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# Rethinking China–Taiwan relations as a *yin–yang* imbalance: political healing by Taiwanese Buddhist organisations

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## ABSTRACT

For many, relations across the Taiwan Strait appears to be an unresolvable sovereignty-cum-security impasse in the Westphalian world. Drawing analogies and metaphors from East Asian medicine (EAM), we reconceive this apparent zero-sum impasse as an inner imbalance of the China–Taiwan ‘body’ and investigate the possible healing effects of some Taiwanese Buddhist organisations. We identify three interrelated patterns in cross-Strait relations analogous to Spleen *qi* deficiency, Blood deficiency and *yin* deficiency. In EAM, the Spleen is associated with holding and its *qi* deficiency means poor digestion and/or Blood loss. Insufficient Blood is a type of *yin* deficiency, affecting all the fluids and lubrication of the body. While the cross-Strait movements of people, goods, services and capital have been increasing since the end of the Cold War, the ‘body’ fails to transform such ‘food’ into trust or a sense of ‘we-ness’ as ‘Blood’. We argue that cross-Strait Buddhist exchanges are conducive to conflict transformation, although they do not amount to a cure-all. Specifically, Tzu Chi Foundation’s charity work and Fo Guang Shan’s cultural education in China have cultivated mutual understandings and goodwill at the grassroots level, resembling therapeutic responses that help to relieve some of the symptoms.

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## Introduction

The conflicts across the Taiwan Strait between the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of China (ROC) may appear intractable in the eyes of most if not all academics and practitioners in international relations (IR). Beginning with a civil war between the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and with the subsequent division seemingly perpetuated by the Cold War, the cross-Strait confrontation has persisted until today, even though people from the two sides have become increasingly intertwined economically, culturally, religiously and familially in their everyday life in the past three ‘post-Cold War’ decades. In a March 2020 public opinion survey commissioned by Taipei’s cabinet-level Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) (2020) amid the global spread of COVID-19, perceptions of

Beijing's hostility towards Taiwan reached their highest point in the past 15 years (towards the latter's government, 76.6% and to its people, 61.5%). While cross-Strait movements were impeded by strict border controls and such medical supplies as face masks had been prohibited from export out of Taiwan following the COVID-19 outbreak, volunteers of the Tzu Chi Foundation (literally, 'compassionate relief'), one of four major Taiwanese Buddhist organisations, managed to collect 300,000 face masks and 14,000 protective gowns abroad and donated them to the pandemic-hit areas in China (newtalk, 3 February 2020). Master Hsing Yun Cultural Education Foundation and Buddha's Light International Association, both associated with Fo Guang Shan, another major Taiwanese Buddhist organisation, reportedly collected over 1.2 million face masks abroad and 700,000 of them had already reached Hubei and Hunan Provinces by early February (Global Times, 2 February 2020). Considering that it is politically unpopular to assist a muscle-flexing neighbour and that the atheist CCP has not allowed Tzu Chi and Fo Guang Shan to conduct missionary activities as these organisations have been doing in other countries, it is intriguing that they still engaged in such relief work in China. How can we make sense of this Buddhist intervention in confrontational China–Taiwan relations, in addition to reasons of cosmopolitan or religious compassion?

Drawing insights from East Asian medicine (EAM), this paper argues that what appears to be a cross-Strait sovereignty-cum-security impasse can be understood as an inner imbalance of the China–Taiwan 'body'. Albeit by themselves insufficient, activities conducted by such Buddhist organisations as Tzu Chi and Fo Guang Shan are conducive to restoring harmony to the body beyond the 'unification vs independence' dichotomy in the Westphalian state system. Its conception of the body draws from EAM's relational ontology, namely that none of the body's organs, blood and fluids can exist in isolation: they become what they are because they are *in relations with* other parts. Moreover, this EAM ontology is monist: all things are ultimately interconnected and co-dependent, however unrelated or contradictory they may appear to be.<sup>1</sup> From an EAM perspective, what have been treated as fully formed, mutually exclusive entities/subjects in IR always already penetrate and constitute each other, as if they formed a body within which numerous capillaries run through the imagined body in question (Ling 2016). Based on the Daoist *yin/yang* dialectics that animates EAM, such a body does not subscribe to the self/Other binary typical in the Eurocentric worldviews (Campbell 1998). Rather than treating embodiment as the securitisation of a given relationship, the EAM-informed body image is employed to stress that interconnectedness exists *between and within* what one sees as rivals or enemies.

To be sure, we do not wish to imply that the ways EAM physicians use to examine and distinguish the human body's major patterns are readily replicable vis-à-vis the social body.<sup>2</sup> Obviously, one cannot look at the China–Taiwan patient's tongue material and moss or have the pulse felt. It is nevertheless feasible to learn from EAM how to approach a complex combination of signs and symptoms, identify the features of a given disorder and accordingly determine an appropriate treatment.<sup>3</sup> While Newtonian mechanics-informed mainstream IR theories continue to treat political actors as self-contained, pre-social and separate entities, EAM conceives all things as inherently relational and mutually constitutive. No longer trapped in a reductionist binary opposition in which the onus lies on either China or Taiwan for 'disrupting the regional status quo', EAM enables us to see confrontational cross-Strait relations as an illness of imbalance and appreciate the healing effects of the activities of some Taiwanese Buddhist organisations.

Following this introduction, the first section briefly looks at the dichotomised discourse on China–Taiwan relations. Not only does the discourse pit the two against each other; it also reproduces Westphalian modernity through naturalising sovereign states in global politics. Inspired by EAM conceptions of Blood and digestion-related organs,<sup>4</sup> the second section reconceives China–Taiwan as one social body situated in a Westphalian world. We do not see Westphalia as the root of imbalance in the China–Taiwan body. Nor do we define the body's health as the absence of Westphalia. Here, Westphalia is conceived as an exterior pathogenic factor analogous to climate. In EAM, the weather's pathological effects on the body are not pre-determined; they depend on whether and how far the balance between the body and the environment has broken down, ie the body may be 'invaded' by the Wind only when it is weak relative to the climatic factor. Given that external pathogens cannot successfully invade a body that is in harmony, we focus on such important patterns of disharmony in the China–Taiwan body as analogous to Spleen *qi* (氣) deficiency that entails poor digestion and/or Blood loss.<sup>5</sup> A common description of contemporary cross-Strait relations as 'cold politics, hot economy' (*zheng-leng jing-re* 政冷經熱) exemplifies that the body fails to effectively transform economic 'food' into a sense of trust or 'we-ness' as 'Blood' and hold it in the vessels. The third section turns to the Tzu Chi Foundation and Fo Guang Shan, illustrating how and why their charity work and cultural education in China are conducive to the formation of new relationalities equivalent to Blood-making. Despite all the restrictions, including the CCP's attempts to co-opt Taiwanese Buddhist organisations as part of its 'united-front' efforts to foster pro-unification public opinions in Taiwan, the latter's activities help to cultivate mutual understandings and goodwill at the grassroots level, resembling therapeutic responses that relieve some of the Blood-deficient symptoms. The last section concludes with the conceptual and policy implications of this research, discussing EAM's potential to re-envision post-Westphalian, post-dichotomous China–Taiwan relations as well as IR knowledge production.

### China–Taiwan relations: a persistent impasse in Westphalian IR

The 'Taiwan conundrum' is typically traced back to 1949 when Chiang Kai-shek and his KMT lost the civil war to the CCP in mainland China and re-established the ROC in Taiwan, a former Japanese colony then under the occupation of Chiang's troops on behalf of the Allied forces. Due to the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 and the subsequent change of US strategic calculations towards East Asia, the Taiwan Strait was 'neutralised' by the Seventh Fleet and the newly founded PRC could not eliminate the remnant ROC forces. As a US ally, the ROC in exile managed to represent the Chinese nation diplomatically, including at the United Nations (UN), until it was derecognised by most states in favour of the PRC in the 1970s. Washington itself 'normalised' its relations with Beijing in 1979, while treating Taiwan as a *de facto* state.

The situation was further complicated by the changing self-identification of Taiwan's population, following the end of the KMT's one-party rule and the island's democratisation since the late 1980s. On the one hand, the ROC government dropped its old pretence that it is the legitimate representative of the entire Chinese nation. On the other hand, the percentage of the Taiwan residents identifying themselves as 'Taiwanese' has been rising during the past three decades, accompanied by multiple and changing views on Taiwan–China relations. From the official PRC perspective, Taiwan remains an inalienable part of Chinese

territory; any moves to promote 'Taiwan independence' are deemed detrimental to Chinese national sovereignty and territorial integrity (hence subject to the PRC's use of force). With the exception of some supporters of immediate or future unification with the mainland, according to public polls, the majority of the Taiwan residents fall within Beijing's 'Taiwan independence' category, which in effect lumps together three positions: 'Type A' (Taiwan should be independent from the ROC [itself a mainland-origin Chinese state] and become a full-fledged Taiwanese state), 'Type B' (Taiwan under the title of the ROC has already been an independent state, never ruled by the PRC since 1949), and 'Type C' (tantamount to 'two Chinas', namely the ROC in Taiwan as another Chinese state vis-à-vis the PRC).<sup>6</sup>

These contending discourses notwithstanding, they all look at (and, indeed, constitute) the Taiwan conundrum through the Westphalian sovereignty frame within which Taiwan is/should be either a sovereign state in its own right or a part of another sovereign state. Within this Westphalian picture, the modern world is constituted and organised on the basis of sovereign-independent, territorially bounded states. This particular way of being assumes that there can be only one supreme authority within a given territory and that such authority is exclusionary, with no equal within and no superior without. Accordingly, 'China' and 'Taiwan' are treated as ontologically distinct entities, although such distinction in the official PRC discourse is at best temporary as the latter can be and will be subsumed under the former. PRC leaders' socialisation into the Westphalian paradigm is embodied in the State Council White Paper *The One-China Principle and the Taiwan Issue* (Taiwan Affairs Office, PRC State Council 2000). It asserts that 'state sovereignty is inseparable. The territory is the space in which a state exercises its sovereignty. In the territory of a country there can only be a central government exercising sovereignty on behalf of the state'. The 'one China principle' likewise stipulates that '[t]here is only one China in the world, Taiwan is an inalienable part of China and the seat of China's central government is in Beijing' (Taiwan Affairs Office, PRC State Council 1993).<sup>7</sup>

Along this line that the Taiwan issue takes place within its sovereign territory, Beijing's refusal to renounce military means against Taiwan independence should not be too surprising. To be sure, PRC officials have occasionally suggested that the mainland and Taiwan are both a part of one China and the former is ready to negotiate with the latter on an equal footing (hence implicitly acknowledging that the PRC may not enjoy supreme authority concerning Taiwan).<sup>8</sup> However, since 'China' in Beijing's diplomatic intercourse with other states has always meant the PRC state rather than one authority higher than or equal to it, the aforementioned proposal has not been well received by its Taiwanese audience.

The room for ambiguity further diminished following Chairman Xi Jinping's recent call for peaceful unification based on a Taiwan version of 'one country, two systems' (China Daily, 3 January 2019). Xi maintained that the two sides belong to one China, but the move was immediately undone by his call for 'jointly pursuing the country's unification' – 'the country' (国家 *guojia*) in this context cannot but be the PRC. Constitutionally speaking, the ROC state similarly maintains that there is only one China, but both the Taiwan area and the mainland area are ROC sovereign territories.<sup>9</sup> With the exception of Ma Ying-jeou who subscribed to this 'one country, two areas' formula, post-Cold War Taiwanese presidents have tended to deemphasise the ROC's sovereignty claim on the mainland and in effect treat the PRC as China, as seen in Lee Teng-hui's 1999 description of the two as 'at least a special state-to-state relationship' and Chen Shui-bian's 'one country on each side of the Strait' statement in 2002. In her second-term inauguration speech, President Tsai Ying-wen did not stress the ROC/

Taiwan as a sovereign state but proposed ‘peace, parity, democracy, and dialogue’ as the basis for conducting cross-Straits relations (Office of the President, ROC 2020), implying the island republic’s possession of popular sovereignty and the inapplicability of Beijing’s ‘one country, two systems’ to Taiwan.

In a nutshell, political leaders on the two sides of the Taiwan Strait have adopted a dichotomised, Westphalian lens to conceive ‘China’ and ‘Taiwan’, leading to their often zero-sum, confrontational relationship. This observation is not missed out in the present literature. Chengxin Pan (2010), for instance, has pointed out that cross-Straits conflicts arise as much from their political and ideological differences as from a commonality in their obsession with Westphalian sovereignty. In his attempt to explore the possibility of a negotiated settlement, Richard Bush (2005) also notes that sovereignty and security are the primary issues that form a complicated knot, and the latter is derivative of the former. Nevertheless, Bush admits that his attempt is more successful in explicating the difficulty in resolving the Taiwan Strait issue than in actually ‘untying the Westphalian knot’. Similarly, Pan uses the examples of the European Union (EU) and China’s past commitments to ‘one country, two systems’ in Hong Kong to show that state sovereignty in practice is frequently compromised and subject to reconstruction, without answering the ‘how-to’ question in China–Taiwan relations. In this sense, Westphalian sovereignty has worked as a ‘picture’ holding the relevant actors captive, as a *practice of language* constituting what appear to be realities of China/Taiwan and, indeed, global politics (Fierke 2002; Pin-Fat 2019).<sup>10</sup>

How, then, can one ‘speak another language’ in which the constituted subjects are no less politically legitimate than Westphalian states, while making oneself more aware of how such subjects are delineated and regulated in China–Taiwan relations and beyond? Chen, Hwang, and Ling (2009) use the film *Lust/Caution* (2007) to illustrate how to jog free ontological space beyond such binary oppositions as ‘self vs Other’, ‘West vs non-West’, and ‘centre vs periphery’ by shifting one’s focus to various ways of being and relating in the China–Taiwan ‘borderlands’. This is not trivial, for pilgrims paid by people of Matzu and Kinmen (Taiwan-controlled islands near China’s Fujian Province) to Meizhou in Fujian since 2002 ultimately ‘subverted the “strong” and “masculine” state’s policies despite being treated by patriarchal convention as “weak” and “feminised” agents of civil society’ (Chen, Hwang, and Ling 2009, 764), paving the way for the resumption of direct cross-Straits transportation, communication and commerce in 2008. Before moving on to another understudied case of the Westphalian state ‘borderlands’, the next section considers how to ‘speak another language’ in China–Taiwan relations in non-dichotomous and non-violent ways.

### Rethinking China–Taiwan relations as a *yin–yang* (陰陽) imbalance

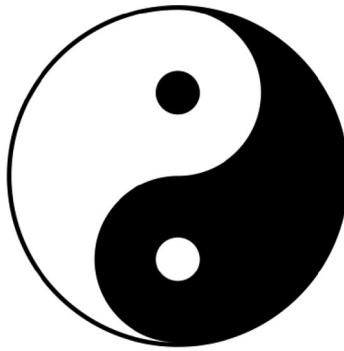
In fact, ‘*zheng-leng jing-re*’, the term that has often been used to describe post-Cold War cross-Straits relations in the scholarly literature (see, in particular, Lin 2016), already entails a state of imbalance and the need to address it. However, experts typically attribute the persistent gap between economic interdependence and political enmity to the failure of nationalistic (if not outright irrational) political elites and/or general public in China and/or Taiwan. Informed by neofunctionalism, it is believed that the positive effects of cross-Straits functional economic cooperation should have ‘spilled over’ onto political issue-areas in the form of reconciliation and integration (Haas 2004). This reproduces a colonial trope that takes perceived failures to conform to the universal (read: Eurocentric) standards as signs of lack of

non-Western agency. We beg to differ: '*zheng-leng jing-re*' points to the possibility of rethinking the Taiwan Strait issue by turning to an alternative language which most academics and practitioners working on China–Taiwan relations are not unfamiliar with – EAM. While this alternative might be too far stretched for the IR mainstream, it is worth noting that the disciplinary boundaries between politics and medicine are not as clear-cut as they appear to be. As the medical historian Paul Unschuld (2009, 18–19) observed, the emergence of medicine in ancient China as the 'linking of healing with science' went hand in hand with the pursuit of *fa* (法) as the 'regularity of rule' of a given state in the Warring States period (475–221 BC), entailing a pattern or system of schematised behaviour. For Unschuld, the aforementioned rise of the Legist/Legalist School and its emphasis on the community-building power of schematic and regulated behaviour in political governance must be understood within the context of the parallel development of science. Moreover, as EAM is grounded upon the *yin/yang* dialectics that goes beyond oppositional binary structures categorising mainstream IR theories (Ling 2014), it embraces Thich Nhat Hanh's notion of interbeing such that 'you are in me and I in you' (Ling 2018),<sup>11</sup> which, in turn, helps to reimagine China–Taiwan relations outside the confinement of the Westphalian 'unification vs independence' dichotomy. In short, EAM can add to the analysis of this relationship by offering not only a non-confrontational language but also a locally intelligible one, restoring problem-solving agency to relevant stakeholders.

How can we make sense of the observation of 'cold politics, hot economy' in cross-Strait relations? It is helpful to begin with the Daoist image of *yin* and *yang* as two polar opposites-cum-complements. As seen in Figure 1, they join together to form a circle in which *yin* (black) and *yang* (white) seem to contradict each other, but a black dot in the white zone and a white dot in the black mean that *yang* contains *yin* and *yin* contains *yang* – neither is complete without the other. The *yin–yang* diagram is intended to show that all things are parts of a whole; things exist not because they possess a certain essence but because they are in relations with others, containing within themselves the possibility of opposition and change (Kaptchuk 2000). Therefore, the qualities associated with *yin* (eg cold, rest, passivity and fruition) are only relative to those of *yang* (eg heat, stimulation, activity and potential). All clinical manifestations in EAM can be boiled down to an imbalance between *yin* and *yang* in terms of excess or deficiency, which leads to the following four major patterns (see Table 1): excess of *yang*, deficiency of *yang*, excess of *yin*, and deficiency of *yin* (Maciocia 2015, 419). The EAM 'Eight Principal Patterns' (*ba-gang bian-zheng* 八綱辨證) involve four pairs of complementary opposites: *yin/yang*, interior/exterior, deficiency/excess, and cold/hot.<sup>12</sup> Because the last three are subdivisions of *yin* and *yang*, EAM physicians usually discern their patients' patterns by sorting the signs and symptoms along with the combination of *yin/yang* and deficiency/excess.

'Excess of *yang*' and 'deficiency of *yang*' do not refer to *yang* in the same sense. The former indicates the presence of a *yang* pathological factor, namely Heat, whereas the latter denotes a lack of *yang qi* whose *yang* means a physiological Heat. Likewise, 'excess of *yin*' entails the presence of a *yin* pathological factor, eg Cold, Dampness, Blood stasis or Phlegm, whereas 'deficiency of *yin*' refers to a deficiency of physiological *yin* substances such as the fluids and Blood (Maciocia 2015). In other words, Blood deficiency is an example of deficiency of *yin*. However, Blood as a type of *yin* substance should not be taken as its absolute quality. As far as EAM is concerned, nothing is entirely *yang* or *yin*, for each thing (eg an organ) contains within itself a *yang* and a *yin* aspect; whether it is *yin* or *yang* is in relation to its counterpart.





**Figure 1.** Yin–Yang diagram.

Source: Wikipedia public domain image.

**Table 1.** A basic picture of disharmony in East Asian medicine (EAM).

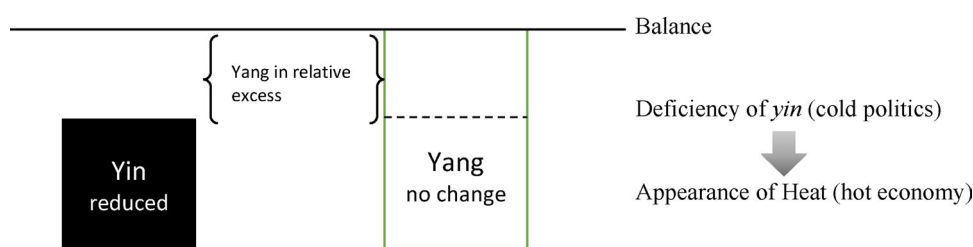
	Excess	Deficiency
Yang	Excess of Yang = Full-Heat	Deficiency of Yang = Empty-Cold
Yin	Excess of Yin = Full-Cold	Deficiency of Yin = Empty-Heat

Source: Based on Maciocia (2015).

Because Blood is a denser and more material form of *qi*, Blood is considered ‘more *yin*’ than *qi* (Maciocia 2015, 10–11). The aforementioned four patterns are not necessarily mutually exclusive. As Giovanni Maciocia (2015, 419–420) explained, a deficiency of *yang* of the Spleen and Kidneys often leads to the development of Phlegm or oedema as a pathological accumulation of fluids (hence associated with an excess of *yin*). In EAM, excess of *yang* (*shi-re* 實熱 ‘Full-Heat’) corresponds to deficiency of *yin* (*xu-re* 虛熱 ‘Empty-Heat’), for pathological Full-Heat may injure the body’s *yin qi* that leads to physiological Empty-Heat; excess of *yin* (*shi-han* 實寒 ‘Full-Cold’) corresponds to deficiency of *yang* (*xu-han* 虛寒 ‘Empty-Cold’), for pathological Full-Cold may injure the body’s *yang qi* that leads to physiological Empty-Cold (Maciocia 2015, 420–421).

‘Cold politics, hot economy’ can be understood as a picture of disharmony in which the China–Taiwan body suffers from Cold and Heat at the same time. It should be noted that the Eight Principal Patterns themselves are never intended as adequate descriptions of clinical reality. Rather, they provide EAM physicians with preliminary guidance for further refinement of their respective pictures of disharmony. Similarly, the picture presented by this research is inevitably incomplete (as Ted Kaptchuk [2000, 217] put it, ‘training the mind to see patterns requires frequent repetition’). Yet, we hope, it serves as a heuristic illustration for the concerned academics and practitioners’ further refinement. While ‘cold politics, hot economy’ might lead to an impression that both *yin* and *yang* are excessive in the China–Taiwan body, the most salient pattern is arguably deficiency of *yin* or ‘Empty-Heat’ – ‘hot’ economy *appears to be* hot when compared to political ‘cold’ war between Beijing and Taipei. While cross-Strait commerce has been thriving since the 1990s and China and Taiwan have been top trading partners to each other (10<sup>th</sup> to China and 1<sup>st</sup> to Taiwan in 2019 [Workman 2020]), the state of cross-Strait economic relations is by no means overheating and perhaps has not reached its full





**Figure 2.** The pattern of deficiency of *yin* in East Asian medicine (EAM)/China–Taiwan.  
Source: Adapted from Kaptchuk (2000, 226).

potential.<sup>13</sup> In other words, signs associated with ‘Empty-Heat’ have the *appearance* of Heat because of insufficient *yin* rather than excessive *yang* (see Figure 2).

Deficiency of *yin*, in turn, may proceed via deficient Blood and insufficient Spleen *qi*. This is because all the fluids and lubrication of the body are *yin*, essential for regulating the menstrual cycle and maintaining the structure of the body strong and supple. Dubbed the ‘foundation of postnatal existence’ in EAM thought, the Spleen is responsible for transforming and transporting *qi* and Blood, ‘governing’ Blood, and even ‘considerations of options, pondering, possibilities, and making final decisions’ (Kaptchuk 2000, 79–80).<sup>14</sup> Its *qi* deficiency means inefficient digestion, massive blood loss and/or bleeding. Blood here is not simply the red fluid understood in biomedicine. Circulating through the body, Blood nourishes, maintains, and partly moistens various body parts. Its characteristics involve ‘repose, receptivity, and relaxation’ as well as the absence of tension and ‘easy acknowledgement of what has been accomplished’ (Kaptchuk 2000, 242). Its functions allow ‘an effortless maintenance and recognition of self’ (Kaptchuk 2000, 243). In the China–Taiwan context, younger generations on the two sides resemble *yin*, who are increasingly unwilling and unable to empathise with each other (eg widespread online mockeries of Taiwanese as ‘frogs at the bottom of the well’ and Chinese as fragile ‘*boli-xin*’, ie ‘glass-made heart’). Just as a patient’s Spleen has not been able to effectively turn abundant food into new Blood and hold the latter in the vessels, amity or positive mutual perceptions (Blood) between mainland Chinese and Taiwanese have not improved in proportion to the increasing varieties and volumes of cross-Strait exchanges (food) since the 1990s, due to the lack of shared visions (Spleen). Put simply, efforts to improve ‘cold politics’ cannot be helped by merely making economy ‘hotter’ (having more economic changes).

Similarly, certain words and deeds that can often be observed in China–Taiwan relations, for example periodical war scares (threats to ‘unify Taiwan by force’) and the constant longing for external recognitions (as a first-class ‘*qiangguo*’ [strong country] vis-à-vis the internationally renowned ‘*Taiwan zhi guang*’ [light of Taiwan]), remind us of such signs as restlessness and lack of self-esteem, often used to discern the general pattern of Blood deficiency in EAM (Kaptchuk 2000, 242). As with a Blood-deficient patient suffering from trauma, prolonged stress and long illness, and Heat conditions, eg excessive sweating (Shea 2018, 177), one can also find parallels in the China–Taiwan body: Washington’s involvements in the ‘Taiwan question’ bring back memories of the ‘century of national humiliation’ (Callahan 2004), whereas Beijing’s threats to use force remind the islanders

of the slaughters of the 28 February incident in 1947 after China 'restored' its sovereignty over Taiwan (Shackleton 2017); a division of seven decades; and Beijing's increasing aerial and maritime manoeuvres near Taiwan and Taipei's counter-military built-ups (The Economist, 1 May 2021).

### 'Blood-making': Buddhist exchanges in China–Taiwan relations

Having discussed the pathology of the *yin–yang* imbalance in the China–Taiwan body, this section illustrates how cross-Strait Buddhist exchanges in general and some Taiwanese Buddhist organisations' activities in China in particular are conducive to healing the body equivalent to Blood-making.<sup>15</sup> Following EAM principles of treatment,<sup>16</sup> the diagnosis of 'cold politics, hot economy' as 'Empty-Heat' requires one to 'simultaneously nourish Yin and clear Heat' (Maciocia 2015, 423), pointing to the need to cultivate cross-Strait relationality and prevent tensions from escalating. It is *not* our contention that Taiwanese Buddhist interventions represent a bottom-up panacea to the present impasse, for clearing Heat needs the Westphalian states to at least temporarily suspend confrontational military measures.

Taiwan is known for its religious diversity. Around 45% of the population identify themselves as adherents of local religions and 20% as Buddhists (Central News Agency, 16 April 2014), but the distinctions between followers of local religions and Buddhists are blurred. The former often practise Buddhism, and vice versa. It is fair to say that Buddhism in post-war Taiwan is indebted to various mainland Chinese Buddhist monks and nuns who retreated to the island with the KMT regime in the late 1940s. Among them, three have been identified as representatives of Taiwanese Buddhism based on the location of their temples: Hsing Yun (1927–) of southern Taiwan, Wei Chueh (1928–2016) of central Taiwan and Sheng Yen (1931–2009) of northern Taiwan. Including the native-born nun Cheng Yen (1937–) of eastern Taiwan, these 'big four' founded major Buddhist organisations in Taiwan (Jiang 2012) promoting Humanistic Buddhism (Ting 2006). Advocated by Venerable Taixu (1890–1947), Humanistic Buddhism aims to modernise Chinese Buddhism. Rather than staying at the temples and becoming reclusive hermits, it is argued, Buddhists should actively reform society, promote human development and improve the world (Shiga 2016, 77). This is embodied in Taiwanese Buddhist organisations' long-time contributions to disaster relief and humanitarian aids in China (and elsewhere) with significant financial and human resources. In fact, cross-Strait Buddhist exchanges have been active since the ROC government's lifting of the martial law in 1987. Following Taipei's opening up of family visits across the Taiwan Strait in that same year, Taiwanese Buddhist monks visited China for the first time since 1949. Hsing Yun and Sheng Yen accompanied reunion groups to the mainland and visited some Buddhist organisations there. The PRC government's initial reaction to the increasing visits by Taiwanese religious groups was mixed. While Beijing believed that such religious ties in cross-Strait relations would be conducive to the implementation of its united-front policy, it was concerned about the potential subversive influence from Taiwan (Jiang 2012, 155–157).

Buddhist exchanges across the Taiwan Strait became frequent after Taipei relaxed the martial law-era travel restrictions and established the 'three mini-links' in 2001. The change allowed direct trade, postal and transportation links between the two sides via the Taiwan-controlled offshore islands and Xiamen and Mawei in China's Fujian Province (recall the pilgrims to Meizhou).<sup>17</sup> Since then, Hsing Yun, Sheng Yen and Cheng Yen have been well

known in China, attracting numerous mainland Chinese tourists to visit Buddhist temples in Taiwan (Huang 2014). Even PRC officials in charge of Taiwan affairs feel the need to visit these temples and their leaders. Moreover, Buddhist temples on the two sides have built up partnerships, with Taiwanese Buddhist leaders frequently visiting China to give sermons. In addition to regular exchanges and co-organised events, Buddhist organisations in China and Taiwan have been jointly holding the World Buddhism Forum every three years since 2006, attended by various political figures worldwide. In 2008, the Tzu Chi Foundation led by Cheng Yen was allowed to develop their network in China, and Hsing Yun's Fo Guang Shan followed suit. Both were regarded as exclusive exceptions enjoyed by Taiwan-based Buddhist organisations. The former established its first Chinese branch in Suzhou in 2010, which was the PRC's first licensed non-profit organisation (NPO) from outside. As of 2019, Tzu Chi operated 21 contact points and 17 Buddhism-related bookstores in China (Tzu Chi Foundation 2019a, 543). Fo Guang Shan obtained approval from the PRC Ministry of Culture in 2014 to establish Master Hsing Yun Cultural Education Foundation in China. To date, it has set up two branches, in Beijing and Shanghai.

The fact that such intimate exchanges have been taking place alongside (and despite) Beijing and Taipei's engagement in the antagonistic, winner-takes-all 'Westphalian game' (Ling 2016, 2) reminds us that it is more productive not to see China and Taiwan as two oppositional ontological entities. Rather, they are socially interconnected and co-dependent to the extent that 'you are in me and I in you', which can be seen from how Humanistic Buddhism has travelled across the Taiwan Strait and been renewed along the way. The remainder of this section shows how the activities of Tzu Chi and Fo Guang Shan have worked to create Blood for the China–Taiwan body, with their emphasis on social relations, grassroots community-building and resonance. In so doing, these activities help to nourish *yin* across various levels of sites, 'innovating at the interstices of ideas and institutions, society and state, today and yesterday' (Ling 2016, 16–17).<sup>18</sup>

### Social relations

Not many are aware that Hsing Yun was once on Beijing's blacklist because of his support for Chinese dissidents during the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests. Not until 1994, when then-Chairman of the CCP-endorsed Buddhist Association of China, Zhao Puchu, stood as guarantor for Hsing Yun, did the PRC government lift the ban (Hsing Yun 2013a). In his autobiography, *Bainian Foyuan (Buddhist Affinities across 100 Years)*, Hsing Yun (2013b) mentioned his personal friendship with political leaders in both Taiwan and China. During his meeting with Yang Shangkun, Chairman of China from 1988 to 1993, Hsing Yun persuaded Yang not to use China's propaganda slogan of 'not ruling out the possibility of a military solution to the Taiwan problem' (Chen 2016, 99–100). From his autobiography, some PRC leaders appeared to be interested in and even practising Buddhism. Hsing Yun mentioned his complicated feelings when he met Jiang Zemin, Yang's successor, in 2006 and witnessed how he recited perfectly the Buddhist verses of Invocation (Ji 2012). Even Xi Jinping claimed to have read all Hsing Yun's books (Hsing Yun 2013b). The latter often urges top leaders of both sides to be compassionate and generous, and not to be concerned with gain and loss to achieve non-self.<sup>19</sup> Hsing Yun (2015) believes that 'non-self and compassion', Taixu's answer to US President Franklin Roosevelt's question about the way to peace during World War II, is applicable to cross-Strait relations. For him, Chinese

societies understand very well the saying of 'You are in me, and I in you' and co-dependent relations; as compatriots, people on the two sides of the Taiwan Strait should not fight over material gains.

The Tzu Chi Foundation's disaster relief activities in China also reveal how social relations may circumvent Westphalian state security concerns. Despite strong criticisms against her for 'betraying Taiwan', Cheng Yen decided to provide aids to China in the aftermath of the 1991 Eastern China flood, two years after the Tiananmen protests when tension was high across the Taiwan Strait (Shanhui Shuyuan 1991). Many Taiwanese held a negative image of the PRC at that time, and Beijing was not ready to accept assistance from Taiwan. The private relationship between the Tzu Chi Foundation and PRC officials in charge of disaster relief eventually overcame the obstacles, and Tzu Chi was able to gain trust in China. The 1991 disaster relief was significant, for it arguably paved the way for future cross-Strait cooperation. Regarding its subsequent activities in China, Tzu Chi has maintained a low profile and adopted the principle of 'three inactions': namely, no discussion of politics, no advocacy and no intentional missionary work (He 2017).

### *Grassroots community-building*

Tzu Chi has left significant footprints in each Chinese province; many local residents have become members of the organisation and the number of volunteers has grown considerably.<sup>20</sup> The support for Tzu Chi can be seen in the amount of donations it received. In 2019, Tzu Chi in China received 124 million RMB in donations (Tzu Chi Foundation 2019b, 10). Its approach to local community-building is also worthy of note. While Tzu Chi devotes its efforts to environmental conservation and education, medical education, tutoring primary and high school students and moral education, most of the activities are conducted at the request of the local government. The latter co-operates with the former to meet the needs of the local population.<sup>21</sup>

So why is Beijing no longer concerned with the external influence brought by these organisations? Unlike the individualism or rights-based democracy that underpins many NPOs, Richard Madsen suggests that Taiwanese Buddhist communities focus more on social solidarity and equality. For them, it is interdependence that counts in a society. Individual independence is only an illusion if there is no mutual devotion within the society (Madsen 2007, 77–81). Communitarianism rather than individualism explains the practice of these Buddhist organisations,<sup>22</sup> emphasising contributions to the society and individuals' inseparable ties with their own community.

### *Resonance*

The remarkable journey of Humanistic Buddhism from China to Taiwan and back to China (Jiang 2012, 159–160) exemplifies the notion of resonance in EAM. Things are able to influence other things because their propensity is connected by *qi* that runs through them (Kaptchuk 2000, 44); in other words, change is evoked from within the China–Taiwan body, not imposed from without. Indebted to Yin Shun's (1906–2005) teaching of 'Buddha in human beings', a renowned Mahāyāna Buddhist monk-scholar from China and a mentor of Cheng Yen, Tzu Chi's volunteer networks have developed throughout China in various provinces

including Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Sichuan, Fujian, Guangdong, Hubei and Yunnan. Tzu Chi's 'success story' has, in turn, evoked Chinese scholars' curiosity, leading to further research published by prominent Chinese academic journals (eg Guo 2013; Zhong and Zhang 2015). Similarly, Fo Guang Shan has become a role model for Buddhist temples in China. The famous Longquan Temple of Beijing, for example, has a close relationship with Fo Guang Shan and strives to modernise Chinese Buddhism. The ripple of resonance does not stop within China–Taiwan: Longquan Temple has established branches in the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, France and the United States, following Fo Guang Shan's approach (Ning 2018).

This is not to romanticise these Buddhist organisations as benevolent agents for peace vis-à-vis belligerent Westphalian states – that only reproduces another false dichotomy in the study and practice of global politics. As much as the PRC government attempts to co-opt Tzu Chi and Fo Guang Shan to promote pro-unification forces in Taiwan, these organisations' *qi* elicits the propensity of Beijing's and resonates as actions for people in need. While it is typical for many academics and practitioners to look at China–Taiwan relations as an irresolvable sovereignty-cum-security impasse in the Westphalian world, EAM and its *yin/yang* dialectics show us that even illness contains the seed of health. Resonating between numerous state and non-state actors on the two sides of the Taiwan Strait, Taiwanese Buddhist organisations resemble a medicine that helps to transform the *qi* of illness into a healthy one,<sup>23</sup> however limited.

## Conclusion

Rather than seeing (and reifying) the Taiwan Strait issue as a zero-sum sovereignty impasse and a regional security hotspot, this paper has illustrated how to think beyond Westphalia by drawing analogies and metaphors from East Asian medical thought. What appear to be persistent binary oppositions (eg Chinese unification vs Taiwanese independence) in cross-Strait relations actually point to symptoms of *yin–yang* imbalance in the China–Taiwan body needing treatment. Focussing on a popular description of China–Taiwan relations as 'cold politics, hot economy', this research has identified 'Empty-Heat' as their major pathological pattern, associated with deficiency of *yin*, embodied by the lack of trust between the two and the sense of restlessness (constant preparations for war), among other signs. The diagnosis calls for both Westphalian states and non-state actors to nourish *yin* (recognising and cultivating China–Taiwan as interbeing) and clear Heat (preventing military confrontations).

EAM also sheds new light on the policy and scholarly implications of the activities of Fo Guang Shan and Tzu Chi in cross-Strait relations. Rather than being 'traitors' or 'fifth columns', they have been helping to restore harmony to the China–Taiwan body by pursuing human development from the grassroots level, without perpetuating the 'Westphalian game' under which cross-border cooperation is 'harder to achieve and more difficult to maintain' (Grieco, Powell, and Snidal 1993, 729). Indeed, cross-Strait Buddhist exchanges have provided various opportunities in which both governments in Beijing and Taipei (and other relevant actors) can afford to 'unlearn' the Westphalian business-as-usual (Said 1979; Bilgin and Ling 2017) or at least temporarily suspend it. This does not imply that Taiwanese Buddhist interventions represent a cure-all treatment, as the deterioration of China–Taiwan relations during (and before) the COVID-19 outbreak has already made it clear. Nevertheless, it is not unreasonable to conclude that without such interventions, the situation could have been even worse. While people in desperate

circumstances might expect medicine to offer miracle cures in the form of external and instant interventions, EAM serves as a reminder that it is the patient, China–Taiwan in this case, who bears the long-term responsibility to maintain the body's inner balance on a quotidian basis.

Conceiving rivals/enemies as sharing the same body politic is admittedly almost impossible to imagine, if one continues to subscribe to Westphalian IR consisting of numerous hierarchical, either-or opposites, including the tired 'Taiwan-is-(not)-a-part-of-China' dispute. Rather than calling on the disputing parties to construct a Kantian 'culture of anarchy' (Wendt 1999) on the basis of a friend identity (which reproduces the us–them dichotomy), this research has maintained that what is at stake is a deep 'ontological switch' (Agathangelou and Ling 2004) enabling us to appreciate that those opposites are complementary and both-and, ultimately interconnected as an indivisible whole. This *dao*/EAM-informed engagement with relationality resonates with such cosmological notions as *dharma*, *ayni*, *ubuntu* and *advaita* (Trownsell et al. 2021; Ncgoya 2015; Shahi 2018), pointing to a feasible way to decentre Westphalian IR presumptions about existence, both geoculturally and ontologically.

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## Notes

1. Such insights allow for multiple imaginations of the body beyond Westphalia and even anthropocentrism, be it Taiwan, China–Taiwan, Japan–Taiwan, East Asia, Eurasia, humanity or Gaia/Mother Earth. Academics and practitioners can learn from specific configurations of relationality in each imagined body, eg (post)coloniality in the Japan–Taiwan body.
2. Nor do we intend to reify the physical/social binary. After all, images of the human body are inseparable from the prevailing ways of thinking about it in a given society (Kuriyama 1999).
3. Contrary to the conventional wisdom that biomedicine is concerned with controlling symptoms and EAM tackling the root, EAM practitioners do not look primarily for root causes but rather look for patterns (Maciocia 2015). They seek to form a detailed picture about the patient by taking all relevant signs and symptoms into consideration so as to identify the underlying disharmony.
4. All capitalised body organs, textures and fluids in this paper are understood in an EAM sense, and do not neatly correspond to their counterparts in biomedicine under the positivistic empiricist lens.
5. *Qi* in EAM is conceived as the basis of all phenomena in the cosmos. Between matter and energy, *qi* connects all being and is constantly in flux, with the quality of being and becoming. When aggregated, it gives rise to physical shape (eg inner organs); when dispersed, it allows things to transform into other forms (Maciocia 2015, 43–46).
6. In contemporary Taiwan's political spectrum, the Taiwan Statebuilding Party (TSP) is most active among supporters of Type A Taiwan independence, whereas the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and the oppositional KMT fit into Type B and Type C, respectively. As an oft-seen typology in Taiwanese news commentaries, these 'types' are neither rigid nor necessarily mutually exclusive.
7. The principle that Taiwan belongs to the body politic of China derives from the idea of the Hobbesian state body, which is different from the EAM approach to the body. As will be further discussed, EAM insights enable actors to rise above their respective political identities and consider what the health of their shared body might mean (and how to restore/maintain it). Accordingly, it is problematic to ask 'whether or not Taiwan's health is mainly plagued by Chinese military and economic forces', for such a question falls back to state-centrism (the China–Taiwan body is not the container of either state actors on the two sides of the Taiwan Strait or their aggregation) and reductionism (imbalance cannot be attributed to a single or major cause, because all parts are interrelated in maintaining the inner balance of the whole).
8. Even the 2005 Anti-Secession Law that authorises the use of 'non-peaceful means' against 'Taiwanese separatists' also adopts this both-the-mainland-and-Taiwan-belong-to-one-China formulation, but the not-so-Westphalian tone is contradicted by its statement that 'China's sovereignty and territorial integrity brook no division'.
9. Given the CCP's refusal to accept 'two Chinas' or 'one China, one Taiwan', the KMT came up with a 'one China, different interpretations' alternative, which essentially accepts the 'one China' principle vis-à-vis Beijing while repeating the 'one country, two areas' mantra within Taiwan. However, the 'alternative' is still Westphalian, for it seeks to mend the cross-Strait ontological separation by subsuming the 'two areas' into one Chinese sovereign state, be it the ROC or the PRC.
10. Another way to study Westphalian sovereignty is to examine why and how China and Taiwan enlisted Westphalia for their respective political purposes, eg claiming autonomy from perceived oppressors. We thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.
11. Independent from the notion of hybridity (Bhabha 1994), the monk-teacher Thich Nhat Hanh (1926–) developed the interbeing concept (*Tiep hien* in Vietnamese) based on the Buddhist formulation of 'co-dependent arising' (*pratītyasamutpāda* in Sanskrit, *yuan-qi* 緣起 in Chinese) where 'the self "flows" into others through intersubjective reverberations' (Ling 2014, 120). One



might argue that seeing China–Taiwan as sharing one body pre-supposes their ontological separation (see Shih and Ikeda 2016 on post-hybridity), but the interbeing concept's concern is how actors appreciate their intrinsic relationality and mutual constitution *despite* their apparent separation. Rather than asking whether the ontological separation of Taiwan and China was caused by Japanese colonialism, it seems more pertinent to appreciate that interconnected-ness exists between and within what appears to be separated.

12. We follow Kaptchuk's (2000, 216) translation of *bian-zheng* as distinguishing 'patterns' rather than 'syndromes', for the latter implies that 'the knowledge of the cause [is] needed to elevate a clinical entity or a syndrome to the rank of a disease' (hence reproducing an epistemological hierarchy that privileges the cause-oriented biomedicine over the pattern-seeking EAM).
13. Beijing and Taipei concluded a free trade agreement-like pact in 2010; fearing China's economic and political infiltration, the passing of its service-in-trade agreement was blocked by a student movement that occupied Taiwan's legislature for 23 days (Rowen 2015).
14. While organs in EAM are defined in terms of their functional activities and their relations with other organs and textures of the body, biomedicine focuses on their fixed somatic structures and accordingly seeks an a priori cause susceptible to isolation and treatment. So to speak, biomedicine subscribes to a 'correspondence theory of truth' (Pin-Fat 2019) in which organs exist independent of human knowledge about them; its account is true as long as the essence of organ-objects is described in positivist rigour. Informed by its relational ontology and a non-positivistic empiricist notion of image (Kim 2017), EAM emphasises processes over fixed entities and the function over the physical mechanism. Our purpose is not to compare which medicine's truth claims are more convincing but to invite readers to go beyond the established epistemic horizon. Just as biomedicine can identify the pancreas and the adrenal glands unrecognised in EAM, EAM can identify the Triple Burner and the Meridians (essential for acupuncture and herbology) unrecognised in biomedicine.
15. This is not to imply that such Buddhist exchanges can replace other forms of cross-Strait exchanges for restoring some balance to the China–Taiwan body. Nor is our case study the first to discuss how healing fits into Buddhist concerns and practices. See Salguero (2014) for a useful literature review on the connections between Buddhism and medicine in East Asian history. Shimizu and Noro (2021) explicitly draw on Mahāyāna Buddhist medicine for IR theorising and conflict transformation.
16. EAM principles of treatment consist of the *yin–yang*, Hot–Cold, Full–Empty dynamics. Excess of *yang*: clear Heat. Deficiency of *yang*: tonify *yang*. Excess of *yin*: expel Cold. Deficiency of *yin*: nourish *yin*. Empty–Cold: expel Cold, tonify and warm *yang*. Empty–Heat: clear Heat, nourish *yin* (Maciocia 2015, 423).
17. With the exception of the three mini-links, direct cross-Strait trade was prohibited, and sea and air transport had to go through a third place such as Hong Kong until May 2008.
18. Fo Guang Shan and Tzu Chi are not permitted to engage in religious activities in China. In fact, they consciously downplay their religious dimensions so as to accommodate their local conditions. Fo Guang Shan is registered in China as a cultural and education institution, whereas Tzu Chi is formally a charity institution and mainly works on disaster relief and environmental protection.
19. The Buddhist quest to dissolve one's self shaped Nishida Kitaro's thought of nothingness and formed the foundation of the Kyoto School of Philosophy (Shimizu 2015).
20. There are three types of Tzu Chi membership. Long-term donors are qualified as regular members. To become a commissioner, one must undertake a two-year cultivation programme. Those who merely take part in volunteer activities can register as volunteers. As of 2019, the number of Tzu Chi's commissioners had reached 89,951, with more than two million regular members worldwide. Tzu Chi only recruits volunteers in China and the number is around 6000 volunteers (Tzu Chi Foundation 2019b, 543).
21. The first author was able to observe the sixth anniversary celebration of Tzu Chi's headquarters and outpatient centre in Suzhou City (9 September 2018). Local people were welcome to join the event and the centre provided free health check-ups and medical treatments such as ear acupuncture. The representative of Suzhou Taiwan Affairs Office and some local officials were present to deliver the opening remarks. The first author was intrigued by an episode where a

mainland Chinese doctor, serving as the consultant of the centre, sang a Taiwanese song to the audience, even though the doctor could not actually speak Taiwanese (derived from Minnan dialects in southern Fujian Province). Upon enquiry, the doctor replied that he wanted to show the 'intimacy of the cross-strait family'.

22. By communitarianism, we refer to an interdependent orientation pursuing common good. In our understanding of Mahāyāna Buddhism, self-transcendence is a means, and the reduction of human suffering is an end.
23. The image of health in EAM is about balance and harmony. Whether a person is healthy or not is not based on a given state measured by pre-determined quantifiable standards. Rather, the key is to understand all the observable functions and relationships as manifestations of this concrete human life so as to identify and treat a disharmony within these functions and relationships (Kaptchuk 2000, 75–77). Accordingly, the health of China–Taiwan is not judged from the extent to which they conform to pre-existing standards of 'democracy' or 'socialism', but from how much they can appreciate their 'co-dependent arising'.

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