceh, Indonesia.

Some local villagers initially took part in rebuilding efforts as paid workers, but later returned without payment. "Yesterday we worked for you. Today, we work together," one villager shared." For Ng, that movement from receiving help to joining in service revealed how humanitarian response can become relational and transformative. "Relationship happens over time and those who once receive help may begin to help others. In this moment, from being helped to helping, dignity is not only protected but gradually restored and strengthened."

In Ng's view, this is how Tzu Chi expands the usual language of human security. Service is not only intervention or provision, but "a relational practice of care, accompaniment, and empowerment." He distinguished between the "common good," understood in terms of institutional protections necessary for public life, and "common goodness," an ethical condition generated through ongoing relationships of response. "Compassion is



William Yau Nang Ng presents "Rethinking Human Security, Response, Relationality, and the Case of Tzu Chi." Photo/Wendy Tsai



▲ Weishan Huang uses Tzu Chi's pop-up bed to show how compassion can take material form through design, logistics, and disaster relief. *Presentation Slide/Weishan Huang*

► Weishan Huang presents "Infrastructuring Compassion: The Moral Economy of Tzu Chi's Humanitarian Relief." *Photo/Wendy Tsai*



not only something we affirm, it is something we do," he said. "And it is through doing, through repeated acts of response that relationships are strengthened and dignity gradually restored."

Weishan Huang, of the Department of Sociology at Hong Kong Shue Yan University, focused on the material and organizational dimensions of relief work in "Infrastructuring Compassion: The Moral Economy of Tzu Chi's Humanitarian Relief." Her study looked at how Buddhist compassion becomes practical disaster response through volunteers, professional staff, technologies, documentation, relief supplies, and organizational protocols.

Huang illustrated this through the development of Tzu Chi's pop-up bed for disaster survivors. After seeing a relief photo of a blind mother sitting on the ground beside floodwater after a disaster, Master Cheng

Yen instructed Tzu Chi's engineering staff to design a bed that could be quickly produced, transported, assembled, and used safely in disaster zones, setting in motion a complex "infrastructuring" process.

"The concept of 'infrastructuring' emphasizes that the pop-up bed innovation is not simply a technical fix but the outcome of a complicated network: compassion, engineers, materials, time, transportation, and survivors all co-produce the infrastructure. Compassion is translated into material form through the network, showing that humanitarian infrastructure is a relational achievement rather than a static artifact," she explained. Relief blankets made from recycled PET bottles, instant rice, water filters, and temporary beds are therefore not only functional objects, but part of a wider moral economy of care, one in which

compassion is embedded in systems of relief rather than expressed only as feeling or intention.

Yining Liu, Assistant Professor in the Humanities and Social Sciences Cluster at Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts, addressed Tzu Chi's environmental advocacy in "Eco-Bodhisattvas in the Anthropocene: Generational, Gendered, and Transnational Dimensions of Tzu Chi's Climate Activism." Placing Tzu Chi within broader conversations on religion, ecology, and climate change, Liu asked how Buddhist organizations can respond to the ecological crisis not only through ideas, but through public action.

Liu's case study centered on Tzu Chi's expanding transnational climate action network. Since Tzu Chi began its environmental mission in Taiwan in 1992, its work has

grown from localized recycling infrastructure and resource recovery into global advocacy connected with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the annual Conference of the Parties, known as COP. Within that network, Liu highlighted women's leadership and youth participation as two important channels through which Tzu Chi carries ecological commitments across generations, communities, and international platforms.

Seen this way, Tzu Chi's work is not only environmental outreach, but a form of Buddhist public engagement in the age of climate change. "The religious discourse and environmental practices underlying Tzu Chi's United Nations ecological advocacy serve as a significant case study for understanding how Buddhism addresses climate



▲ Yining Liu highlights Tzu Chi's environmental advocacy through international climate platforms and youth engagement. *Presentation Slides/Yining Liu*



► Yining Liu presents "Eco-Bodhisattvas in the Anthropocene: Generational, Gendered, and Transnational Dimensions of Tzu Chi's Climate Activism." *Photo/Wendy Tsai*

change and responds to the Anthropocene. Furthermore, they highlight the ‘ecological turn’ within Asian Buddhism and the distinctive characteristics of Anthropocene Buddhism,” Liu noted.

Jiangang Zhu, of the Department of Sociology at Zhejiang University, examined Tzu Chi’s volunteer formation in mainland China in “Tzu Chi Volunteers in Mainland China: Humanistic Buddhism, Moral Discipline, and the Making of Volunteer Spirit.” Focusing particularly on Guangzhou, Zhu asked why people in a highly urbanized, market-oriented, and individualized society continue to devote themselves to long-term voluntary service.

Zhu located the answer in the way Tzu Chi forms volunteers within an organized moral community. “Tzu Chi is not a loose network of helpers who occasionally come together for good deeds. It is an organized

moral community. Volunteers are drawn into a dense web of relationships, stages of advancement, collective activities, and shared symbols,” he explained. “Through these mechanisms, volunteers gradually come to identify themselves as ‘Tzu Chi people,’ a shared identity that strengthens organizational recognition, emotional attachment, and collective belonging.”

Zhu described this identity formation, which encompasses discipline, moral edification, and repeated practice, in concrete terms. “Volunteers learn how to speak, how to move, how to dress, how to regulate emotion, and how to conduct themselves in public and collective settings. These are not random details. They are technologies of formation,” he said. Volunteer spirit, in this sense, is not confined to formal service events, but becomes part of everyday conduct, a way of turning charitable work into self-cultivation and social belonging.

Reflections on the Presentations

Following the presentations, commentators Monica Sanford, Assistant Dean at Harvard Divinity School, and Mayfair Yang, Professor of East Asian Languages and Cultural Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, drew out broader questions raised by the papers.

Sanford returned to the theme of relationship, reflecting on how modern convenience can weaken the reciprocal ties through which people once helped one another directly. “One of the things that Tzu Chi does is it restructures, it kind of restitches the fabric of society through re-establishing relationality.” She also raised a translation question central to the section, asking how *karuṇā* can be rendered as compassion without losing its action-oriented force. “From the Buddhist perspective, I’ve always understood *karuṇā* to be very deeply embedded in the idea of action just as Master Cheng Yen describes it. For there to be *karuṇā* there must be a willingness and an ability to take action to alleviate suffering.”

Yang placed the discussion within larger questions of secular institutions, state power, environmental crisis, and the material systems through which values take form. Huang’s presentation, in particular, led her to consider how Buddhist ethics can shape even the design of disaster relief products. “The material things that are produced are actually in accordance with the ideals and ideas of Buddhist philosophy.” In that sense, infrastructure need not stand in opposition to environmental concern when it is shaped by Buddhist ethics and care.

Together, these reflections extended the discussion of engaged Buddhism from humanitarian response to the networks, materials, and relationships through which compassion becomes practice. The next group of presentations turned inward toward Tzu Chi’s formation as a religious community, asking how a shared path of cultivation is created and sustained.



Jiangang Zhu presents “Tzu Chi Volunteers in Mainland China: Humanistic Buddhism, Moral Discipline, and the Making of Volunteer Spirit” via prerecorded video. Photo/Wendy Tsai



Commentators Mayfair Yang (right) and Monica Sanford (left) continue the discussion following the panel presentations. Photo/Wendy Tsai

Charisma, Practice, and Religious Community in Tzu Chi

Opening the panel, Pei-Ying Lin, Associate Professor at the Graduate Institute of Religious Studies at Chengchi University in Taiwan, explored the ethical structures that allow compassion to become durable across cultures and communities. Her presentation, "Compassion Network: The Tzu Chi Pure Practitioners in the Age of Globalisation," emphasized that Tzu Chi's global growth cannot be understood through compassion alone. Its capacity to sustain humanitarian relief, medical care, environmental action, and volunteer service across national boundaries also depends on what she called "a codified ethical infrastructure," rooted in the Ten Tzu Chi Precepts and the disciplined forms of life they shape.

At the center of Lin's analysis were Tzu Chi's Pure Practitioners, or *qingxiu shi*, whom she described as occupying a distinctive position within Tzu Chi's community. "A phrase frequently used to describe them is 'a monastic mind, lay outfit,'" she said. "They do renounce household life, and they cultivate discipline and inward commitment that resembles monastic aspiration." Many come from overseas Chinese and diaspora backgrounds, showing how Tzu Chi draws globally mobile individuals into a shared life of discipline, service, and spiritual commitment.

Lin's analysis made the Pure Practitioners significant because they reveal the discipline that sustains Tzu Chi's humanitarian work. In this sense, they are not simply exemplary volunteers. "The Pure Practitioners illuminate how ethics are translated into organization and how compassion becomes codified into durable



A slide from an earlier presentation shows the first certification ceremony for Tzu Chi Pure Practitioners, held at the Jing Si Abode in Hualien, Taiwan, in 2019. *Presentation Slide/Jianming He*



▲ Examples of published biographies of Master Cheng Yen discussed in Yu-Chen Li's presentation. *Presentation Slides/Yu-Chen Li*

▼ Yu-Chen Li presents "Writing Religious Charisma: The Buddhist Publishing Industry and *Bhikshuni*." *Photo/Wendy Tsai*



institutional form. They embody a lay-centered moral modernity in which discipline and self-cultivation operate within civil society."

Yu-Chen Li, Director of the Graduate Institute of Religious Studies at Chengchi University in Taiwan, traced how religious charisma is not only embodied in a living teacher, but also recorded, circulated, and strengthened through writing and publication. In "Writing Religious Charisma: The Buddhist Publishing Industry and *Bhikshuni*," Li situated Master Cheng Yen within the broader history of post-war Taiwanese *bhikshuni* biographies. "Historically, *bhikshuni* biographies were compiled as a collection appended to biographies of monks," she explained. "People living 50 years ago couldn't imagine a biographical genre featuring a standalone and publicly available biography dedicated to a single nun. This is a very new phenomenon."

Li found that Tzu Chi ranked first among organizations publishing biographies of *bhikshunis*, with Master Cheng Yen's life presented in relation to the development of Tzu Chi itself. "Each is written from Master Cheng Yen's perspective, but reflecting the phased development theme of Tzu Chi at that time." As Tzu Chi expanded, these publications helped readers encounter Master Cheng Yen's teachings and presence beyond the circle of those who could meet her. "When we define charisma, we always focus on personal contact. But when the organization grows, not everyone gets a chance to get in touch with the leader. So these books use words to link you and the master together."

In Master Cheng Yen's biographies, Li identified three broad stages, beginning with early life and personal cultivation, then the gathering of authority needed to build a religious community, and finally the expansion of that authority as Tzu Chi's work grew. "As a religious leader, you have

▼► A Tzu Chi “Silent Mentors” ceremony honors whole-body donors who become teachers for medical students and physicians.
Presentation Slide/Julia Huang



to transform your charisma, because charisma becomes social credibility,” Li said. In this sense, publishing did more than preserve a life story. It helped shape how Master Cheng Yen’s religious leadership could be understood, shared, and recognized as Tzu Chi grew from a local Buddhist community into a global movement. “Charisma could be written. In Taiwan, especially, publication is very important for nuns.”

Julia Huang, Professor at the Institute of Anthropology at Taiwan Tsing Hua University, brought the discussion of religious practice into the intimate terrain of death, family caregiving, and end-of-life choice. In “Modern Body-Giving Bodhisattvas: Affect, Emotional Practice, and Ethics in the Whole-Body Donations to Tzu Chi,” she looked at Tzu Chi’s “Silent Mentors” program, through which whole-body donors become anatomy teachers for medical students and physicians. Since 1995, more than 1,400 donors have completed whole-body donations through Tzu Chi, reshaping

not only medical education but also the emotional and ritual meanings of death in Taiwan.

Rather than focusing only on the donors themselves, Huang emphasized the sustained role of family members, who help fulfill the donor’s wish through end-of-life care, transportation, deferred cremation, and commemoration. She opened with the story of Ms. Song, whose mother had long hoped to donate her body to medical science and whose final journey required difficult choices to keep that possibility open. “My mother had never been to Hualien in her life,” Song told Huang. “So I was worried that she would feel alone here.” For the first 100 days after her mother’s death, Song traveled from Taichung to Hualien every week to visit her body, then continued monthly visits during the waiting period. “I wanted to keep her company.” After exactly one year, following the completion of a four-day surgical simulation, Song reflected, “Today my mother’s wish to become a teacher has finally come true.”



▲ Julia Huang presents “Modern Body-Giving Bodhisattvas: Affect, Emotional Practice, and Ethics in the Whole-Body Donations to Tzu Chi.” *Photo/Wendy Tsai*

Such stories show how the “Silent Mentors” program creates a new moral and emotional timeline for death. Donation is not a single decision made at the end of life, but often the culmination of years of caregiving, family negotiation, and ritual participation. “The whole-body donation as modeled in the ‘Silent Mentor Program’ enabled the ethicalization of the end of life in traditional Han Chinese culture,” Huang said. It also opened what she described as “a freedom to choose one way to die and to end your life,” without being seen as “a bad son, a bad family, a bad daughter, or a bad wife.” In this sense, body donation becomes not only a contribution to medical science, but another expression of the Bodhisattva path, where even death can become an act of care and teaching.

Reflections on the Presentations

Following the presentations, Pierce Salguero, Professor of Asian History and Health Humanities at Pennsylvania State University, Abington College, and Jonathan C. Gold, Professor of Religion and Director of the Center for Culture, Society and Religion at Princeton University, brought the panel into a broader consideration of how Tzu Chi’s modern religious community carries, transforms, and reworks older Buddhist forms.

Listening as a historian of medieval Chinese Buddhism, Salguero asked how remnants of the past might still be present in contemporary Tzu Chi. In the Pure Practitioners, he heard possible echoes of Buddhist ideas about moral discipline



Shufang Lin, Director of Tzu Chi USA Northeast Region’s Boston Service Center, joins the moderator, presenters, and commentators for a group photo following the “Charisma, Practice, and Religious Community in Tzu Chi” panel. From left: Pierce Salguero, Yu-Chen Li, Pei-Ying Lin, Shufang Lin, Jonathan Gold, Julia Huang, and Elise Anne DeVido. *Photo/Wendy Tsai*

as a force that shapes conduct, presence, speech, and the ability to influence others. Turning to *bhikshuni* biographies, he asked whether older biographical traditions had already framed monks and nuns differently, with monks often associated with ritual power and miraculous healing, and nuns typically linked with piety, charity, education, and care. And in the “Silent Mentors” program, he wondered how older concerns about death, merit, ghosts, or death pollution might still matter in contemporary Taiwanese practice, even when transformed through Tzu Chi’s language of care and donation.

Gold brought the three presentations together around the relationship between self-cultivation and the social forms that sustain it. Tzu Chi offers a powerful case for studying how individual moral formation becomes organized practice, whether through the disciplined lives of the Pure Practitioners, the role of writing and publication in stabilizing charisma as an institution grows, or the “Silent Mentors” program’s creation of “an extended period where emotions around death are evoked and given space for expression.”

The Future of Buddhism

Rather than treating Buddhism’s future as a single destination, the roundtable that concluded the day’s discussions considered its possibilities from several directions. Moderated by Mayfair Yang, the exchange moved across philosophical, historical, anthropological, and scientific perspectives on how Buddhist thought and practice might respond to suffering, social conflict, technological change, ecological crisis, and the needs of contemporary life.

Jonathan Gold asked what Buddhism might uniquely contribute to social thought today. Buddhist concepts, he said, need not require full enlightenment to offer moral and psychological benefit. Applied to social and political problems, dependent origination can shift attention toward the causes, conditions, and systems that give rise to them. “Rather than blame-centered thinking, we can think about what brought this situation to pass, not who is the person who did this.” Karma, too, becomes useful when understood not as reward or punishment, but as a feedback system in which repeated actions shape habits, expectations, institutions, and the conditions for future action. Overall, the future of Buddhism may depend “less on whether people identify as Buddhists than on whether Buddhist methods for resisting reification and

compulsive certainty can remain culturally available and can be made more widely available.”

Weijen Teng cautioned against treating the future of Buddhism as something that could be predicted or prescribed in a single form. A more useful question is how Buddhist traditions can continue to develop under changing historical and cultural conditions while remaining meaningfully connected to their roots. “The future of Buddhism, if it is to have any depth, is not built by repudiating tradition but by rereading it,” he said. “When contemporary Buddhists speak of engaged or applied Buddhism, they are neither merely innovating nor merely repeating. They are continuing, extending the tradition’s own dynamic into

new conditions.” In this view, Buddhism’s future depends on preserving its traditional foundations while allowing them to respond to the conditions of the present.

Julia Huang looked toward Buddhism’s future through the lens of globalization, social capital, and lived practice. She described two broad ways religious traditions travel, one through visible institutions and another through forms of life that become portable, adaptable, and quietly woven into everyday culture. Buddhism, she observed, may have unusual strength in this second mode because it can offer guidance for living while adapting to different cultures, societies, and generations. “I think the future of Buddhism is bright because it’s organic.” In Tzu Chi, she saw a striking example of this capacity, where practices that may appear secular, such as recycling or donating one’s body to medical education, are given religious meaning. “You do this, you recycle garbage, you can be a bodhisattva.”

Yinggang Sun framed the future of Buddhism in response to a turbulent world marked by conflict, fragmentation, and what he called “collapsing globalization.” Speaking as a historian, he emphasized common goodness as a foundation for Buddhism’s renewed intellectual, public, and international roles. It must offer value frameworks capable of guiding humanity away from “zero-sum games” and toward coexistence and shared flourishing. It must also enter public life more fully, including hospitals, communities, nursing homes, and “spiritual wastelands,” wherever people face illness, aging, mental exhaustion, or fear of death. “Only when the Dharma truly integrates into people’s daily necessities and the universal realities of birth, aging, sickness, and death can Buddhism



once again become an indispensable warm force in society.”

William McGrath turned to Buddhist scriptures that imagine the future not as open-ended progress, but through predictions of decline, disease, and the eventual disappearance of the Dharma. Drawing on the *Chandragarbha Sutra*, also known as the *Sutra of Moon Essence*, he described a scriptural prediction that “the true Buddha Dharma” would last for 2,000 years after the Buddha’s death before entering a period of decline. And yet, against this darker vision, the *Lotus Sutra* offers a more hopeful view, in which the Buddha dies but persists, and great merit can still be generated through practice. “Those 2,000 years have long run out, and so we’re running on extra time here,” McGrath said. “I think the idea is actually through action, through activity, perhaps we can extend this true doctrine even just a little bit longer.”

Jacob Lindsley, speaking from the field of contemplative science, focused on the scientific study of mindfulness, meditation, and Buddhist-derived contemplative practices. Over the past 40 years, meditation research has expanded scientific views of human potential and helped validate subjective experience as meaningful data for understanding the mind. He traced that development through three chronological research waves: mindfulness and focused attention, compassion and loving-kindness, and wisdom and nonduality. “What we’re really trying to do is take practices and experiences that we have had that are inspiring to us and attempt to create an evidence base in order to show that it is effective and helpful.” Yet this scientific translation also brings risks. Meditation can enter health care, education, and other secular spaces, but Buddhism may become less visible when practices are detached from their religious context. “If we have these programs that allow us to meditate in a non-Buddhist context, the path to enlightenment can disappear.”

▼ Rey-Sheng Her (middle) listens as symposium participants share their thoughts between sessions. He is deeply committed to ensuring the future of Tzu Chi and Dharma Master Cheng Yen’s teachings for generations to come. Photo/Wendy Tsai

Mayfair Yang closed the roundtable by reflecting on the range of perspectives it had brought together, including the possibility of new conversations between Buddhism and science. “I’m so glad to hear that Buddhism has turned around and now, in its own way, is helping to direct scientific research,” she said. “Religion and science don’t have to be in opposition, but they can be working together.”

Audience questions then raised American Buddhism, market humanism, gender equality, artificial intelligence, animal suffering, ecological crisis, and the meanings of “engaged,” “humanistic,” and “applied” Buddhism. Across these exchanges, Buddhism’s future appeared less as a matter of followers or institutions than of how its wisdom, compassion, and practices of interdependence could continue to respond to suffering in a changing world.

The Future of Tzu Chi

Before the symposium began, Rey-Sheng Her, Deputy CEO of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Charity Foundation, had also reflected on the future of Tzu Chi as a contemporary form of Buddhism. For him, the central issue was whether the Tzu Chi School of Buddhism can be sustained not only for one generation, but for “100 years, 1,000 years, or even longer than that.” To do so, three pillars are essential: the philosophy of Master Cheng Yen, an organizational structure capable of carrying her legacy forward, and a discipline that guides practitioners from compassion and altruism toward enlightenment.

“Master Cheng Yen’s teaching is crucial,” Her said, pointing to the importance of organizing her manuscripts, documenting Tzu Chi’s history, and preserving the lived

record of the millions of volunteers who have put her philosophy into practice. That archive would serve not merely as institutional memory, but as a foundation for transmitting Master Cheng Yen’s teachings and Tzu Chi’s model of practice to future generations of volunteers. The need for organizational structure comes from the fact that Tzu Chi’s future cannot depend on one saintly figure alone, but on a global body of practitioners who share the same conviction and can carry the work forward with wisdom, commitment, and collective responsibility. Finally, it is discipline that shapes Tzu Chi practice itself, including what Her described as the bridge “from altruism to enlightenment.”

Her noted that Tzu Chi does not emphasize the practice of meditation or sutra chanting. Instead, it focuses on compassion and altruism expressed through action. “By delivering compassion to alleviate people’s suffering, we purify our spirit,” he said. The remaining question is how that active service becomes a clearly defined path of spiritual cultivation, and how altruism can lead toward enlightenment. Clarifying that path is essential if Master Cheng Yen’s teachings are to guide Tzu Chi practitioners into the future.

Across the presentations, reflections, and roundtable exchanges, the symposium’s guiding theme, “Applied Buddhism and the Contemporary Bodhisattva Path: Exploring the Future of Buddhism,” came into focus not through any single method or institution, but through the many ways Dharma can be brought into everyday life. What emerged was a vision of Buddhism’s future grounded in preserving wisdom, responding to suffering, and making compassion visible through action. 🌱



▲ Participants listen attentively during the symposium’s roundtable on the future of Buddhism. Photo/Wendy Tsai





▲ Eugene Wang delivers his keynote address, “Design After Buddhism: Back to Future,” during the third day of the 2026 Tzu Chi Global Symposium for Common Goodness at Harvard University on May 9. Photo/Hector Muniente

◀ On May 9, the 2026 Tzu Chi Global Symposium for Common Goodness turns toward how Buddhist thought can inform design, while Tzu Chi USA’s media team supports the visually rich program through livestream and other coverage. Photo/Hector Muniente

2026 Tzu Chi Global Symposium for Common Goodness: Part III

Designing Buddhist Futures

Written by Ida Eva Zielinska

What does Buddhism have to do with design?” asked Eugene Y. Wang, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Professor of Asian Art at Harvard University and Founder and Director of the Cognitive Aesthetic Media Lab (CAMLab) at Harvard’s Faculty of Arts and Sciences, as he opened

his keynote address, “Design After Buddhism: Back to Future,” during the 2026 Tzu Chi Global Symposium for Common Goodness. Held at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, from May 7 to 9, the gathering, co-hosted by the Buddhist Tzu Chi Charity Foundation and CAMLab,

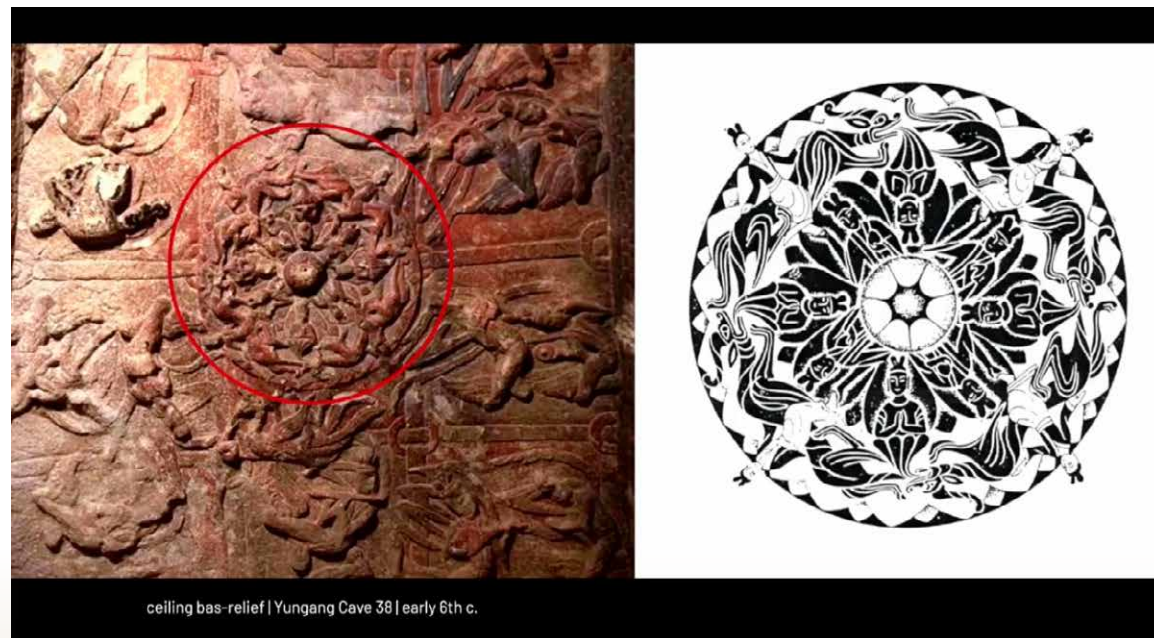
had already explored how Buddhist teachings move from philosophy and scripture into lived practice, how the thought of Tzu Chi founder Venerable Dharma Master Cheng Yen shapes its humanitarian action, and how the Bodhisattva path can respond to the needs of the contemporary world.

On the symposium’s third day, under the theme “Design Futures After Buddhism: Worldmaking by Other Means,” the conversation turned toward design, media, architecture, ecology, and multisensory experience. Wang’s keynote opened this

new direction by asking how Buddhist wisdom might inform the way people imagine and design the future, from built environments and ecological relationships to new forms of sensory and media experience. His analysis began from the premise that the connection between Buddhism and design was not incidental. “From the get-go, Buddhism was deeply caught up with the issue of design,” he said, especially in relation to the tension between “built forms” and “biological forms.”

To make his point, Wang showed a sixth-century ceiling bas-relief from the Yungang cave complex in China. “What you have here is this exquisite formal design of how the Buddhist vision of the cosmos works,” he explained. “It encompasses different kinds of realms, the human figure form, the animal form, plant botanic forms, they’re all organized into this very coherent scheme. So it’s all dynamic, it’s all organic, it’s all a holistic kind of field, process, or transformation. Of course, it’s geared towards the Buddhist concept of metamorphosis, transformation, reincarnation, and so on.”

From that medieval example, Wang turned to what he saw as a central challenge for design today. The question was not how to imitate Buddhist visual forms, but how to recover the deeper logic they reveal, a way of imagining life as interdependent, organic, and continuously transforming.



ceiling bas-relief | Yungang Cave 38 | early 6th c.

Eugene Wang presents a sixth-century ceiling bas-relief from Yungang Cave 38 to show how Buddhist visual culture organized human, animal, plant, and cosmic forms into an organic design system. *Presentation Slide/Eugene Wang*

In modern design, he observed, that sense of relationship has often been weakened by the 20th century’s “over-mechanized modernist fantasy or indulgence,” in which built forms tend to stand apart from the natural world rather than participate in its processes.

Yet contemporary architecture may be beginning to recover this older insight in new ways. Wang traced that possibility through the international design competition for the Natural History Museum in Shenzhen, China, where architects were asked to create a building that would serve as an unmistakable civic landmark while also merging into a river ecosystem. The competing proposals revealed different ways of answering that challenge, some treating architecture as a form of human control over nature, others softening the separation through greenery or borrowing natural forms from the outside.



Wang presents the winning design for the Shenzhen Natural History Museum as an example of architecture that neither imposes itself on nature nor merely copies its forms, but becomes integrated with its natural setting. *Presentation Slide/Eugene Wang*

The winning design, known as “The Big Wave,” shifted the focus from the appearance of nature to its underlying processes. Responding to the museum’s riverfront setting, the design drew from the way flowing water shapes land over time, treating the building as if it had emerged from the riverbank itself. “What the Shenzhen Natural History Museum demonstrates is that the highest evolution of modern architectural thought is no longer about dominating nature, nor is it about crude literal mimicry,” Wang said. “The future of design lies in profoundly learning from nature’s underlying operational process. It is an act of deep humility.” His keynote offered a powerful entry point into the panel that followed, where speakers continued to explore different dimensions of design.

Speculative Design and Alternative Futures

In his presentation “An Archive of Impossible Objects,” Anthony Dunne, Professor of Design and Emerging Technology at The New School, explored speculative design through objects created not as consumable products, but as ways of loosening the boundaries of what people consider real or possible. “One of the things design does really well is to give tangible form or materiality to alternative belief systems, values, and ways of seeing the world,” he said. “Physically, these objects are present in the here and now, but conceptually, they don’t quite fit in. They’re designs for non-existent worlds, and that’s their value.” Speaking on behalf of himself and his co-presenter and colleague Fiona Raby, he added, “We see designs as a form of inquiry, where design objects are tools to think with and through.”

Dunne described the idea of an “archive of impossible objects,” a speculative collection that would allow people to encounter fragments from alternative ways of thinking about reality. It could draw from science, fiction, the history of ideas, and nonhuman ways of being that are “by their very nature impossible to grasp for human-shaped



Anthony Dunne shows *Plume 1*, part of *Designs for a World of Many Worlds: After the Festival*, where a transparent human figure appears with a solid plume-like form, making the traces of human presence seem more substantial than the body itself. *Presentation Slide/Anthony Dunne*

minds.” The purpose would not be to predict the future, but to create spaces where people can leave behind familiar habits of thought. “Rather than more futures or end points extrapolated from a faulty present, we believe new starting points are needed, spaces to momentarily step out of existing realities to a ‘not here, not now,’ to imagine different ways of being in the world made tangible through design of everyday objects.”

Dunne then extended this inquiry through reflections on nonhuman perception. In *Designs for a World of Many Worlds: After the Festival*, a speculative design project imagining objects from a fictional festival, he asked what it might mean to design not by welcoming nonhuman beings into an already too human world, but by recognizing that other forms of life inhabit realities shaped by different senses, bodies, and ways of knowing. Such a shift in perspective asks humans to see

themselves and the human-made world differently, and to recognize their impact on other life forms. “This project is about encouraging a deeper, more philosophical form of empathy for other life forms we share this planet with, and acknowledging the inaccessibility of their worlds, not by attempting to comprehend their non-humanness, but by celebrating aliveness and unknowability, paradoxically in ways that humans can still appreciate.”

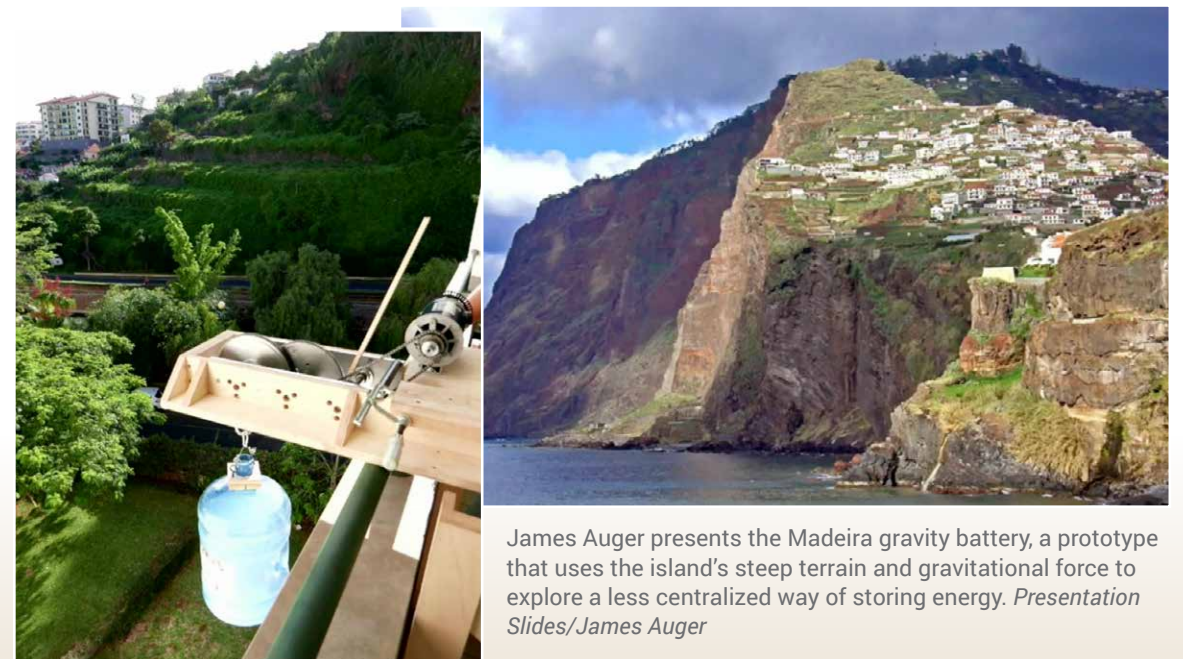
Drawing on the influential American industrial designer and architect Charles Eames’s observation that “design depends largely on constraints,” James Auger, Associate Professor of Design at RMIT Europe, examined what happens when those constraints are hidden from view. In “Reconstrained Design,” he looked beyond practical limits such as cost, materials, or time, acknowledging the existence of larger, more complex or covert constraints embedded in infrastructure, markets, myths of progress,

and inherited ideas about technology. “The obscure nature of these constraints means that they’re commonly not recognized by the designer, who simply works within or for the system, creating very, very narrow pathways into the future.”

Auger connected those hidden constraints to inherited visions of progress, where the future is often imagined as faster, larger, more automated, and more spectacular, even when such visions no longer fit the needs of the present. “Designers tend to be constrained by these technological dreams of the 20th century, as they continue to provide goals and aspirations, despite how contentious or inappropriate they are for the world of today.” Breaking those patterns begins by identifying the hidden constraints that limit design, then finding strategic ways to work around them or imagine beyond them, reopening paths toward more appropriate and locally situated futures.

He made this approach concrete through a project on Madeira, a Portuguese island in the Atlantic Ocean, where abundant sun, wind, rain, and steep cliffs coexist with an energy system shaped by centralized infrastructure, diesel generators, and restrictive market rules. Rather than treating those conditions as obstacles, Auger and his collaborators used them as the starting point for a different kind of design. Drawing on the local landscape, materials, know-how, and elements, they sought to work “more with nature than against nature.” The result was the Madeira gravity battery, a first working prototype that used the island’s terrain and gravitational force to explore a less centralized and less extractive way of storing energy.

Chenchen Lu, CAMLab Co-Founder and Associate Director, used *Journey to Enlightenment*, the multimedia exhibition at CAMLab Cave that opened in conjunction with the symposium, as a case study in how immersive media can translate Buddhist cultural systems into spatial experience. “Enlightenment in Buddhism



James Auger presents the Madeira gravity battery, a prototype that uses the island’s steep terrain and gravitational force to explore a less centralized way of storing energy. *Presentation Slides/James Auger*

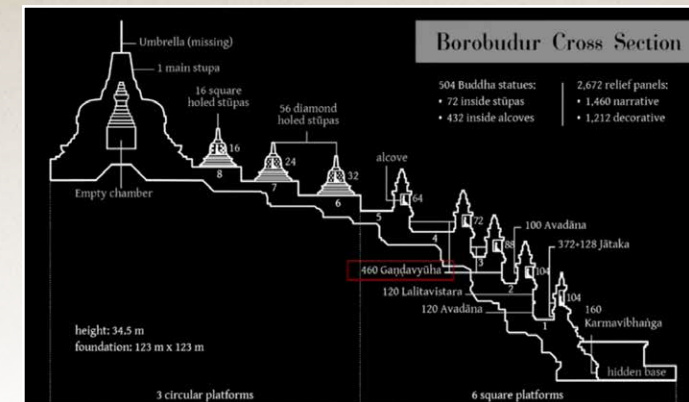
actually is not a simple idea. It is often understood as the culmination of countless lifetimes of practice, of compassion, of discipline, of wisdom, of sacrifice, and transformation,” Lu said, introducing the project’s principal challenge. “How can we express or deliver such a state of being to the public? And how could we translate it into something that can be spatially experienced?”

During the early stages of research, the team saw a video of Master Cheng Yen speaking about the Buddhist concept of Great Perfect Mirror Wisdom. “Suddenly something began to crystallize for us,” Lu recalled. “The mirror has probably been the most profound metaphor of enlightenment in Buddhist culture. It is small, yet it contains the whole world. It has no image of its own, yet it receives all images placed before it. It appears empty, yet endlessly, reflective.” Across Buddhist traditions, the mirror has served as a metaphor for the enlightened mind. “A disturbed mind is like the rippled water, fragmented, distorted, unable to perceive clearly. But an awakened mind reflects reality without distortion.

It reflects the world completely while remaining empty itself.”

That insight shaped the design strategy for *Journey to Enlightenment*, which selected Buddhist sites to explore qualities of the mirror, including reflection, interconnection, and the transformation of perception. Lu focused on one of them, Borobudur, the eighth- to ninth-century Buddhist temple in Central Java, Indonesia, describing how its carved corridors and level-by-level ascent become a spatial and narrative journey toward enlightenment. The idea comes into focus through relief panels depicting Sudhana’s pilgrimage to the bodhisattva Maitreya, whose magical tower contains “infinite mirrors” reflecting visions of the past and future and revealing *Indra’s Net*, the Buddhist image of a cosmos in which each part reflects the whole. “Borobudur itself becomes Maitreya’s magic tower, the pilgrims become Sudhana, the ascent becomes this visionary journey along the Bodhisattva path, and the architecture becomes the tower of mirrors.” [Read more about the *Journey to Enlightenment* exhibition in this issue.]

An aerial view of Borobudur, the eighth- to ninth-century Buddhist temple in Central Java, Indonesia, reveals the monument’s mandala-like design, guiding pilgrims through a spiritual journey of movement, sacred narrative, and reflection. Photo/Harvard FAS CAMLab



Chenchen Lu presents Borobudur’s ascent and narrative structure alongside CAMLab’s immersive interpretation, showing how the temple’s relief panels, stupa forms, and spatial path become a journey toward enlightenment. *Presentation Slides/Chenchen Lu*



In the Q&A that followed the panel’s presentations, the discussion widened to the role of design in a world increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence, digital systems, powerful technology companies, and uncertain futures. Rather than treating design as a matter of objects or tools alone, the panel returned to the importance of sensibility, education, agency, and new

ways of seeing. Across their responses, the speakers emphasized that design’s power lies not simply in producing new technologies, but in helping people recognize the systems shaping their lives, imagine alternatives, and recover a more human relationship to the future. That concern with systems, perception, and relationship carried into the next panel.



Freeman Su, Executive Director of Tzu Chi USA’s Northeast Region, and Eugene Wang join the moderator and presenters for a group photo following the panel “Speculative Design and Alternative Futures.” From left: Chenchen Lu, James Auger, Fiona Raby, Anthony Dunne, Eugene Wang, Allen Sayegh, and Freeman Su. Photo/Hector Muniente

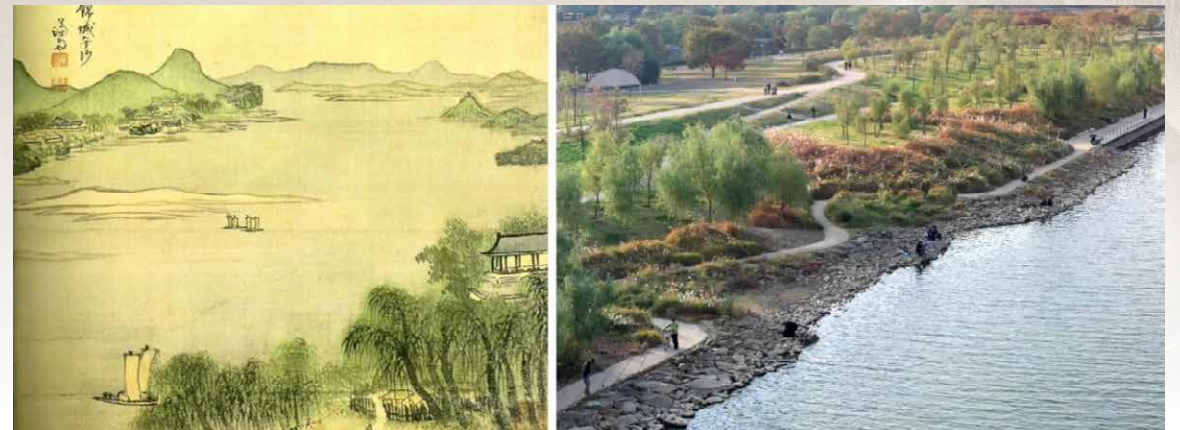
Architecture, Ecology, and Systems Thinking

In her presentation “Trees as Teachers,” Sheila Kennedy, Professor of the Practice of Architecture at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, explored how trees can guide an architecture rooted in the inter-connection between the health of the natural world and human well-being. Bringing ancient arboreal wisdom into conversation with contemporary design, digital tools, climate urgency, and forest ecology, Kennedy grounded the inquiry in Buddhist tradition, noting that trees appear in early Buddhist art before figural representations of the Buddha. Moreover, the Buddha’s life unfolded in forests and beneath trees, most famously beneath the Bodhi tree at the Mahabodhi Temple in India, where he attained enlightenment.

“Trees have been teachers,” Kennedy said. The question, then, was how architecture could relearn from them. “Architects and humans have forgotten how to read trees. We used to be able to see a part or a need within the form of a tree.” Industrialization changed that relationship, replacing close attention to the whole tree with systems that cut, standardize, and extract. “What that has done is it’s removed the human touch. It’s removed us very far away from the tree when we think about wood today.”

Through TREE FORM, a research and design project presented at the Berggruen Foundation’s NEXT EARTH exhibition during the 2025 Venice Biennale di Architettura, Kennedy and her team asked, “How could we learn from the natural intelligence of trees in their natural form before they were chopped up?” The project focuses on branching forms often discarded when trees are processed for

Sheila Kennedy presents TREE FORM, a research and design project that uses branching tree structures to rethink how architecture can learn from trees and reduce material waste. *Presentation Slide/Sheila Kennedy*



Jungyoon Kim presents the Yanghwa Riverfront project in Seoul alongside a historical image of mountain and water, showing how *sansu* can inform contemporary landscape design shaped by river systems, climate, and public life. *Presentation Slide/Jungyoon Kim*

lumber, even though this part of the tree is structurally powerful, acting as both column and beam in architecture. Using digital scanning, computational modeling, and structural engineering, these branching structures could be used in construction. Kennedy imagined people gathering “in the presence of trees,” where even ordinary questions about wood, sawdust, and material use could open into a fuller understanding of how branching tree forms might be valued and reused rather than treated as waste.

Jungyoon Kim, Associate Professor at Harvard Graduate School of Design and Co-Founder of PARKKIM, a landscape architecture practice based in Seoul and Boston, approached landscape architecture through *sansu*, the Korean reading of the East Asian concept often known in Chinese as *shanshui*, or “mountain and water.” In “Reworlding *Sansu* through Nature-Drawn Boundaries,” she presented *sansu* not as a remote scene to be contemplated from a distance, but as the lived ground of cities, climate, infrastructure, and daily life. “In the era of a changing climate, it is relevant and timely to analyze how projects in each bioregion have responded to their environment. We need to reorient ourselves, move beyond senseless political

borders, and reestablish our relationship with mountain and water.”

Kim briefly introduced *Designers of Mountain and Water: Alternative Landscapes for a Changing Climate*, a Harvard Graduate School of Design exhibition and conference that organized Asian landscape projects by bioregion rather than national borders. She then turned to PARKKIM’s own work, using the Yanghwa Riverfront in Seoul as a clear example of “alternative nature,” a constructed landscape that does not imitate nature’s appearance, but functions within its specific environment. Along the Han River, the project accepted that the river could not simply be restored to a nostalgic sandy shoreline. Instead, it worked with seasonal flooding, silt, and mud, reshaping flat terraces into slopes so mud could flush back into the river as floodwaters receded while opening public access to the water’s edge. The riverfront now looks surprisingly natural, but that quality came not from copying natural forms, but from precise collaboration with hydraulic engineers and ecologists.

In Kim’s view, such projects show how inherited ideas of *sansu* can become systems for living with climate change, moving beyond scenery toward active

forms of landscape intervention. “In Buddhist or Neo-Confucian cultures, our Asian ancestors have been interacting and intervening with *sansu* or *shanshui* in very poetic, respectful, and even systematic ways,” she said. The task now is to carry that inheritance into the present through landscape architecture. “In the world we are living in now, and the world we are moving into, the contribution through landscape architecture methodology will be to create spaces that are highly engineered artifacts, precisely fitted into given bioregions by very sophisticated intervention, yet that quietly offer the functions, beauty, and experience of nature as gently and naturally as flowing water.”

Yu Han Goh and Huai-Yan Chang, Co-Founders of SALAD Dressing, a Singapore-based landscape architecture practice, asked how design might shift human attention toward forms of life people often fail to perceive. In “On the Being

of Plants,” Goh began with the moon, “humanity’s longest companion and a mirror through which we contemplate our existence,” before turning to technology as a tool for extending perception. The 1969 Apollo 11 moon landing produced an unexpected reversal. “We didn’t only see the moon, we saw ourselves. The Earth appeared as a blue marble, floating alone in the darkness, fragile and yet alive.” Goh connected that shift to the teaching often associated with the *Sūrangama Sūtra*, “Do not mistake the fingers pointing at the moon for the moon itself,” before applying it to technology. “Sensors, cameras, algorithms, and simulations are the fingers that extend our limited senses to a world that we cannot easily perceive. But the danger is that we could become enchanted by the instrument and forget the life it reveals. The tool should not replace a living world, it should return us to it.”



Rey-Sheng Her, Deputy CEO of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Charity Foundation, and Eugene Wang join the moderator and presenters for a group photo following the panel “Architecture, Ecology, and Systems Thinking.” From left: Chenchen Lu, Jungyoon Kim, Rey-Sheng Her, Sheila Kennedy, Huai-Yan Chang, Yu Han Goh, and Eugene Wang. Photo/Hector Muniente

Across projects involving native flora, carnivorous plants, mimosa, tree pulses, moon gardens, and shadow gardens, Goh and Chang have explored how plants challenge human assumptions about intelligence, agency, and perception. What they found is that plants communicate through chemical signals, respond to repeated stimuli, and move through rhythms too subtle or slow for human senses to register. In one project, a dendrometer measuring the tiny expansion and contraction of a tree trunk made its hidden pulse visible through ripples in water. Such works asked whether humans are limited not only by their ideas, but by their bodies, speeds, and assumptions about what life should look like.

Chang expanded Goh’s reflections on plant perception into environments designed around plant life. In a shadow garden SALAD Dressing designed in a tropical valley, humidity, temperature, water, stone,

and light were calibrated for plants rather than human comfort, revealing that, “Darkness is not absence. It is orientation.” This plant-centered approach reached a larger scale in SALAD Dressing’s work on the Singapore Pavilion at Dubai Expo 2021, developed in collaboration with architects. Chang framed the pavilion as part of a broader “planetary performance” in which human, plant, digital, and architectural systems interact. In that context, architecture was “not an object, but a self-sustaining cyborg holobiont, a system shared by human beings, other living beings, and digital beings.” In biology, a holobiont refers to a host together with the organisms that live with it; here, the term helped frame architecture as a shared ecological and technological system. Drawing on the Buddhist image of *Indra’s Net*, “where one diamond shines, all others sparkle simultaneously,” Chang imagined architecture not only as an intelligent building, but as “a sanctum where many intelligences finally meet to express together.”

During the Q&A that followed, moderator Chenchen Lu drew together a central challenge running through the panel, namely, the modern assumption that humans stand outside nature as managers or controllers. The discussion also returned to older and Indigenous forms of ecological knowledge, including Buddhist tree protection practices in Southeast Asia, where monastic robes are wrapped around trees to mark them as ordained and protect them from harm. Such examples suggested that imagining future worlds may require learning again from ways of living with nature that have never fully disappeared. That movement from ecological systems to perception and lived experience led naturally into the next panel.



A Future where humans, other livings
& digital beings learn to
evolve together

Yu Han Goh and Huai-Yan Chang present a vision of architecture where humans, other living beings, and digital beings evolve together within a shared environment. Presentation Slide/Yu Han Goh and Huai-Yan Chang

Mind, Meditation, and Multi-Sensorial Experience

"We are living in such a digitalized world. But because of that, I think the importance of multi-sensorial bodily dimensions of the built environment will only get amplified, ironically, maybe helped by digital technologies," said Jungyoon Kim, Associate Professor at Harvard Graduate School of Design, who moderated the symposium's final panel. "Sound, community, environment, heritage, and memory are all vulnerable objects of care. How do you think about the aesthetics of intervening, of calming our minds, shaping a community, reanimating fragments, or reconstructing a cave, especially when your audience may not be Buddhist at all?" Kim's questions foreshadowed the concerns the speakers would address.

Monique Mead, Director of Music Entrepreneurship at Carnegie Mellon University, began the presentations with "Journey to Enlightenment: A Musical Pathway into Meditative States," weaving together spoken reflection, violin performance, and the resonant tones of singing bowls. She presented sound meditation as a form of experience design, one that can draw the anxious mind toward stillness without requiring prior training. "For hundreds of years, Buddhists have been practicing meditation as a path to liberation, freedom from the constraints of our conditioned mind, that warped perception that causes suffering," she said. "In theory, the steps of meditation are really very simple. But in practice, at least for me, it often goes more like this: Sit, breathe, mantra. Repeat. Mind on mantra. When thoughts arise, back to mantra..." As her words gave way to violin, the audience could experience

the movement toward stillness she had been describing.

Mead then turned to John Cage's *4 Minutes and 33 Seconds*, a landmark composition made entirely of rests, in which the expected silence of a concert hall is instead filled by coughing, nervous laughter, rustling, and the ambient sounds of the room. "Where this piece fails as a concert meditation, it stands as a powerful philosophical statement that questions the very nature and purpose of music. Strongly influenced by the mentorship of Indian musician Gita Sarabhai, Cage adopted the philosophy that the purpose of music is to sober and quiet the mind, thus making it susceptible to divine influences." During the pandemic, as anxiety, stress, and depression rose among students at Carnegie Mellon University, Mead carried that philosophy

into her own work and asked, "How then would you create music that is able to capture the anxious mind and draw it into stillness with no effort beyond listening?"

Drawing from ancient sound practices, neuroscience, and music therapy, Mead developed a sound protocol using quartz singing bowls and a notation system, then trained student practitioners to hold daily group sound meditations, or sound baths, at Carnegie Mellon. "Over the past five years, we've held hundreds of sound meditations, and in the research we conducted, it showed significant and immediate improvement in mood and stress." At the symposium, she demonstrated soundscapes inspired by four stages of meditation, namely, grounding, focus, bliss, and expansion. She then connected the practice to Guanyin, the bodhisattva who listens to the cries of the world and is featured in the *Journey to Enlightenment* exhibition. "I saw all the elements of this sound practice come together, listening, holding space, expanding awareness through compassion. Wherever there is life, there is sound. And wherever there is sound, there is potential for transformation."

Cuilan Liu, Associate Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Pittsburgh, presented "Hor nag mañi: Buddhist Chanting and Community-Building in Northeastern Tibet," approaching sound from the perspective of a living Buddhist chanting tradition. She began with Milarepa, the 11th-century Tibetan Buddhist yogin, poet, composer, and singer, whose religious songs, known in Tibetan as *mgur*, expressed spiritual realization and were transmitted orally from practitioners to lay audiences. Liu initially found that the practice of chanting Milarepa's songs had largely disappeared in central Tibet, but



Monique Mead presents "Journey to Enlightenment: A Musical Pathway into Meditative States," moving between violin performance and singing bowls as she explores sound meditation as a path toward stillness. Photos/Hector Muniente





Cuilan Liu describes Hor nag mañi, a 300-year-old Buddhist chanting tradition sustained by a monastery and its affiliated villages in northeastern Tibet. Presentation Slide/Cuilan Liu

her fieldwork in northeastern Tibet's Amdo region led her to the Hor nag mañi festival, where monks and lay communities have preserved a related chanting tradition.

Held annually by a small Gelugpa monastery and eight affiliated villages in the region, the festival centers on a shared practice. Monks chant from two songbooks, including one associated with Milarepa, while villagers respond with the mantra *Om mani padme hum*. "They will only chant the six syllables over and over again. And the goal is to finish the entire songbook by the end of the festival." This interactive, participatory form of community practice led by the monks also binds the monastery and villages into a living network of mutual support. Villagers rely on the monks to remain connected to Buddhist practice, while the monastery receives offerings that help sustain monastic life.

"What we are seeing here is an institutional effort aiming at preserving a Buddhist

musical tradition," Liu said. Kept alive there without interruption for 300 years, this tradition also clarifies an important distinction in Buddhist monastic life. Reciting and chanting, which use religious texts with tunes ranging from simple to complex, are permitted when they serve a devotional purpose, while singing, understood as secular, is not. In Hor nag mañi, monks preserve a sacred chanting tradition rather than a secular musical form.

Through her presentation "In the Spirit of Recycle and Reuse: Preserving Buddhist Wall Painting through Replication," Sonya S. Lee, Professor of Art History, East Asian Languages and Cultures, and Religion at the University of Southern California, brought Tzu Chi's environmental mission into dialogue with the preservation of Buddhist art and cultural heritage. "These two are very different domains of activities and discourses, but what's really in common is that both of them are concerned with material objects that are no

longer retaining their original function, and also ways to make these objects useful and meaningful again," Lee said. Focusing on Buddhist wall painting fragments from cave temples along the ancient Silk Road, she proposed that Tzu Chi's approach to recycling could offer a new way to think about preservation, especially through the use of replicas in material and digital forms.

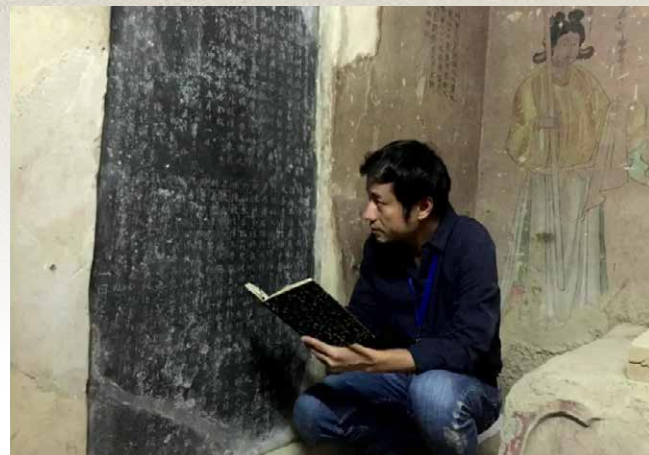
Lee traced this comparison to Master Cheng Yen's teaching that environmental care is inseparable from spiritual practice. To reach enlightenment, human beings must cultivate compassion and discover their Buddha nature, and the Earth is the only realm in the cosmos where they have the conditions to do so. Protecting the planet, then, becomes not only an environmental duty, but also a way to preserve the conditions that allow all sentient beings to move toward enlightenment. The same teaching offers guidance for treating manufactured products as living things. "Once you start to treat objects made by people with compassion, that will compel them to extend these objects' lifetime and also reanimate them so that they become

useful again." That idea opened a way to think about ancient wall paintings whose original architectural settings have been damaged, fragmented, or removed.

This approach came into focus through the 2024 exhibition *Echoes of Camel Bells: Arts and Civilizations along the Silk Roads* at the Beijing Minsheng Art Museum, which presented Buddhist wall paintings through several forms of replication. These included framed mural copies displayed like individual artworks and two types of replica caves: A same-scale replica of Yulin Cave 29 in Dunhuang, assembled from handmade copies on paper, and a same-scale reconstruction of Kizil Cave 8 in Kucha, created with digitally reproduced murals after its original paintings were removed in the early 20th century and taken to Berlin. Properly designed, replicas can do more than reproduce an image. They can help visitors enter a lost spatial world, learn from damaged heritage, and participate in making it meaningful again. "When properly designed and communicated, replicas can be a powerful tool to educate people about the past and the present."



Sonya S. Lee shows how mural copies and replica cave environments can help contemporary viewers encounter Buddhist wall paintings in their broader visual and spatial context. Presentation Slide/Sonya S. Lee



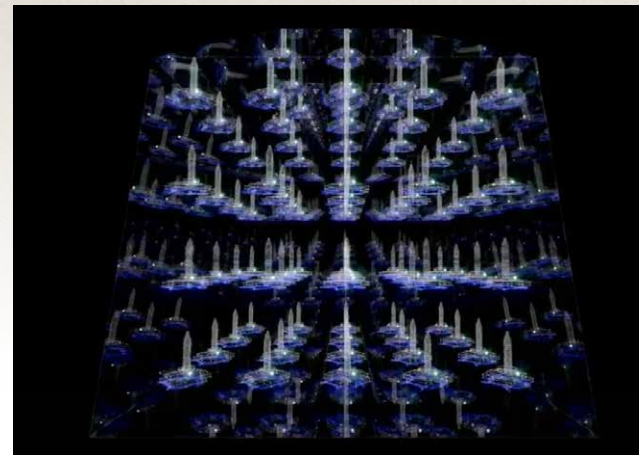
Xiaoze Xie shows the 1908 photograph of Paul Pelliot inside Dunhuang's Library Cave alongside his own encounter with the cave's materials, tracing the archival starting point for *Amber of History*. *Presentation Slides/Xiaoze Xie*

Speaking as an artist practitioner rather than an art historian, Xiaoze Xie, the Paul L. and Phyllis Wattis Professor of Art at Stanford University, closed the panel with "Cosmic Models: Poetic Reveries on the Dunhuang Library Cave." His presentation centered on *Amber of History: Reimagining the Library Cave at Dunhuang*, an ongoing project that began during his 2017 residency at the Dunhuang Academy, the research institute that oversees the Mogao Caves, a UNESCO World Heritage Site near Dunhuang in Gansu, China. "Dunhuang has been a place of pilgrimage for generations of artists since the beginning of the 20th century," Xie said. Faced with its immense historical and cultural weight, he recalled asking himself, "How could I find a different path and unfold different types of works? ... How can I balance my sincere respect with creative freedom?"

Cave 17, the Library Cave, drew Xie back again and again. Discovered in 1900, the small grotto once held tens of thousands of manuscripts, paintings, textiles, and other

relics later dispersed around the world. Xie shared that he was especially struck by a 1908 photograph of French Sinologist Paul Pelliot seated in the dimly lit cave, sorting loose folios before a wall of materials. "It is such a dense, gloomy and haunting image to me. This scene from over 100 years ago seemed as if it was from yesterday." When Xie was granted rare permission to enter the cave with a photographer in 2017, the experience became the project's starting point. "I felt like an amateur archaeologist, and I was thinking how could I blend archaeological analysis and scholarship with poetic imagination in my artwork. Thanks to the 3D data generously provided by the Academy, I eventually came up with the idea of transforming this internal space of the cave into a void, or emptiness, if you will, into a solid volume."

That transformation became the foundation for a project that unfolded across drawing, sculpture, painting, and multimedia installation. Xie first developed a long brush-and-ink scroll that brought together



▲ Xiaoze Xie presents the culminating 3D video projection from *Amber of History*, mapped onto a one-to-one model of Dunhuang's Library Cave and drawing on Buddhist cosmology to reimagine the cave as an abstract model of the universe. *Presentation Slide/Xiaoze Xie*

▼ Vict Yin, Deputy Executive Director of Tzu Chi USA's Northeast Region, joins the moderator and presenters for a group photo following the panel "Mind, Meditation, and Multi-Sensorial Experience." From left: Jungyoon Kim, Monique Mead, Cuilan Liu, Vict Yin, Sonya Lee, and Xiaoze Xie. *Photo/Hector Muniente*

notes, diagrams, calligraphy, architecture, concept drawings, and fragments of artifacts once housed in the cave, documenting what he called "a process of study, contemplation, imagination, and conceptualization." In later sculptural works, the cave's empty interior became an amber-colored volume, with calligraphic characters and other materials suspended inside like traces preserved across time. The project also led him into Buddhist cosmology, star charts, and mandala forms, culminating in a 3D video projection mapped onto a one-to-one model of the Library Cave. Through these works, the cave became not only an archive of dispersed objects, but a model of the world itself. "Being in a Buddhist cave is like being in the cosmos. In other words, a Buddhist cave offers a complete model of the world. It is a miniature of the world."





The three days of presentations and dialogue during the 2026 Tzu Chi Global Symposium for Common Goodness leave attendees with much to reflect on as the event draws to a close. Photo/Hector Muniente

Why These Conversations Matter

As the 2026 Tzu Chi Global Symposium for Common Goodness drew to a close, several speakers from across its three days of presentations offered final reflections on what the gathering had made possible. Rather than pointing to a single conclusion, their remarks lingered on the value of conversations held across disciplines, traditions, and forms of practice.

Weijen Teng, Professor and Dean of the Department of Buddhist Studies at Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts, said what would stay with him was not only the

technical detail of philosophical arguments, but the colors, sounds, feelings, accents, faces, conversations, and moments of shared attention that had shaped the gathering. “I have loved the melody of our conversations. And I loved it, not in spite of but because of our disagreements. There was a kind of harmony, I would call it, ‘unharmonious harmony.’” Those disagreements had given the symposium not disruption, but depth and resonance, allowing the conversations to stay alive inwardly.

Justin R. Ritzinger, Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Miami, reflected on applied Buddhism as a movement from idea into embodied

practice. To transform the world, ideas matter, but they are not enough on their own. Buddhism must also address “our embodied nature,” including the feelings, relationships, and shared forms that move people into action. “What makes Tzu Chi successful is not simply its ideas or even its logistical sophistication, as impressive as those are, but its ability to evoke feeling that inspires action through embodied practices.” Looking ahead, he concluded, “We need a middle way that neither clings to the forms of the past nor simply apes the present order that is frankly breaking down: forms that are inspired instead by the fundamental functions of body and mind.”

“I’ve been energized and inspired by all your presentations. I have found new hope for the future,” shared Elise Anne DeVido, Associate Professor and Director of the Institute of Religion and Humanities at Tzu Chi University, reflecting on the symposium as “our own three-day journey to enlightenment.” What stood out to her was how the gathering brought artists and designers into conversation with Buddhist scholars and practitioners, opening new ways to think about Buddhist practice in the 21st century. Looking ahead, she emphasized two insights: first, Buddhist care must extend beyond human concerns to the larger web of plants, animals, rocks, mountains, water, ecosystems, life, death, and causality; and second, the Bodhisattva path calls not only on the rational mind, but on the full range of human senses.

Eugene Wang returned to the image of *Indra’s Net*, a cosmos in which each jewel reflects all the others. “These three days kind of played out this core scenario, where we come from different disciplines, different cultural backgrounds, different

communities, and we converge here, not knowing whether we can truly carry out some kind of conversation. There might still be disciplinary gaps to be bridged, but overall I think there are these lasting moments where we feel like we are reflected in others, and others in ourselves.” This also required a shift in perspective. Recalling his own experience at Dunhuang, Wang described realizing that the insects circling him in the desert were not an annoyance, but beings seeking water and life. “You need to think about how they think, and then you understand why they need what they need,” he said. “It is that experience and that sense of how you live with other species, how you imagine how other people think, how other species think, that in the end matters more.”

Rey-Sheng Her, Deputy CEO of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Charity Foundation, closed by returning to the purpose behind the symposium itself. Citing Master Cheng Yen’s teaching, “Apply Buddha Dharma to daily life and bring Bodhisattvas into the world,” he framed applied Buddhism as the work of bringing wisdom and compassion into every field of professional life, from education, medicine, and communication to governance, economy, art, and design. That effort, he said, requires models, tools, knowledge, and collaboration across disciplines. The future of Buddhism, in this sense, is not only a question of what Buddhism should become, but of what kind of world human beings should help create. “We are going to design the future blueprint of humankind,” Her said. “That’s the core compassion and goal of Buddhism.” 🌱



Under One Sky: Music Connects Hearts at Harvard

Written by Chen Chen

Edited by Adriana DiBenedetto

On the evening of May 9, 2026, blue light bathed the stone arcades of the Harvard Art Museums' Calderwood Courtyard. Here, as Tzu Chi commemorated its 60th anniversary and Dharma Master Cheng Yen's 90th birthday, the *Under One Sky* concert, presented by the Buddhist Tzu Chi Charity Foundation in collaboration with the Harvard FAS Cognitive Aesthetics Media Lab (CAMLab), would soon commence. Seventeen musicians took their seats with their instruments: the tabla, taiko, pipa, guqin, and double bass. Echoing the spirit of the ancient Silk Road, musical traditions that emerged across Asia and North America converged once more, this time reverberating through the enclosed travertine atrium designed in the style of an Italian piazza.

"We all dwell under the same sky. Therefore, we hope to bring together different voices and different civilizations on the same stage through this concert and the power of music," expressed Chenchen Lu, Co-Founder and Associate Director of the Harvard FAS CAMLab. "Tonight's concert will undoubtedly serve as the grand finale of this three-day series of events."

On the other side of the globe, Taiwan welcomed the early morning of May 10, and the Buddha Day Ceremony at the Jing Si Abode in Hualien was about to begin. As the morning bells in Hualien rang, the concert responded from across the Pacific with a musical journey spanning generations.

◀ ▼ Within the Harvard Art Museum's Calderwood Courtyard, the collaborative *Under One Sky* concert launches a musical journey spanning civilizations. Photo/Hector Muniente



Opening with Aspirations

At the program's opening, Rey-Sheng Her, Deputy CEO of the Tzu Chi Charity Foundation, announced, "This concert is presented with the partnership between Tzu Chi and Harvard University, featuring the 'Silk Road Ensemble,' the Artistic Director of which is the world-renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma, along with several Grammy Award-winning musicians. They will join 17 musicians from Taiwan, Japan, China, and other regions to perform Buddhist music. This event celebrates Tzu Chi's 60th anniversary and offers blessings for the Venerable Dharma Master Cheng Yen's 90th birthday."

The first to take the stage was an ensemble of 11 Chinese musicians. "We accepted Harvard University's invitation in September 2025, and we've been preparing ever since," recalled Yang Jin, pipa performer and president of the Chinese Musicians Association of North America,

who served as the convener of the Chinese musicians for this musical gathering. "Most of us studied at the Central Conservatory of Music in China before coming to the United States for further education and careers. Although we are now scattered across various universities and orchestras in the U.S., we share a common vision: to create more beautiful music together," Jin said.

Peers who once pursued their musical dreams together reunited that night under the arcades of Harvard. The opening piece they chose for the evening was *Aspirations*, a song most familiar to Tzu Chi members.

"When we first heard *Aspirations*, we were deeply moved, not only because the melody is so beautiful and perfectly suited for our traditional Chinese instruments, but also because our shared aspiration aligns with that of Tzu Chi: We hope the world will be filled with love." Through the gentle plucking of the pipa, the flowing tones of the guzheng, and the expressive notes of the erhu, the melodies resonated deeply within the hearts of all assembled. Though there were no accompanying vocals, the heartfelt emotion carried by these masterful notes left a truly lasting impression.

Wang Lu, a professor in the Department of Music at Brown University and the winner of the Berlin Composition Award and the Guggenheim Fellowship, and Yao Chen, head of the Composition Department at the Central Conservatory of Music, delivered remarkable back-to-back performances. Drawing from the same roots of Chinese music but employing distinctly different contemporary approaches, the two composers each revealed their own unique musical landscapes.



The first piece performed is Tzu Chi's classic song, "Aspirations." As the word "Aspiration" appears on the screen, the musicians convey their love for the world through their instruments. Photo/Hector Muniente

Composer Wang Lu noted that the collaboration differed from a conventional Western classical rehearsal process. "We don't rehearse," said Lu. "We're open to each other's interpretation. It's risk-taking, and the risk-taking is based on a deep trust in each other's humanity. When we decide to play and when to stop, and not to be dominant." Lu connected the rehearsal philosophy to the spirit of Tzu Chi, expressing that everyone in the world is different and no one is perfect, yet each person has a role, and by working together in harmony, they create beauty in the world.

This really reflects what Tzu Chi has been about; this humanistic, core nature of how we should treat each other.

“

Wang Lu
Composer and Pianist

New Voices of Dunhuang

This spirit of shared humanity carried directly into the next performance, as renowned Taiwanese guqin musician Yang Hsin-Yi offered a musical response with the contemplative musical composition, "Siddham Chapter." Originally from Taiwan, Hsin-Yi is the founder of the Boston Guqin Society and Boston Guzheng Ensemble. As her fingertips touched the strings, the entire courtyard fell instantly silent, with only the clear tones of the guqin's seven strings echoing softly through the arcades.

The ensuing performance of *The Drunken Concubine* was a uniquely dramatic moment. Dressed in an embroidered theatrical costume and adorned with a dazzling headpiece, renowned Chinese Kunqu and Peking Opera performer Jia Yonghong took the stage. With a flick of her sleeves and a

► The five-string pipa, held by Yang Jin, was commissioned by CAMLab and crafted by Beijing luthier Cao Weidong from ironwood with mother-of-pearl inlay. It is a reproduction of the Tang Dynasty mother-of-pearl-inlaid five-string pipa housed in the Shōsōin repository in Nara, Japan. Photo/Hector Muniente



► *Siddham Chapter* is performed by the renowned Taiwanese guqin musician, Yang Hsin-Yi. Photo/Hector Muniente

► As the renowned Kunqu and Peking Opera performer Jia Yonghong takes the stage to perform *The Drunken Concubine*, her sleeves flutter gracefully and her headdress sparkles. Photo/Hector Muniente



gentle unfurling of her fan, Yonghong juxtaposed the moonlit Tang Palace and the grace of Concubine Yang Yuhuan beneath the arcade of the courtyard.

During the performance, Yang Jin's instrument took on a particularly radiant presence; the pipa in her hands held a special significance. "This pipa was specially made for this concert," explained Jin. "The pipa you are seeing now is a replica of the famous Tang dynasty pipa housed in the Shōsōin repository."

The finale of Part I of the evening's program was *New Voices of Dunhuang*, a piece derived from the ancient Tang Dynasty musical scores discovered in the Dunhuang Library Cave. In an interview, Jin discussed the process of the performance, saying, "We are deeply grateful, as many teachers and predecessors have already translated the ancient scores and academically deciphered the fragments retained in Dunhuang. What we can now

see is the translation work of Professor Chen Yingshi, an authority on Dunhuang musical score research at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. There have been several months of careful discussion and refinement among several musicians; we explored how to use China's three most representative instruments – the pipa, guzheng, and erhu – along with percussion and piano, to reinterpret our reverence for tradition. So, while we incorporate improvisation, we must always respect the original traditional scores, their progression, and their structure."

Based on the translation of ancient scores, Yao Chen had rearranged the music, bringing together the pipa, guzheng, erhu, ruan, piano, and percussion, to breathe contemporary life into melodies from a thousand years ago.



In Part II of the concert, Sandeep Das (second left) and the musicians of the Silk Road Ensemble perform the *Bodhichitta* and *Sunyata* section together. Photo/Hector Muniente

A Tribute to the Spirit

While the first half of the evening explored the artistic legacies of China and East Asia, the second half traced Buddhism's roots back to India, where a new ensemble of musicians invited audiences into a contemplative exploration of enlightenment, compassion, and interconnectedness.

Indian tabla master Sandeep Das served as the artistic director for Part II of the concert. As the stage lighting turned warm, Das sat cross-legged, his hands gently caressing the drumheads of his tablas. He is one of the most iconic contemporary Indian percussion masters, a core musician of the Silk Road Ensemble, and a Grammy Award winner. Accompanying him are sitar master

Abhik Mukherjee, Das's disciple, Bailey O'Donnell, world percussion master Shane Shanahan, double bassist Matt Small, and Japanese taiko and shinobue player Kaoru Watanabe.

Das chose *Bodhichitta* and *Sunyata* as the theme for the section. "I grew up in a town called Patna, 20 miles away from where Buddha was born," said Das. "It's a connection to my roots. I'm preparing pieces that touch the concept of enlightenment and the concept of spreading love."

Das did not view his performance as merely a program for this event. "For me, it's not a concert," he said. "I'm thinking of it

more as a meditation. We perform concerts all over the world, but this one is different."

The spirit of music and the philosophy of Buddhism are one and the same; both are about harmony and love. Tzu Chi upholds a beautiful belief that within every person lies humanity and divinity.

“

Sandeep Das
Master of Indian Classical Percussion

"Namaste means, 'My inner soul bows in reverence to your inner soul,'" continued Das. "I believe the spirit of music and the philosophy of Buddhism are one and the same; both are about harmony and love."

When Kaoru Watanabe's fue sounded, clear and resonant, the entire ensemble established a riveting harmony alongside the different instruments. "I love listening to the resonance of my instrument, and I

love listening to the resonance of my partners' instruments," said Watanabe. "I hope and believe that the audience will feel it, too. Our breaths will blend together, and the sounds of the instruments will resonate within each of us."

Music is a language that transcends borders. We hope that through our music, we can break down all barriers and differences, bringing everyone together.

“

Yang Jin
President
Chinese Musicians Association
of North America

The program concluded with the following words: "May these sounds reach every corner of the universe, soothing the suffering of all sentient beings." That night, Tzu Chi joined hands with Harvard University to convey this aspiration through melody.

Immersed in musical harmony, audience members close their eyes and join their palms in prayer, feeling the power of the notes deep within their hearts. Photo/Hector Muniente



Japanese musician Kaoru Watanabe plays the fue. Photo/Hector Muniente



Tzu Chi and CAMLab representatives offer tribute to the performing musicians. Photo/Hector Muniente

A Promise Across Ten Thousand Miles

When the final note faded away, the entire audience rose to their feet with enthusiastic applause. Rey-Sheng Her imparted a broader historical context for the day's event, sharing, "The Silk Road played a crucial role in the first globalization of Buddhism in human history. Through the Silk Road, Indian Buddhism spread to Central Asia, eventually reaching China, and from there to Korea, Japan, and South Asia. Thus, the Silk Road symbolizes the globalization of ancient Buddhism. Today, we seek to renew that spirit of exchange and understanding by bringing Buddhist values into dialogue with contemporary global society."

William McGrath, assistant professor of Buddhist studies at New York University, expressed his admiration as well, saying, "I lived in China for several years and know that this performance was of a very high standard. I was already exhausted after three days of intensive academic forums, but after the concert, I felt incredibly uplifted."

Justin R. Ritzinger of the University of Miami also observed the care taken to ensure each element complemented all others. "This concert was incredibly rich and diverse in musical style and instrumentation, blending Chinese, Indian, and Western styles with powerful rhythms. The venue's acoustics and atmosphere were simply stunning," he said.

A Shared Heart Across the World

2026 marks Tzu Chi's 60th anniversary and Dharma Master Cheng Yen's 90th birthday. To commemorate the dual historical milestone, Tzu Chi and Harvard's CAMLab additionally organized a joint dialogue spanning academia, the arts, and faith.

"This series of academic seminars is probably the largest academic event we've ever hosted at Harvard's CAMLab," Chenchen Lu shared with excitement. The three-day forum unfolded along a clear thematic thread: the first day explored Buddhist philosophy and the traditional frameworks of Buddhist studies; the second delved into Dharma Master Cheng Yen's thought

and the contemporary practice of the Bodhisattva path; and the third focused on design, architecture, ecology, and multisensory meditation experiences.

We all dwell under the same sky. Through collaboration and by transcending borders, we can collectively reimagine the future.

Chenchen Lu
Co-Founder and Associate Director
Harvard CAMLab

Rey-Sheng Her also offered a concise summary of the series' intent: "The content of these three days is exceptionally comprehensive and rich. It encompasses many important concepts: 'Engaged Buddhism' and the 'Contemporary Bodhisattva Path.' We discuss engaged Buddhism because the Dharma must genuinely benefit the secular world, and it must be applicable to every professional field and to everyone's daily life."

What is presented through these artistic forms is the underlying philosophy, a philosophy filled with love, compassion, tranquility, and bliss, which ultimately elevates our wisdom and compassion.

Rey-Sheng Her
Deputy CEO
Tzu Chi Charity Foundation

Through ancient melodies, contemporary interpretations, and instruments carrying centuries of history, *Under One Sky* brought together voices from across cultures and generations. What's more, it was a living expression of the values that have guided Tzu Chi for six decades: compassion, connection, and the belief that despite our differences, humanity shares one sky, and one fervent heart. 🌿

One Global Family, 60 Years of Compassion

Written by Adriana DiBenedetto

Across continents and coastlines, Tzu Chi volunteers and community members joined hands and hearts beneath one shared spring sky on May 10, 2026, to celebrate Buddha Day, Mother's Day, and Global Tzu Chi Day.

On May 10, 2026, Tzu Chi's Buddha Day celebration in Chicago, Illinois, unites Buddha Day, Mother's Day, and Global Tzu Chi Day while also commemorating the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation's 60th anniversary. *Photo/Dennis Lee*

At Tzu Chi offices from California to New York, participants breathed in the scent of fresh flowers placed upon altars, hands together in prayer as thousands of miles away in Taiwan, the same aspirations for peace and unconditional compassion rose into the air. Through synchronized ceremonies, and joined by Tzu Chi's founder, Dharma Master Cheng Yen, from the Jing Si Abode in Hualien, communities bridged oceans in shared reflection. Though separated by distance, participants moved together in gratitude, uniting individuals across the world as one global family. This year's observance carried particular significance, too, as it marked not only Tzu Chi's annual triple celebration, but a diamond jubilee commemorating the global Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation's 60th anniversary, alongside Dharma Master Cheng Yen's 90th birthday.

Long before the first attendees arrived, volunteers had already prepared the spaces with meticulous care. Some arranged flowers around crystalline altars, while others prepared vegetarian meals, rehearsed performances, or gently polished ceremonial vessels until every surface reflected light. In the peace before these ceremonies began, the day's meaning revealed itself not only through prayer but also through countless small acts of love.

And indeed, beyond ceremonial formality, the gatherings also illuminated something deeply profound. In each location, volunteers, families, faith leaders, and community members alike lifted up a vision rooted not only in contemplation but in compassionate action. Again and again throughout the weekend, reflections on inner purification intertwined with conversations surrounding disaster relief, environmental stewardship, genuine service to vulnerable communities, and care for one another. The ceremonies offered not only opportunities for reflection, but reminders that spiritual practice must ultimately manifest through compassionate engagement with the world. As Dharma Master Cheng Yen has long emphasized, cultivating kindness begins within the heart, but it does not end there.

That spirit extended far beyond the grounds themselves. From humanitarian partnerships and cultural exchanges to academic symposia and musical offerings inspired by Buddhist teachings, Tzu Chi's 60th anniversary peered into the past while inviting all to imagine how compassion can continue to shape the future.



▲ Volunteers, faith leaders, and community members alike move mindfully through the space toward altars adorned with orchids as close-held prayers fill the Tzu Chi USA National Headquarters campus in San Dimas, California. *Photo/Shuli Lo*

► At Tzu Chi USA's National Headquarters, more than 700 attendees join the global Tzu Chi community in prayer and reflection. *Photo/Shuli Lo*

► Community members in San Dimas, California, reflect on the Buddha's teachings and express gratitude to mother figures amid a spirit of quiet unity. *Photo/Shuli Lo*

National Headquarters Region

On May 9, more than 700 attendees gathered at Tzu Chi USA's National Headquarters in San Dimas, California, for the heartfelt celebration honoring Buddha Day, Mother's Day, and Global Tzu Chi Day. The ceremony was held simultaneously with Tzu Chi's headquarters in Taiwan, uniting participants worldwide in prayer, gratitude, and compassion as part of Tzu Chi's 60th anniversary celebration. Together, attendees reflected on the Buddha's teachings, expressed gratitude to mother figures, and celebrated the spirit of unity and kindness that connects communities worldwide.



Faith leaders also united for the triple celebration. Venerable Chao Chu spoke about his 40-year history with Tzu Chi, remarking upon the foundation's ability to combine compassion with wisdom in the fields of charity and education. Master Hong Zheng of Dharma Seal Temple also emphasized that the Buddha Day Ceremony is not just a ritual but a vital means of purifying the mind, inspiring compassion, and encouraging everyone

to uplift others in their own way. Ritchie Cajulis, Mayor of the City of Walnut, California, also attended the day's event to offer his appreciation for Tzu Chi's long-standing community service.

The spirit of compassion bloomed beyond Buddha Day Ceremonies and into future action, too, as the Panda Restaurant Group donated a new "Kindness In Motion" food truck to Tzu Chi USA, expanding the foundation's capacity to provide timely, hot, nutritious meals during disaster relief operations and community outreach efforts. The fully equipped mobile kitchen can serve up to 2,000 people and meet urgent needs amid crises.

Tina Hsing, Director of Panda Cares at the Panda Restaurant Group, shared that the bond between Panda Restaurant Group and Tzu Chi traced back to 2013. Andrew Cherng, the chairman and co-CEO of Panda Restaurant Group, once met Dharma Master Cheng Yen in Hualien, an encounter that ultimately sparked a profound friendship with Tzu Chi. Since then, many Panda associates, including Hsing, have traveled



◀ Tzu Chi USA CEO Debbie Lee (right) accepts an award for Tzu Chi's long-standing community service from Walnut, California, Mayor Ritchie Cajulis (left). *Photo/Shuli Lo*

▼ Panda Restaurant Group donates the "Kindness In Motion" food truck to Tzu Chi USA, expanding the foundation's capacity to meet urgent community needs. *Photo/James Huang*

to Hualien to participate in the Tzu Chi Entrepreneurs' Camp, gaining a deep understanding of Tzu Chi's humanistic spirit and philanthropic philosophy. Over the years, the partnership has grown through shared efforts serving communities affected by disasters across the United States. Hsing then symbolically handed the vehicle keys to Tzu Chi USA CEO Debbie Lee, marking another milestone in a relationship rooted in compassion, service, and hope.

The day was further illuminated by a "Meeting Friends Through Tea" cultural exchange, inviting people of diverse backgrounds to join hands and touch upon the heart of Buddhist humanistic culture. Among those gathered were local dignitaries, including Attorney Long Liu, representing California State Assemblyman Phillip Chen, who paused to offer a certificate of recognition. "The core spirit conveyed by Tzu Chi is 'love and compassion,'" Liu remarked. "If love and compassion were a language, then Tzu Chi would be the teacher who instructs us in that language." Dr. Chia Yu Teng, a Diamond Bar City Councilmember, echoed these sentiments, expressing a wish that Tzu Chi's mission can ripple forward far beyond the next 60 years.



Perhaps the most moving presence amid the campus grounds was that of disaster survivors who returned to what many now consider their extended Tzu Chi family. Among them was Jennie Bridges of Altadena, a survivor of the 2025 Los Angeles wildfires, who recalled the kindness she encountered when Tzu Chi volunteers provided emergency financial aid in El Monte. Even amid the fatigue of hotel stays and the slow work of healing, she emphasized that Tzu Chi's ongoing companionship became a tangible source of hope, reminding her that she did not have to walk the journey alone.

Nearby were Roberto Covarrubia and his wife, Karina, Los Angeles wildfire survivors who received help with mortgage payments and window replacements in a time of uncertainty. After 18 weeks of navigating hotels, temporary rentals, and a winding road of permits, they came to offer their blessings for Tzu Chi's 60th anniversary.

Elsewhere within the U.S. Headquarters Region, Tzu Chi's Buddha Day Ceremony brought quiet moments even to cities perhaps best known for their constant momentum. At Tzu Chi USA's Las Vegas Service Center, where May temperatures

often climb beyond 100 degrees Fahrenheit, and the city pulses with perpetual motion, the Buddha Day Ceremony provided a moment of calm. Volunteers described the gathering as "A stabilizing force to soothe people's hearts."

Amid the day's heat, more than 100 volunteers and community members entered the Las Vegas Service Center in small groups throughout the morning, stepping from the velocity of the Strip into an atmosphere transformed by prayer and the scent of flowers. As attendees joined palms and approached the altar one by one, a ladle of fragrant water symbolized the purification of inner burdens, fear, distraction, and sorrow.

At Tzu Chi USA's Las Vegas Service Center, the Buddha Day Ceremony provides a moment of calm. Photo/Audrey Cheng



Before the shining altars, inner burdens, fear, distraction, and sorrow are washed away. Photo/Tzu Chi USA Las Vegas Service Center



Throughout the day, bamboo banks circulated among attendees as volunteers shared the enduring lesson of Tzu Chi's origins: that even small daily acts of compassion can accumulate into lasting relief for those in need.

For first-time Las Vegas attendee Ella Lok, the experience was unexpectedly emotional. "When I heard the sound of the chanting, I was deeply moved, and tears flowed uncontrollably," she shared. "I felt a very quiet and peaceful power that allowed my mind to slowly settle down."

Amid the heat, more than 100 volunteers and community members at Tzu Chi USA's Las Vegas Service Center take turns before the altars, and join hands in prayer. Photo/Tzu Chi USA Las Vegas Service Center



Volunteer Douglas Aaron offers sincere prayers at Tzu Chi USA Las Vegas Service Center's Buddha Day Ceremony. Photo/Tzu Chi USA Las Vegas Service Center



▲ Great care is taken when decorating traditional Longevity Peaches for the triple celebration and double anniversary. Photo/Tzu Chi USA Phoenix Service Center

► At the Tzu Chi Phoenix Service Center in Arizona, volunteers set several days aside to make Longevity Peaches from scratch. Photo/Tzu Chi USA Phoenix Service Center



The Tzu Chi Phoenix Service Center in Arizona also held a grand "three-in-one" celebration, marking a significant milestone as the Phoenix office celebrates 30 years of service. To commemorate this double anniversary, volunteers organized an initiative offering their blessings to seniors while highlighting the humanistic spirit of Great Love that has taken root in the local community.

To honor the 30th anniversary, Phoenix volunteers additionally set several days aside to hand-make Longevity Peaches. From kneading the dough to the final artistic touches, each bun was crafted with sincerity for those assembled.

For 30 years, Tzu Chi Phoenix volunteers have acted on the teachings of Dharma Master Cheng Yen by "speaking good words, doing good deeds, and thinking good thoughts." As they look toward the next three decades, they remain committed to ensuring that this same spirit of care continues to shine across Arizona, warming the hearts of all who seek help.



Community members and volunteers in Reston, Virginia, gather to commemorate Buddha Day, Mother's Day, and Global Tzu Chi Day together. *Photo/Benny Cheng*



Though the Buddha Day Ceremony's atmosphere is quiet at Tzu Chi USA's Greater Washington D.C. Region, the gathering carries a profound sense of togetherness. *Photo/Benny Cheng*

Greater Washington D.C. Region

At Tzu Chi USA's Greater Washington D.C. Region Office in Reston, Virginia, volunteers and community members joined hearts as prayers from Taiwan filled the hall. Floral offerings framed the altars as participants moved forward with measured steps, bowing before presenting water, flowers, and their sincere prayers for the future.

Though the atmosphere was quiet, the ceremony carried a profound sense of togetherness. Across generations and



▲ At Tzu Chi USA's Greater Washington D.C. Region Office in Reston, Virginia, volunteers and community members join palms as livestreamed prayers from Taiwan fill the hall. *Photo/Benny Cheng*

► Throughout the day, long-time participants greet old friends as youths observe the tradition beside parents and grandparents. *Photo/Benny Cheng*



backgrounds, attendees participated side by side in a tradition that links communities across oceans through shared aspirations and gratitude. In the stillness of the ceremony, many participants reflected not only on personal peace, but on the collective hope for harmony in the world.



▲ In total, 49 participants attend Tzu Chi's triple celebration in Dallas, Texas. *Photo/Julie Sun*

Central Region

At Tzu Chi USA's Central Region Office in Dallas, Texas, attendees gathered for a ceremony marked by serenity and collective devotion. In total, 49 participants moved together through a synchronized tradition as prayers from Hualien connected the Texas community with Tzu Chi members around the globe.

Fresh, carefully arranged flowers lined the ceremonial space while participants continued through each movement. Throughout the morning, prayers rose and fell in unison as attendees approached the Buddha, and cleansed their hearts. The observance also reflected Tzu Chi's enduring emphasis on service rooted in gratitude as volunteers prepared vegetarian meals, welcomed new faces, and created a space where reflection and human connection could unfold naturally.

► In Dallas, Texas, attendees unite for a ceremony marked by serenity and collective devotion. *Photo/Julie Sun*

Attendees offer prayers, their hearts joined with those of Tzu Chi members across the globe. *Photo/Julie Sun*

Carefully arranged flowers line the ceremonial space as participants offer sincere prayers. *Photo/Julie Sun*



Northeast Region

In Flushing, a neighborhood in Queens, New York, light shone on outdoor altars and floral arrangements as attendees joined their palms in reverence and gratitude. As participants from across generations stepped forward one by one to bathe the Buddha, a physical reminder to wash away greed, hatred, and ignorance, the gathering highlighted the diversity and interconnectedness of New York itself. Volunteers, longtime supporters, families, and first-time attendees each stood shoulder to shoulder in shared mindfulness, united by aspirations for peace, kindness, and harmony. For many, the ceremony offered not only spiritual grounding but a meaningful reminder that compassion transcends language, culture, and geography, indeed.



◀ Volunteers, families, and first-time attendees unite shoulder to shoulder in shared reflection and harmony. *Photo/Jack Lai*

▼ This year's triple celebration marks 60 years since Tzu Chi's founder, Dharma Master Cheng Yen, first illuminated this path of compassion in Taiwan. *Photo/Hui Liu*



Global Tzu Chi family members gather not only for the annual triple celebration, but a diamond jubilee. Pictured is Tzu Chi's celebration in Flushing, New York. *Photo/Jack Lai*

► Across generations, attendees participate side by side in a tradition that bridges oceans. *Photo/Pinhau Chiou*



During this year's Buddha Day, Mother's Day, and Tzu Chi Day celebrations, Tzu Chi members unite for a peaceful walking meditation in Darien, Illinois. *Photo/James Chen*

Midwest Region

In Illinois, hundreds gathered across ceremonies and community events throughout the weekend, including walking meditation and a vegetarian charity sale.

Amid the rhythm of sincere prayer, long-time participant Jiang Caiping reflected on returning year after year for more than a decade: "I feel very good, very happy, and very warm," she shared. "I truly love paying respects to the Buddha." Though years have flown by, she expressed that the deeper feeling has remained unchanged: gratitude, peace, and a wish for harmony within both family and society. As Tzu Chi volunteers guided attendees through the procession, participants closed their eyes in prayer, as others quietly bowed to the gleaming altars framed by flowers.

► Local families and volunteers move together as prayers from Hualien, Taiwan, connect with Darien, Illinois. *Photo/Dennis Lee*



► In Darien, Illinois, a vegetarian charity food sale is held amid the day's celebrations to help fund Tzu Chi's humanitarian missions. *Photo/James Chen*



► Tzu Chi Chicago volunteers warmly guide attendees through the ceremonial process. *Photo/Dennis Lee*

◀ In Chicago, Illinois, community members and volunteers gather to commemorate the triple celebration. *Photo/Dennis Lee*





▲ In Houston, the familiar sight of uniformed Tzu Chi volunteers gather in peace and reflection.
Photo/Jean W. Hsu



◀ Outside the Tzu Chi USA Southern Region Office in Houston, Texas, volunteers commemorate 60 years of compassion and relief in action.
Photo/Fuchi Prucha



Families attend together across generations, with grandparents, parents, and children standing side by side. Photo/Fuchi Prucha



Tzu Chi volunteers in Houston, Texas, guide youngsters attending the Buddha Day Ceremony for the very first time.
Photo/Jean W. Hsu

Southern Region

In Houston, Texas, volunteers arrived in their signature Tzu Chi uniforms, and rows of fresh flowers framed Buddha-bathing altars as they guided attendees through each stage of the event.

Throughout the ceremony, prayers flowed through the Tzu Chi USA Southern Region Office as participants paused in reflection before the altar, families attending together across generations, with grandparents, parents, and children standing side by side in the warm, inviting space. Beyond the tradition itself, the gathering carried a truly unique sense of belonging as volunteers welcomed guests attentively, and created spaces for conversation at the ceremony's conclusion. Amid the rapid pace of daily life, many attendees expressed gratitude for the opportunity to pause, reconnect inwardly, and gather together in peace.

Northwest Region

In San Jose, California, this year's Buddha Day Ceremony unfolded with graceful simplicity and quiet harmony. Families attended together, with younger participants observing the rituals beside long-time volunteers who have supported Tzu Chi's mission for decades.



▲ Amid soft lighting and fresh flowers, peace fills attendees' hearts as prayers are offered for the future.
Photo/C.M. Yung



▲ In San Jose, California, at Tzu Chi USA's Northwest Region Office, the Buddha Day Ceremony invites community members to gather in harmony as prayers from across the world connect the space.
Photo/Steven Chiu



▲ Loved ones discover historical moments mindfully arranged at Tzu Chi USA's Northwest Region Office.
Photo/Mimi Ching

Generations gather in unity at Tzu Chi USA's Northwest Region Office as volunteers guide the ceremony. Photo/Steven Chiu



Further north in Oakland, California, Tzu Chi USA's Oakland Service Center held its annual Buddha Day Ceremony on May 17. Community leaders and partner organizations joined volunteers and local families in celebration, including representatives from the Oakland Police Department, the Oakland Chinatown Chamber of Commerce, and the American Red Cross. Together, attendees shared in an atmosphere centered upon gratitude, compassion, and peace.

During the gathering, the Oakland Service Center also received two commendations from the Oakland City Council recognizing both the center's longstanding dedication to humanitarian care and community service, as well as Dharma Master Cheng Yen's six decades of compassionate leadership and global humanitarian contributions.

The recognitions reflected not only Tzu Chi's enduring local presence within the Bay Area, but also the broader spirit woven throughout this year's ceremonies nationwide: that compassion is most meaningful when carried outward into the communities we serve.



Faith leaders and local community members join hearts under the spring sun at Tzu Chi USA's triple celebration in Oakland, California. *Photo/Tzu Chi USA Oakland Service Center*

The spirit of Tzu Chi's nationwide Buddha Day Ceremonies reveals how compassion is most meaningful when carried outward into communities. *Photo/Tzu Chi USA Oakland Service Center*



At Tzu Chi USA's Oakland Service Center, the annual Buddha Day Ceremony is held on May 17, an occasion made even more meaningful amid the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation's 60th anniversary year. *Photo/Tzu Chi USA Oakland Service Center*



Volunteers share in an atmosphere centered upon gratitude, compassion, and peace during the outdoor Buddha Day Ceremony in Oakland, California. *Photo/Tzu Chi USA Oakland Service Center*



▲ Family members, Tzu Chi volunteers, and Dharma Masters approach altars with sincere aspirations for peace. *Photo/Phil Chen*

◀ Across generations, participants create a shared atmosphere of warmth, humility, and collective care. *Photo/Phil Chen*

Mid-Atlantic Region

At the Jing Si Hall inside Tzu Chi USA's Mid-Atlantic Region Office in Cedar Grove, New Jersey, volunteers, students, families, and Dharma Masters united for the Buddha Day Ceremony, the hall gradually filling with prayer and musical offerings as participants prepared inwardly for reflection. Students from the local Tzu Chi Academy participated alongside teachers and volunteers, while sign language presentations added layers of emotional resonance to the day's observance.

For many families, the ceremony also served as an opportunity to pass values forward. Youth stood beside parents and grandparents, learning rituals shaped not only by tradition but also by mindfulness, gratitude, and service.

Dharma Masters gather at the Tzu Chi USA Mid-Atlantic Region Office in Cedar Grove, New Jersey, for the Buddha Day Ceremony. *Photo/Wayne Wu*

Musical pieces and sign language presentations add layers of emotional resonance to the day's observance in Cedar Grove, NJ. *Photo/Ted Li*





On May 9, 2026, the *Under One Sky* concert takes place at the Harvard Art Museums, marking the closing of the 2026 Tzu Chi Global Symposium for Common Goodness jointly organized by the Buddhist Tzu Chi Charity Foundation and Harvard FAS CAMLab. Photo/Hector Muniente

Together, Under One Sky

While Buddha Day ceremonies unfolded across the globe, another gathering inspired by the same aspirations for peace and interconnectedness emerged on the East Coast.

On the evening of May 9, the *Under One Sky* concert took place at the Harvard Art Museums, marking the closing of the 2026 Tzu Chi Global Symposium for Common Goodness jointly organized by the Buddhist Tzu Chi Charity Foundation and the Cognitive Aesthetics Media Lab at Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences.

Opening with Tzu Chi's song, *Aspiration*, the concert echoed Dharma Master Cheng Yen's enduring wishes for purified hearts, social harmony, and a world free from disasters.

The performance brought together internationally renowned musicians, including Grammy Award-winning artists and members of Yo-Yo Ma's Silkroad Ensemble, in celebration of Tzu Chi's 60th anniversary and Dharma Master Cheng Yen's 90th birthday. Ancient Buddhist traditions converged with contemporary interpretation through works such as

New Voices of Dunhuang, inspired by Tang Dynasty musical scores discovered along the Silk Road, alongside Indian sacred music, Japanese instrumentation, and meditative compositions rooted in Buddhist philosophy.

Together with the symposium and *Journey to Enlightenment* exhibition that opened alongside it, the concert reflected how Buddhist teachings continue to resonate across cultures, disciplines, and generations. Beneath one shared sky, music became yet another bridge across distance, language, and time.

Sixty years ago, a movement began with small change and an abundance of faith; today, that same spirit continues to ripple across oceans, cultures, and generations. With each milestone reached, each partnership strengthened, and a shared global pulse of sincerity, this momentum can unfold ever onward, from horizon to horizon. May this love continue to light the path as we each walk mindfully toward a brighter, more compassionate tomorrow. 🌱



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State	Tzu Chi USA Offices	Address	Tel / Fax	State	Tzu Chi USA Offices	Address	Tel / Fax
AZ	Phoenix Service Center	2145 W. Elliot Rd. Chandler, AZ 85224	480-838-6556 F: 480-777-7665	MD	Montgomery County Service Center	10853 Outpost Dr. North Potomac, MD 20878	703-707-8606 F: 301-339-8872
	JingSi Books & Cafe, Phoenix	710 E Union Hills Dr., Suite 10, Phoenix, AZ85024	623-738-6188		Boston Service Center	15 Summer St. Newton, MA 02464	617-762-0569 617-431-4844 F: 617-431-4484
S. CA	Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, US Headquarters Area	1100 S. Valley Center Ave. San Dimas, CA 91773	909-447-7799 F: 909-447-7948 909-447-7799 x 6569	MA	Boston Outreach Office	65 Harrison Avenue, 7th Boston, MA 02111	781-285-8499
	Jing Si Books & Café, San Dimas				Cambridge Outreach Center	620 Massachusetts Avenue #6 Cambridge, MA 02139	617-800-9567
	Tzu Chi Academy, San Dimas		909-447-7799 x 6551 F: 909-447-7944	MI	Lansing Office	3511 West Hiawatha Dr., Okemos, MI 48864	517-505-3388
	Buddhist Tzu Chi Medical Foundation	1000 S. Garfield Ave. Alhambra, CA 91801	626-427-9598 F: 626-788-2321		Detroit Service Center	2207 Dryden Rd. Troy, MI 48085	586-795-3491 F: 586-795-3491
	Tzu Chi Health Center - Alhambra		626-281-3383 F: 855-710-5853	MN	Minneapolis Office	1485 Arden View Dr. Arden Hills, MN 55112	617-939-6965
	Tzu Chi Health Center - South El Monte	10414 Vacco St. South El Monte, CA 91733	626-281-3383 F: 855-710-5853	MO	St. Louis Service Center	8515 Olive Blvd. St. Louis, MO 63132	314-994-1999 F: 314-994-1999
	Buddhist Tzu Chi Education Foundation	1920 S. Brea Canyon Cutoff Rd. Walnut, CA 91789	909-895-2125 F: 909-345-7025		Reno Office	903 West Moana Lane Reno, NV 89509	775-827-6333 F: 775-770-1148
	Tzu Chi Great Love Preschool & Kindergarten, Walnut		909-895-2126 F: 909-927-8336 909-895-2125 x 3200 F: 909-345-7025	NV	Las Vegas Service Center/ Academy	2590 Lindell Rd. Las Vegas, NV 89146	702-880-5552 F: 702-880-5552
	Tzu Chi Elementary, Walnut		909-895-2280		New Jersey Chapter/Jing Si Books & Café	150 Commerce Rd. Cedar Grove, NJ 07009	973-857-8666 F: 973-857-9555
	Tzu Chi Academy, Walnut			NY	Tzu Chi Academy, Northern New Jersey		
	Tzu Chi Great Love Preschool & Kindergarten, Monrovia	206 E. Palm Ave. Monrovia, CA 91016	626-305-1188 F: 626-599-8098		Tzu Chi Academy, Central New Jersey	50 Woodrow Wilson Dr., Edison, NJ 08820	973-857-8666
	Tzu Chi Academy, Monrovia	220 E. Palm Ave. Monrovia, CA 91016	626-775-3675 F: 626-359-8199		New York Chapter/Academy	137-77 Northern Blvd. Flushing, NY 11354	718-888-0866 F: 718-460-2068
	Northwest Los Angeles Service Center	11701 Wilshire Blvd. #15A Los Angeles, CA 90025	310-473-5188 F: 310-477-9518		Jing Si Books & Café, New York		718-799-3000
	Torrance Service Center	1355 Broad Ave. Wilmington, CA 90744	310-684-4465 F: 310-684-4460		Brooklyn Office	513 57th Street Brooklyn, NY 11220	917-909-0682
	Tzu Chi Health Center - Wilmington		626-281-3383 F: 855-710-5853		Tzu Chi Academy, Brooklyn	270 59th Street, Brooklyn NY 11220	718-888-0866
	Orange County Service Center	22911 Mill Creek Dr. Laguna Hills, CA 92653	949-916-4488 F: 949-916-5933		Long Island Branch/Academy	60 E Williston Ave. East Williston, NY 11596	516-873-6888 F: 516-746-0626
	Tzu Chi Academy, Irvine	4321 Walnut Ave., Irvine, CA 92604	714-624-3026 F: 949-916-5933		Long Island Education Center	50 Underhill Blvd, Syosset, NY 11791	516-321-0697
	Cerritos Service Center	14618&14620 Carmenita Rd. Norwalk, CA 90650	562-926-6609 F: 562-926-1603		Manhattan Family Service Center	63 Canal Street New York, NY 10002	212-965-1151 F: 212-965-1152
	Northwest Service Center	8963 Reseda Blvd. Northridge, CA 91324	818-727-7689 F: 818-727-9272		East Long Island Office	4 Milburn Rd. S. Setauket, NY 11720	631-964-3393
	San Gabriel Valley Service Center	9620 Flair Dr. El Monte, CA 91731	626-416-4527 Warehouse: 626-416-4529		Tzu Chi Center for Compassionate Relief	229 E. 60th St. New York, NY 10022	212-660-9229 F: 646-864-0086
	Jing Si Books & Café, El Monte		626-448-1362		Raleigh Service Center	1274 Horsham Way Apex, NC 27502	919-322-8389
	San Diego Service Center	5754 Pacific Center Blvd. #202 San Diego, CA 92121	858-546-0578 F: 858-546-0573	NC	Charlotte Office	4527 Dwight Evans Rd. Charlotte, NC 28217	704-281-8060 F: 704-943-1031
N. CA	Northern California Chapter	2355 Oakland Rd. San Jose, CA 95131	408-457-6969 F: 408-943-8420		Cincinnati Office	11228 Brookbridge Dr. Cincinnati, OH 45249	513-469-2161 F: 513-469-2161
	Tzu Chi Academy, Tri-Valley		925-785-7413		Columbus Service Center	2200 Henderson Rd. Columbus, OH 43220	614-457-9215 F: 614-457-9217
	Jing Si Books & Café, San Jose		408-457-6981		Dayton Office	1459 E Dorothy Lane Dayton, OH 45429	937-701-7111
	San Francisco Branch	2901 Irving St. San Francisco, CA 94122	415-682-0566 F: 415-682-0567	OH	Cleveland Service Center	1076 Ford Rd. Highland Heights, OH 44143	440-646-9292 F: 440-646-9292
	Tzu Chi Academy, San Mateo	2675 Ralston Ave., Belmont, CA 94002	650-888-1582		Oklahoma Office	2831 Misty Eidge Dr, Norman, OK73071	405-701-3927
	Tzu Chi Academy, San Francisco	350 Girard St. San Francisco, CA 94134	415-680-5225 F: 415-682-0567		Portland Service Center	3800 SW Cedar Hills Blvd #194 Beaverton, OR 97005	503-643-2130 F: 503-643-2130
	Modesto Service Center	1100 Carver Rd. #J Modesto, CA 95350	209-529-2625 F: 209-529-2625	OR	Tzu Chi Academy, Portland	3500 SW 104th Ave. Beaverton, OR 97005	503-643-2130
	Tzu Chi Academy, Cupertino	1280 Johnson Ave San Jose, CA 95129	408-823-8799		Philadelphia Service Center	107 North 9th Street Philadelphia, PA 19107	215-627-1915 F: 215-627-1916
	Santa Rosa Office	2435 Professional Drive, Suite D Santa Rosa, CA 95403	707-546-1945	PA	Pittsburgh Service Center/ Academy	1333 Banksville Rd. #201 Pittsburgh, PA 15216	412-531-8343 F: 412-531-8341
	Sacramento Service Center	1820 Tribute Rd. # J Sacramento, CA 95815	916-568-5800		Texas Chapter/Academy	6200 Corporate Dr. Houston, TX 77036	713-270-9988 F: 713-981-9008
	Ukiah Office	527 S State St. #B Ukiah, CA 95482	707-462-2911		Jing Si Books & Café, Houston		713-981-8966
	Oakland Service Center	620 International Blvd. Oakland, CA 94606	510-879-0971 F: 510-879-0971		Tzu Chi Great Love Preschool & Kindergarten, Houston		713-395-0303 F: 713-395-0305
	Tzu Chi Academy, San Jose	625 Educational Park Dr. San Jose, CA 95133	408-457-6970		Austin Service Center	7221 Northeast Dr. Austin, TX 78723	512-491-0358 F: 512-926-1373
FL	Fresno Service Center	3097 Willow Ave. Suite 6 Clovis, CA 93612	559-298-4894 F: 559-298-4894		San Antonio Office	23210 Crest View Way, San Antonio, TX, 78261	909-576-2387 F: 210-566-3970
	Chico Recovery Center	1001 Willow St, Suite C Chico, CA 95928	530-801-6335	TX	Dallas Chapter/Academy/ Jing Si Books & Café	534 W. Belt Line Rd. Richardson, TX 75080	972-680-8869 F: 972-680-7732
	Orlando Service Center	5062 W. Colonial Dr. Unit 140, Orlando FL 32808	407-292-1146 F: 407-479-3662		Tzu Chi Great Love Preschool & Kindergarten, Dallas		214-446-1776 F: 214-446-1772
	Miami Service Center	8070 Pasadena Blvd. Pembroke Pines, FL 33024	954-538-1172 F: 317-645-9907		Arlington Service Center	534 W. Belt Line Rd, Richardson, TX 75080	972-680-8869
GA	Atlanta Branch/ Tzu Chi Academy, Atlanta	3120 Medlock Bridge Rd. Building E Peachtree Corners, GA 30071	770-458-1000		Washington D.C. Chapter/ Academy	1516 Moorings Dr. Reston, VA 20190	703-707-8606 F: 703-707-8607
HI	Hawaii Chapter/Academy	1238 Wilhelmina Rise Honolulu, HI 96816	808-737-8885	VA	Richmond Service Center	421 Crofton Village Ter Midlothian, Virginia 23114	804-245-2628 F: 804-378-3520
IL	Chicago Chapter/Academy/ Jing Si Books & Café	1430 Plainfield Rd. Darien, IL 60561	630-963-6601 F: 630-960-9360	WA	Seattle Branch/Academy	15800 SE Newport Way Bellevue WA 98006	425-643-9104
	Chicago Service Center	215 W 23rd St., Chicago, IL 60616	312-285-0920		Milwaukee Office	5356 W. Silverleaf Ln, Brown Deer,WI 53223	414-378-4022
IN	Indianapolis Service Center	2929 E. 96th St. #E Indianapolis, IN 46240	317-580-0979	WI	Madison Office	1019 Starlight Ln, Cottage Grove, WI 53527	608-960-1962
KS	Kansas Office	9508 Shannon Way Circle Wichita, KS 67206	316-323-5798				



Your Love Truly Makes a Difference

The Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation is a volunteer-based international non-governmental organization established by Dharma Master Cheng Yen in 1966. While it began with 30 female followers donating 50 NT cents (around two US cents) daily from their grocery money to help those in need, Tzu Chi’s humanitarian aid footprint has now reached 139 countries and regions to relieve suffering and create a better world for all through compassion, love, and hope. Its activities encompass community and social services, national and international disaster relief,

medical and charitable assistance, education, environmental protection, and the promotion of humanistic values and community volunteerism. **And yet, there’s so much more we can do together. Your recurring donation can help strengthen our efforts for years to come.**

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Buddhist monastics and community members join in prayer during the 2026 Buddha Day Ceremony in San Dimas, California, united in gratitude, reverence, and aspirations for peace. *Photo/Shuli Lo*