

The Empowerment of Religious Narratives —

Analyzing the Formation of Tzuchi “Books of Morality”

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Abstract

This paper examines the empowering process of religious language and stories in Buddhist Tzuchi Association in Taiwan. Drawing upon self-narratives of five Tzuchi volunteers, this study finds that these narratives reconstruct their life stories and reality and thus function as a therapy for individuals. The re-construction undergoes in the context of “larger-than-oneself” belief, directing one toward religious cultivation other than worldly roles. It is persuasive by offering a positive and meaningful framework of life for the narrators. On the other hand, these volunteers’ narratives often cite the “Words of Still Thoughts,” a collection of the talk by Master Cheng Yen, the founder of Tzuchi. These narratives along with their stories are widely circulated via books, tapes, radio and television, and thus become a kind of modern religious “Book of Morality” (*shan shu*) following the “Words of Still Thoughts.” Appealing to admonish good and evil as traditional *shan shu* did, these story-tellings are characterized by daily encounters along with cultivation from Tzuchi’s services. Such experiential narratives are rooted in life and strengthen “Words of Still Thoughts” as a moral guidance from below. The mutual flow of language and life elicits converting power for the audience and appears to be a significant condition for religious narratives to be influential. As the central media of religious communication, narratives not only represent or reflect upon reality, but also possibly reconstruct living reality and bring forth healing and transformation of individual lives.

Keywords: empowerment, narratives, healing, life stories, book of morality

宗教敘事的培力——慈濟「善書」的形成分析*

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摘要

本文以台灣佛教慈濟功德會為例，探討宗教度化的語言和故事產生影響力的培力（empowering）過程。研究資料以五個慈濟志工的自我敘事為主，從敘事治療的角度看，其敘事具有重新建構生命史和生活現實的療癒作用，這個建構是在「大於我」的信仰脈絡中進行，引導人轉進超越世間角色的宗教修為，提供正面有力的生存意義架構，因此也就具有說服力。另一方面，這些志工的敘事常引述證嚴法師提倡人間佛教的語錄《靜思語》，也和《靜思語》一樣透過出版和電子傳播的大量發行，跟著形成一類的宗教善書。其訴求類似於傳統善書的規過勸善，而特色是從生活人事情節出發，加上從慈濟具體的行事修為中領悟，此屬於經驗性語言的宗教敘事植根於生活，由下而上地強化了《靜思語》做為道德指引的影響力，亦即語言和生命的相互流動，是度化語言所以感人，並具有號召力的原因，也是宗教敘事「培力」，或現代善書發揮影響力的重要條件。敘事是宗教傳播的主要媒介，本研究顯示敘事不只是表達或反映現實，也可以重構生存現實，促成生命的療癒與轉化。

關鍵字：培力、敘事、療癒、生命史、善書

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