Mindful Authoring through Invocation: Leaders' Constitution of a Spiritual Organization

Boris H. J. M. Brummans[1], Jennie M. Hwang[1], and Pauline Hope Cheong[2]

Abstract

This article examines how those who hold leadership positions in an internationally renowned Taiwanese Buddhist humanitarian organization establish themselves as legitimate authors of their organization by invoking a spiritual leader in their daily interactions and use this invocation to author their organization with a shared sense of compassion and wisdom. In so doing, this article extends the literature on mindful organizing and offers practical insights into the cultivation of mindfulness in an organizational setting. In particular, this study underscores the importance of understanding how a spiritual organization is communicatively constituted by voicing a revered figure into everyday situations, illustrating the profound connections between voice, invocation, and vocation.

[1]Université de Montréal, Montréal, QC, Canada
[2]Arizona State University, Phoenix, AZ, USA

Corresponding Author:
Boris H. J. M. Brummans, Département de Communication, Université de Montréal, C.P. 6128 succursale Centre-ville, Montréal, QC, H3C 3J7, Canada.
Email: boris.brummans@umontreal.ca

What is mindful organizing, why is this important, and how can it be practiced in organizational contexts? In these turbulent socioeconomic times, it is essential to develop ways of managing organizations that account for what Weick and Putnam (2006) call "the inevitability of suffering" involved in trying to reaccomplish order as it "keeps rising and falling, appearing and disappearing, forming and dissolving" (p. 283). Almost forty years ago, the celebrated economist E. F. Schumacher (1973) indicated that principles derived from Buddhist philosophy may help organizations deal with the countless forms of impermanence inherent in modern life. Following this line of thought, several contemporary scholars (e.g., Gray, 2007; Kernochan, McCormick, & White, 2007; Weick, 2009; Weick & Putnam, 2006) have suggested that studying "mindful organizing" (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006), conceived from a Buddhist perspective as the "diminished dependence on concepts, increased focus on sources of distraction, and greater reliance on acts with meditative properties" (Weick & Putnam, 2006, p. 275), may illuminate how an organization can be managed by taking impermanence and nonattachment to conceptual distinctions like "self," "other," "us," "them," as points of departure rather than as things to combat.

The problem is that we have little insight into the ways in which Buddhist mindfulness can inform the management of an actual organization. To clarify, Buddhist mindfulness differs from Ellen Langer's often-cited conception of mindfulness as "the process of drawing novel distinctions" (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000a, p. 1; see also Langer, 1989, 1992; Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000b). According to Langer and Moldoveanu (2000a, pp. 1-2), "Actively drawing these distinctions keeps us situated in the present" and "makes us more aware of the context and perspective of our actions than if we rely upon distinctions and categories drawn in the past": "Under this latter situation, rules and routines are more likely to govern our behavior, irrespective of the current circumstances, and this can be construed as mindless behavior." Hence, Langer's work focuses more on the *reduction of mindlessness* caused by relying on past categories, acting routinely, and fixating on a single perspective, rather than on the *cultivation of mindfulness*.

For Buddhist scholars and practitioners, cultivating mindfulness implies becoming aware of our desire to "self-produce" and our tendency to make sense of what is going on by clinging to a fixed sense of self in relation to others—other people, animals, inanimate objects, or our environment. By viewing our selves as territories that need to be defended and expanded, we attempt to impose conceptual distinctions on a world that is forever changing because it is made up of numerous interdependencies. Buddhists believe that this self-clinging leads to suffering by creating negative emotions like jealousy, anger, or sadness. Thus, in contrast with Langer's view, they see the self's drawing of distinctions, even if they are novel, as the *cause* of our suffering, since it cuts

us off from the world of interdependencies that constitutes us. From this perspective, Buddhist mindful organizing centers on improving the well-being of organizational members and nonmembers by cultivating the aforementioned awareness to alleviate the negative emotions that result from "attempts to create order [by] freez[ing] a dynamic reality into something that people can cling to" (Weick & Putnam, 2006, p. 276).

Besides Langer's experimental research on the potential benefits of reducing mindless behavior in organizational settings (see Kawamaki, White, & Langer, 2000) and Weick's work on the importance of "collective mind" through "heedful interrelating" in High Reliability Organizations, which draws on and extends Langer's research (see Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006), few studies have examined the phenomenon of Buddhist mindful organizing as we are conceiving it here (for an exception, see Brummans & Hwang, 2010). Furthermore, while Weick and Putnam's (2006) theoretical and largely speculative work provides a valuable starting point for our research, these authors focus on the potential benefits of individual meditative practices in organizational contexts without explicating or offering empirical insights into the ways mindfulness can inform the communicative constitution of an organization.

To address these limitations, this article examines how an organization whose philosophy is expressly Buddhist is mindfully "authored" (Taylor, 2011, 2012; Taylor & Van Every, 2011) by its leaders in the course of their daily interactions. As we will show, leaders' invocation of (calling upon, imploring, or appealing to) a revered figure, such as a spiritual teacher, plays a pivotal role in this authoring and illustrates the profound connections between voice, invocation, and vocation. By studying invocation, this article thus offers organizational scholars a useful communicative view of mindful organizing and deepens the literature on this subject. Moreover, it provides practitioners with detailed accounts of management practices that cultivate organizational members' awareness of their and others' desire for individual "selfness" and the effects of this awareness on interactions.

To position our research, we will review the literature on authority and introduce the notion of "authoring" an organization. After this, we will explicate our idea of "mindfully authoring through invocation," describe the nonprofit we studied to investigate this phenomenon and the methods we used, and then present our findings. To conclude, we will discuss the implications of our work for organizational communication research and practice.

Authoring an Organization

While the term "authority" is bandied about frequently in organizational life, it remains an elusive concept. As Benoit-Barné and Cooren (2009, pp. 5-6) observed, it "is a key principle of political organization, manifest in the

writings of political thinkers such as Aristotle, Hobbes, Machiavelli, and Arendt." We also find it "in the writings of modern sociologists (Sennett, 1980; Weber, 1922/1968), in management theory (Boström, 2006; Casey, 2004; Fayol, 1916/1949; Gilman, 1982; Hoogenboom & Ossewaarde, 2005; Kahn & Kram, 1994), and in rhetorical theory (Farrell, 1993; J. M. Murphy, 2000)." Hence, authority is "a fundamental feature of our human capacity to act in concert, whether with regard to the basis of government, the establishment of social bonds, the process of organizing, or the sustenance of communal life through rhetoric" (Benoit-Barné & Cooren, 2009, p. 6).

Looking at the literature on authority, we see that this rich and multidimensional concept has been studied in various ways, ranging from static to dynamic conceptualizations, with different analytic foci (Cheong, 2013). Weber's (1947) classic formulation of authority, for example, descriptively categorizes authority into ideal types termed as "traditional," "legal-rational," and "charismatic" authority, which are justified by various forms of legitimation. Respectively, authority is said to arise from sacred tradition, appointment to a superior office, and perceived charisma of being instilled with divine or supernatural powers.

Yet authority has also been studied in more relational and emergent terms (see Benoit-Barné & Cooren, 2009; Cheong, Huang, & Poon, 2011a, 2011b; Taylor, 2011, 2012; Taylor & Van Every, 2011). In particular, scholars advocating a focus on the communicative constitution of organizations have argued that authority is an integral part of daily interactions and enables people to work out a sense of "negotiated order" (Strauss, 1978). In this case, authority is accomplished through discourse that not merely describes or reports (a constative view of communication) but impels and establishes precedence or hierarchy (a performative view of communication), where role and status distinctions are sustained and contested in ongoing negotiations (Taylor, 2011, 2012). The analytic focus shifts, in this case, to how the organization is authored (from the Latin *augere*, "to cause to grow" or "to increase") by "composing" it as a collective object of value in the course of interactions (Taylor, 2011).

As Taylor and Van Every (2011) explain, an organization is authored through the interplay between conversation and textualization. This authoring happens by making different sources of authority (rules, principles, protocols, policies, documents, people, the organization itself) present through the use of speech and text in interactions, which, in turn, affects how situations unfold (Benoit-Barné & Cooren, 2009). These acts of "presentification" (Cooren, 2006) play an important role in the negotiation of order. They shape organizational members' collective understanding of what "the" organization is, its *raison d'être*, who is allowed to speak in its name or on its behalf

(Cooren & Taylor, 1997), who is supposed to do what, and so forth. From this constitutive point of view, the term "authority" refers to the extent to which someone or some thing influences the co-construction of this collective understanding. This influence does not reside *in* people or things, but is an effect that needs to be accomplished, again and again, by calling upon different sources of authority and bringing them into play in the enactment of situations. Authority is thus a phenomenon of plural and hybridized effects of presence(s) and absence(s), as these sources need not be physically present in the same locale (Fairhurst & Cooren, 2009).

Mindful Authoring Through Invocation

What the literature on the discursive and transactive nature of authority suggests is the importance of invocation (from the Latin *invocare*, literally meaning "to call in") or the calling upon, imploring, or appealing to rules, principles, people, etc. in the authoring of an organization. To be more precise, acts of invocation are central to the establishment of "thirdness," which Taylor (2012) describes as follows:

> It is Charles Sanders Peirce (1955) who deals best with the origin of coherent collective activity, the rules that make a division of labor possible. *Firstness*, he proposed, is what is simply *there*, a potentiality and nothing more until it has become a focus of human preoccupation and concern. That preoccupation with, and action on, is *secondness* . . . The action, however, is meaningless until it is informed by an understanding of what the linking means, a semantic interpretation of the event and its meaning that only language affords . . . ; This then becomes the instrumentality that supports a collaborative effort by A and B, confronted with X, now seen as an end to be accomplished in collaboration. That is *thirdness*. Peirce thinks of the third as interpretation; by adding an organizational dimension, we see it slightly differently as where authority resides, since it is the commonality of a perception of what they are doing, and why, that makes it possible for two (or more) people to work together, productively, to organize . . . It is the authority of thirdness that constructs roles, and targets, and underpins the expertise in manipulating technology, that thereby leads to an activity . . . and authenticates the roles that people play in their collaboration. (p. 9, italics in original)

In the context of religious or spiritual organizations, revered figures, such as deities, people, or canonical scriptures, "become the instrumentality that supports a collaborative effort." Organizational members' collective interpretation of these figures enables them to develop "the commonality of a perception of what they are doing, and why, that makes it possible . . . to organize." By invoking these figures through speech and text in interactions, they

become inscribed or voiced into members' authoring of the organization. They come to embody or "incarnate" (Brummans, 2011; Brummans & Cooren, 2011; Cooren, 2006) the thirdness that guides the sensemaking of those who enact the organization. Members therefore do not constitute their spiritual organization by merely speaking or acting in its name, but by calling or writing these revered figures into their daily practices. In other words, these invocational acts enable revered figures to author the organization's thirdness *through* members' speech, actions, and ways of being. However, they also enable members to speak, act, and be *through* these figures by providing them with a legitimate basis for participating in this authoring. Differences in authority between members are established, in turn, based on whether members are regarded as skilful, knowledgeable, and rightful interpreters of the organization's revered figures.

In line with these observations, invocation plays a central role in Buddhist practice. It implies visualizing, bringing to mind, or calling upon an enlightened being (a Buddha, deity, or dharma master). The aim of this practice is to generate inspiration and become increasingly mindful of the detrimental effects of clinging to selfness in an impermanent world as well as to develop compassion and wisdom to help others accomplish this same aspiration (Berzin, 2000/2010; Dorje, 2001). As Ogyen Trinley Dorje (2011), the 17th Gyalwa Karmapa, explained in a recent speech,

> In Buddhism, we talk about the Buddhas and their sons and daughters, Bodhisattvas, and the importance of recalling or bringing to our minds, again and again, the noble and excellent qualities of their body, speech, and mind, and use that recollection as a stepping stone to further inspire ourselves to emulate them in body, speech, and mind, so that we can bring more benefit to ourselves and to others . . . In general, as students of Buddhism, we enter into the teachings, we connect with a spiritual friend or spiritual master, and then we endeavor to accomplish the instructions that he or she gives us as best as we can for the benefit of both ourselves and others. But I think the truest and most powerful form of spiritual instruction is the life example of the masters themselves.

As living examples of the Dharma (literally meaning "the way things are"), dharma masters are thus seen as manifestations or personifications of compassion and wisdom who guide beings on their path to enlightenment, and invoking these masters enables people to emulate their example in body, speech, and mind.

Because invocation is so fundamental to Buddhist practice, investigating how Buddhist mindfulness is used to author the co-construction of an organization's thirdness by inscribing or voicing a spiritual teacher into interactions provides useful empirical insights into the communicative dynamics of

mindful organizing. It allows us to understand how people negotiate order through their collective sensemaking of a dharma master's speech, actions, and ways of being. More specifically, our focus on mindful authoring through invocation enables us to study how those who hold leadership positions in a Buddhist organization establish themselves as skillful, knowledgeable, and rightful interpreters of a master's body, speech, and mind, which provides them with a legitimate basis for authoring the organization in ways that are collectively considered to be mindful. Hence, to gain in-depth insight into the role of invocational practices in the enactment of an actual Buddhist organization, we explored the following research questions:

RQ1: How does the invocation of a dharma master enable those who hold leadership positions in a Buddhist organization to establish themselves as the organization's legitimate authors?

RQ2: How do leaders use this invocation to author their organization in ways that are collectively considered to be mindful?

Methods

To provide informed responses to these questions, we interviewed and observed people who hold leadership positions in the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation in Taiwan. Tzu Chi is the largest nongovernmental charity organization in The Republic of China (Taiwan) in terms of funds spent to help people in need (Laliberté, 2003) with millions of trained volunteers and numerous paid employees in Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas (see Brummans & Hwang, 2010; Huang, 2009; O'Neill, 2010). Moreover, its charismatic leader and founder, Master Cheng Yen, is one of the most prominent dharma masters on the island and has received both national and international awards for her humanitarian efforts (e.g., she was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993). What is perhaps most important, however, is that by focusing on putting Buddhism into action in Taiwan and the rest of the world, the organization distinguishes itself from traditional Buddhist organizations that emphasize the study of canons, the practice of sacred rituals, and individual meditation. Hence, Tzu Chi provides an exceptionally suitable case for investigating how a social collectivity engages in its own form of Buddhist mindful organizing to advance global well-being.

Inspired by the "humanizing Buddhism" (Soung, 2006) or "humanistic Buddhism" (Huang, 2009) of her own spiritual teacher, Master Yin Shun, the nun Cheng Yen founded Tzu Chi as a "volunteer-based, spiritual, and welfare

organization" (Tzu Chi Foundation, 2011a) in 1966, believing that Buddhism should be put to use in society to alleviate spiritual poverty and material deprivation, which are the main causes of human suffering. Over the past 40 years, Tzu Chi members have enacted Cheng Yen's belief by implementing four missions: providing charity; medical care (e.g., through Tzu Chi general hospitals); education (e.g., through Tzu Chi schools); and "culture," that is, humanistic values and community volunteerism (e.g., through publications like *Tzu Chi Monthly*, books, audio CDs, DVDs, and satellite radio and television programs broadcasted worldwide by Da Ai ("Great Love") TV, which is part of the Da Ai Cultural and Humanitarian Centre in Guandu). Another recent goal is to engage in environmental protection (e.g., through running recycling stations). Moreover, the organization is widely known for its international disaster relief projects in countries ranging from Bangladesh to Ethiopia, as well as its bone marrow registry in Taiwan. The Mandarin word *cíjì* ("compassion relief") sums up the organization's "Eight Footprints" and captures its overall mantra, as described on Tzu Chi's official website:

> The shared goal of Tzu Chi volunteers is to cultivate sincerity, integrity, faith, and honesty within while exercising kindness, compassion, joy, and selflessness to humanity through concrete actions. Transcending the bounds of race, nationality, language, and religion, they serve the world under the notion that "when others are hurting, we feel their pain; when others suffer, we feel their sorrow." Not only do the volunteers endeavor to promote the universal value of "Great Love," they also fully employ the humanitarian spirit of Chinese culture to its utmost. Tzu Chi Foundation's "Four Major Missions" consist of Charity, Medicine, Education, and Humanity. Furthermore, considering ongoing efforts in Bone Marrow Donation, Environmental Protection, Community Volunteerism, and International Relief, these eight concurrent campaigns are collectively known as "Tzu Chi's Eight Footprints." (Tzu Chi Foundation, 2011b, para. 2)

Tzu Chi's form of mindful organizing thus involves doing humanitarian work as "a means to help those in need, and also [as] a way to open the eyes of . . . volunteer[s] to the harsher side of life, so that through giving, they may find spiritual happiness and life's true meaning" (Tzu Chi Foundation, 2007).

Data Collection

The research for this article is part of a larger three-year, multidisciplinary, naturalistic study (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; see also Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), and which looks at various aspects of Buddhist mindful organizing. This ongoing investigation was preceded by nine months of

extensive archival and literature research, and a four-week preliminary field study conducted in Taiwan in the summer of 2007 (see Brummans & Hwang, 2010).

For this preliminary study, the first and second author conducted interviews with ten directors or senior managers of various parts of the large Tzu Chi organization, such as the Foundation Headquarters in Hualien, "Jing Si Abode" (the central convent where Master Cheng Yen resides most of her time together with approximately 115 nuns), and the Taipei Tzu Chi General Hospital. All interviews were semi-structured, audio-recorded, and mainly conducted by the second author whose native language is Mandarin Chinese. To complement the interviews, we observed, as non-participants and (occasionally) participants (see Spradley, 1980), small group meetings of volunteers, a volunteer training day, performances by children participating in a youth camp, work activities at Da Ai, as well as interactions in one of the editorial rooms, the Hualien and Taipei hospitals, one of the recycling stations, and Tzu Chi university in Hualien. Some of these interactions were video-recorded. Whenever this was not possible because people objected to being filmed or because we felt it was too intrusive, we reverted to taking detailed fieldnotes.

To investigate how leaders establish themselves as Tzu Chi's legitimate authors by invoking Master Cheng Yen in their daily interactions (RQ1) and how they use this invocation to author the co-construction of their organization's thirdness in mindful ways (RQ2), we conducted an in-depth study of people who hold leadership positions in Da Ai. To start, the first author conducted participant observation for three weeks as a volunteer in Da Ai's Foreign Language Department in the fall of 2010. This allowed him to observe and experience everyday work interactions, such as meetings, lunches, and informal conversations. During this time, he also conducted a number of informal interviews with the department's director and employees, which were recorded by taking fieldnotes.

This fieldwork was followed by a more extensive four-week study in the summer of 2011 consisting of in-depth face-to-face interviews with twelve directors or senior managers of Da Ai's various departments (which averaged 60 min) and observations of several events, including the preparations for a large theatrical adaptation of a well-known Buddhist text, called the "Water Repentance Sutra." These interviews were semi-structured, audio-recorded, and mainly conducted in Mandarin Chinese. Interviewees were asked to reflect on their management practices in view of their use of traditional and new media, their motivations to work for Tzu Chi, and the role of Master Cheng Yen in their work.

To conclude, during each fieldwork trip to Taiwan, we organized audio-recorded debriefing sessions after our visits to Tzu Chi. In addition, we kept

individual fieldwork journals to capture our personal experiences in our own words, provide preliminary interpretations of events and interactions, and reflect on our emerging relationships with the people we were studying. Hence, we mainly used these fieldnotes to keep track of our own sensemaking processes along the course of our naturalistic inquiry (see Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995/2011).

Data Analysis

All recorded materials were transcribed and, where necessary, translated into English. We included relevant nonverbal and contextual cues in our transcripts to enable a detailed analysis of leaders' communicative practices. Subsequently, we used thematic analysis to make sense of our data.

Thematic analysis is a popular type of inductive analysis that provides an appropriate method for systematically uncovering structural or thematic aspects in accounts of lived experience (see Lindlof, 1995; Ryan & Bernhard, 2003). In our thematic analysis we relied on the open, axial, and selective coding techniques that Strauss and Corbin (1990; see also Corbin & Strauss, 2008) outline in their explication of grounded theory, as these techniques provide a robust set of well-tested analytical procedures for developing in-depth insights into a phenomenon. Through open coding, we individually compared and contrasted events, actions, and interactions while repeatedly reading through our transcripts and fieldwork journal entries. This repeated reading enabled us to identify recurring points of reference in the data, such as "compelling incidents, sequences of action, repetitive acts, and other critical details that inform[ed our] understanding of the scene" (Lindlof, 1995, pp. 219-220). Based on discussions of our individual analyses, we then looked for the regularity with which these points of reference resurfaced. This process enabled us to define conceptually similar categories or themes, like similarities in the ways Tzu Chi leaders called upon Master Cheng Yen in their accounts or interactions as well as similarities in their reference to the Master to account for their organizing practices. In turn, axial coding allowed us to check these themes against our data and to uncover conceptual relationships between leaders' invocation as a *sens pratique*, their communicative establishment of authority, and their engagement in specific mindful organizing practices. During the final stage (referred to as "selective coding" by Strauss and Corbin [1990]), we used the notion of invocation as the core concept for integrating our themes, thus progressively "filling in" our results with descriptive detail in order to describe and explain the central role of leaders' invocational practices in Tzu Chi's mindful authoring (see next section).

Tzu Chi Leaders' Mindful Authoring Through Invocation

Leaders' Establishment as Tzu Chi's Legitimate Authors Through Invocation

What may strike any newcomer to Tzu Chi is how omnipresent Master Cheng Yen is, even though she mainly resides in Hualien. When entering Tzu Chi buildings, the charismatic nun can be seen on posters and photos, on book covers and pamphlets, in Da Ai television programs on TV sets overhanging hallways; and most importantly, her voice can be heard everywhere, as if it were filling the organization throughout (First author's fieldwork journal, July 15, 2007). However, this omnipresence is not something that appears by itself. It is constituted through the people and things that make Tzu Chi what it is and enact it through their daily interactions.

What is also surprising is how naturally Tzu Chi leaders (as well as other employees and volunteers) speak of the Master, refer to her, and quote her speeches, texts, or the interpersonal interactions they have had with her. Hence, the words *shàng rén* ("Master Cheng Yen") can be heard frequently in conversations (First author's fieldwork journal, August 31, 2010). Furthermore, after spending some time in the organization, it becomes clear that Tzu Chi leaders do not only invoke their Master by emulating the content of her speech but also her speaking style (paced, fairly slow, thoughtful, without strong emotional outbursts), and even her body movements and demeanor (calm, graceful, yet confident) (First author's fieldwork journal, August 31, 2010).

Tzu Chi leaders' invocational sense does not develop over night. It is a practical sense that emerges in interactions, and leaders' authoring of Tzu Chi by directing everyday organizing processes depends largely on the degree to which they master this sense. Thus, by having regular interpersonal interactions with the Master, attending her teachings and speeches, reading her books, and interacting with fellow organizational members, leaders learn to embody the Master's philosophy, which makes it appear as if their invocational acts are second nature.

The Da Ai Media Operations Department Manager we interviewed exemplified how this invocational *sens pratique* is born in interactions with the Master and colleagues:

> If everybody walks in the same step, the power is very strong . . . This year, I requested Master to come to Guandu [where Da Ai is located] and have a heart-to-heart talk with all the managers . . . If this is Master, I sat right here [pointing to indicate his proximity to the Master], just a few people sitting on little stools and talking . . . I told Master that sometimes I feel tired in my heart. Because . . . this

is not like managing a commercial TV station, you need to love this work, but not everybody feels the same . . . So it's difficult, you tell them the philosophy, and they say: "No, no, no, don't tell me about it!" But you need them to do their work. So sometimes you will feel very tired . . . But Master answered that she will feel tired *too*. But she knows how to be *gǎn ēn* [Mandarin for "thankful" or "grateful," and an often-used expression in Tzu Chi]. As soon as you think about this word, you no longer feel tired . . . Because we expect a lot from the people we work with at Da Ai, which means that they also need us. So we need to be grateful.

As this manager's account indicates, acquiring the mentioned *sense pratique* implies learning to recall and call upon the Master's compassion and wisdom when dealing with the difficulties of actual work situations. As he says, getting organizational members to walk "in the same step" can be challenging, if not disheartening, especially in a nonprofit organization that strongly depends on volunteers of all walks of life. His account shows how a specific interaction with the Master provides him with guidelines for putting challenges like these into a broader perspective so that they become personal opportunities for helping others and improving himself. That is, the Master reminded him of the interdependent nature of reality, which is central to Buddhist philosophy, by bringing his attention (and the attention of other people who attended the meeting in Guandu) to the importance of being grateful in moments of fatigue and discouragement.

As we frequently observed in informal conversations and in our interviews, Tzu Chi leaders regard these simple yet personal interactions as extremely meaningful and useful. Every meeting with Master Cheng Yen, however brief, becomes a significant, memorable event—and when they recount it, it is as if they are reliving their interaction with the same intensity and emotion (e.g., note how the manager restages his interaction by describing his proximity to her, the stools, etc.). Like this manager, most of the people we interviewed and observed expressed similar feelings of being "very touched by the Master" (First author's fieldwork journal, September 1, 2010), admiring her, and feeling privileged to have regular interpersonal interactions with her. These meetings turn their work into instances that encourage them to improve themselves and others by becoming more mindful of the innumerable interdependencies that make their everyday organizing volatile, yet also purposeful.

The Da Ai Media Operations Department Manager's account also illustrates that the development of this invocational *sens pratique* is not a smooth, uncontested process, but one that involves continuous self-questioning and self-reflection vis-à-vis/in the midst of the challenges of organizational life. By recalling the Master's actions, words, and way of being, again and again, he creates calibration points that enable him to navigate organizational life and to learn to emulate her.

The struggles involved in trying to emulate the Master are further illustrated by the Director of the Da Ai News Department, who abides by one of the Master's often-cited mantras, "Use love to manage; abide by the system of self-discipline":

> When I came to work for Tzu Chi seventeen years ago, my work, now I look at it, I would say it was extremely bad . . . But Master still said: "Oh, you did a good job." Yes, so that's so embracive! . . . So I try to be positive in the same way when I work. Because sometimes you will be angry, ((laughing)) because I am *not* Master . . . Because sometimes you will be frustrated: "Why do you do that? I taught you already!" But Master never does that. She always encourages you: "You did a good job," "Thank you for your hard work," "I appreciate you." Yeah, so we are learning. We're learning the spirit. We're learning the way to face our team, yeah, but it's difficult ((laughing)).

Through her account, this director explains that during her many years at Tzu Chi, she has endeavored to be as compassionate and appreciative as the Master in her own work while maintaining the high standards she sets for herself as a professional. The fact that she defines herself as "*not* Master" suggests that she regards herself as a student and that the Master serves as a source of continuous inspiration. The Master is thus seen as a mirror that enables her to face the limitations of her own self-conception in relation to others. As the next interview excerpt shows, interpersonal interactions with the Master are of vital importance for her practice of mindfulness, cultivated through her continuous reflection on her relationships with others—as we saw in the Media Operations Department Manager's account, too:

> I learned how to be a manager, how to be a team leader . . . The Chinese believe that you should not trouble others, but take care of your own business . . . Also, my personality is such that I don't like to keep talking to people, discussing everything, and communicating all the time. So this is a big lesson I need to learn. I still remember when I was about to take this position, I told Master: "My personality is not really suited for this position." But Master explained and shared her experience, saying that more than forty years ago, she founded Tzu Chi. She was also very young and had no experience. Her personality is also not well-suited for being in big crowds. So she told me to learn . . . We talked face-to-face for more than one hour and a half. ((smiling)) Well, most of the time she was talking and I was listening . . . So I took this job. Therefore, what I have to learn is how to improve myself . . . to work with everybody, discuss with everybody . . . to encourage the team so that they are on the same page to achieve our goals.

Here, the director draws strength and confidence from a recent conversation with the Master to deal with management challenges. Her new job requires

her to be more team-oriented than she is accustomed to and to be much more available and present publicly than she would like to be. Being a good leader, she indicates, implies stepping out of one's comfort zone, being open to other people and situations, and putting effort into bringing out the best in others and oneself. Although this process is, as repeatedly mentioned throughout the interview, "difficult," invoking the Master and trying to emulate her helps her to keep this ideal in mind, suggesting that invocation allows the Master's authorial presence to transcend long after their face-to-face encounter.

Accounts like these may create the impression that Tzu Chi leaders' invocational sense only emerges through self-reflection in light of personal interactions with the Master. However, other accounts show that this sense also develops through reflection on and during interactions with others, such as Tzu Chi volunteers or other employees. The Director of the Da Ai Programming Department illustrated this by describing her experiences with rehearsing for the theatrical adaptation of the "Water Repentance Sutra," where she felt "pushed around" by other volunteers:

> The first thought that pops in your mind is probably: "This is so annoying!" But the second thought is that you want to resolve this right away. You know what? This is what Master said: "Sometimes you have to step up to be the leader, but sometimes you need to follow others." No problem! Yes, therefore you have to . . . be able to "stretch and bend" in any situation . . . If you always want to be the boss, it will be difficult to get things done . . . Therefore, if I were to apply this idea to my own team, this means that if there is just one person with some good points, then you should keep magnifying his good points, praising or encouraging him, giving him credit . . . Here [in Tzu Chi] it means everything is a process that focuses on participation. But you shouldn't be so preoccupied with results, how it is going to be. I heard from other [Tzu Chi] sisters, they said that in Tzu Chi, striving for success is natural, but to be successful without anybody knowing who did it, that's the real art.

This director shows how central the Master's philosophy is to her reflections on her interactions with others. While invoking the Master, she explains that leading people is not about clinging to one's own fixed sense of self and being attached to receiving credit for one's own accomplishments but about bringing out the qualities of everyone involved and being sensitive to what a situation requires. As she said later on in the interview, it is a matter of "shrinking yourself to a nano-level" (one of the Master's aphorisms, many of which can be found in Cheng Yen's two-volume book *Still Thoughts*, see Cheng Yen, 1993, 1996), that is, of not being narrowly focused on oneself (one's "ego") or on immediate results, but rather to concentrate on making everyone excel in the whole participation process. More specifically, this

excerpt shows how invoking another aphorism ("Sometimes you have to step up to be the leader, but sometimes you need to follow others") leads this manager to reflect on the experience of being "pushed around" and directed by other people—"common folks," as she called them. In so doing, she transforms this seemingly ordinary (and potentially very annoying) event into a moment of realization that helps her to look at her role as a leader from a broader perspective.

In sum, what these findings illustrate is that Tzu Chi's mindful authoring implies being aware of one's own feelings, desires, intentions, and views as they emerge in interactions with others, and voicing or inscribing this awareness into organizing processes as they are enacted through ongoing interactions. Developing a sense for invoking Master Cheng Yen plays a central role in the cultivation of this mindfulness. By bringing her to mind, mentioning her name, quoting her, and even carrying oneself (one's voice and body) like her during conversations, presentations, etc., she is made present as a continuous source of authority who arbitrates this relationship between self and other; yet these practices also enable leaders to establish themselves as legitimate authors of Tzu Chi's thirdness. Hence, while the Tzu Chi leaders we observed and interviewed are experts in their professional fields and use this expertise and their official organizational position as sources of authority, their influence depends largely on how skilled they are in invoking the Master in daily work situations because it provides them with a legitimate basis for their ways of speaking and acting. How leaders use this invocational sense to author the co-construction of their organization's thirdness in mindful ways we will describe in further detail in the next section.

Leaders' Mindful Authoring Through Invocation

Our fieldwork observations of leaders' interactions and their accounts of management practices are rife with examples of how invocation allows leaders to author Tzu Chi in ways that are collectively considered to be mindful. For instance, the Director of Da Ai's Foreign Language Department works with a team of translators (paid employees and ad hoc volunteers) to produce the English subtitles of the Master's daily morning speech for Da Ai's evening news. She described her management practices as follows:

> Every day, when I listen to her [during the Master's morning speech], I will watch her very mindfully because her expressions and gestures will tell you something . . . And the things she says, I will try to dig for more information. And sometimes when I really don't understand what she means, I will call the Abode [Jing Si Abode in Hualien] and ask other monastic disciples of Master who are close to her:

"Do you know why Master said this?" Because something might have happened that gives her that feeling . . . So every day, I always share this with my team members, that you don't ask *what* Master said today, that's not the question; you have to ask, what Master *wants to say* today . . . So you have to catch that . . . It took me about . . . 6 months and during those 6 months, I worked very, very hard . . . I read her books, I watched her speak, I wanted to be familiar with her, and I went back to Hualien to follow her . . . And I watched Da Ai TV . . . Yeah, so I tried to pick up gradually.

Here we see how this organizational leader uses the gradual development of her own invocational sense to inscribe the Master into her team members' translation efforts. This passage shows how much time and effort has gone into the development of her invocational sense, which gives her the confidence to decipher or "know" the Master's message. In other words, this sense allows her to see herself as someone who is able to make the Master's message present in a way she believes to be accurate and faithful, and her leadership focuses on instilling this same sense in her team members. As she explained,

Usually I lead by example . . . Words don't work. For the new employees, I will let them translate an event which is more straightforward, and when they get more familiar with the Master's ideas, I will let them start doing a little part of the spiritual stuff [i.e., the Master's reference to Buddhist canonical texts] . . . And sometimes I will call a meeting and ask the senior [team] members to share their experiences. Because when I speak, they will think: "Oh, you are the boss" . . . But if you ask team members to share, they are more willing to accept . . . And I let them edit each other's translation . . . so that the editor will be grateful to the translator for doing basic stuff . . . Usually I will start by asking them: "What do you think of this part?" . . . And it's best if they know their problem and they ask. Then you don't have to say anything. You just guide them . . . Because I am a translator myself, so I *know* the path, and you cannot be rushed . . . All I care about is if you have the heart to learn and to work here . . . Can I help you make the work more enjoyable? . . . And every day when we are watching the video [of the Master's morning speech], you can see the changes in everyone. For some, the longer they work here, they will tell me that Master said something really wonderful today, and when I hear that, I'm really happy. ((laughing))

This account illustrates how the director relies on the invocational sense she has developed during her years at Tzu Chi to "lead by example," which means that she aims to demonstrate the Master's compassion and wisdom to team members through her ways of organizing. For her, mindful authoring implies preventing internal strife by highlighting each member's individual strengths, using role switching to let members look at their work from another

point of view, showing patience with the translation process, and emphasizing the importance of enjoying the work and finding meaning in it. What she considers to be the greatest fruit of her labor, though, is when team members become more attuned to the Master's message and thus gain their own invocational *sens pratique*.

Similar principles of mindful authoring surfaced in interviews with other Tzu Chi leaders. For instance, the Da Ai Media Operations Department Manager described how he abided by four principles (eight words in Mandarin Chinese), which the Master taught him before he went to Indonesia (where Islam is the dominant religion) to set up a new Tzu Chi television station:

> How can we tell Muslims to make programs about Buddhism? And how can I get the Muslim employees to trust me? Master told me that in Buddhism there are four principles: giving generously, treating people equally, speaking kindly, and putting what you learn into action. Master just gave me these eight words. Since I knew what needed to be done, I did everything first and let them watch me. So during that time, for a whole month I didn't take a break and we became very, very strong, like brothers and sisters . . . Because the philosophy is different, the culture is different. In the beginning, it was *very* tough. If we have a meeting, and said, "Today we meet at nine o'clock," maybe I would sit there until eleven or twelve o'clock, and they still didn't come . . . So every time I made an appointment or set up a meeting, I would prepare everything and just sit there. But I would *never* be late. As time passed, they would also stop being late . . . So as long as you put the rules and principles into action yourself, people will follow. So Master said, "You just do it first."

The above excerpt shows how this leader used invocation to establish himself as one of Tzu Chi's legitimate authors abroad. It enabled him to overcome the challenges of working in a foreign culture because recalling the Master's words in times of difficulty helped him see the limitations of rigidly holding on to a specific sense of self. Thus, by "giving generously, treating people equally, speaking kindly, and putting what he learned into action," he was able to cut through his self-conceptions and embody or incarnate the Master's principles in his work interactions with people of a different faith and culture.

These four principles were also mentioned by the Director of the Programming Department. According to her, applying these principles in Tzu Chi's management is the "true practice of showing gratitude, respect, and love." As she explained, she tries to put these ideas into practice in her work by not being ostensibly "bossy," consciously breaking down preconceived ideas of hierarchy through leading by example, expressing her care and gratitude to others, and using negativity as an opportunity for improving herself:

So Master says: "Here in Tzu Chi, we use love to manage and abide by the system of self-discipline." . . . "Abide by the system of self-discipline" means that you have to set the example. You have to lead by example. "Use love to manage" means that you need to care for others with love. It is not like the typical top-down managerial attitude. For Master it is the other way around. So . . . in Tzu Chi . . . we seldom call so-and-so "manager," or so-and-so "vice president." We call each other "brothers and sisters." . . . Removing the title but working with each other with respect and love. That is the highest-level! . . . So here it is giving without asking for anything in return. You need to be grateful . . . .It's like the English word "serendipity," right? It's an opportunity, like everything happens due to good karma, even though others look at you miserably, you're scolded, or whatever, you treat it as good karma. Master taught me you can always learn from everything. Even if something fails, you can learn from the failure and realize something, so that it will become a motivation for success.

This director sees herself as someone who inscribes the Master into her work interactions, which makes the Master's authorial presence heard and felt yet also makes the director's own authority present. Together with the accounts of other leaders analyzed in the previous paragraphs, this account suggests that Tzu Chi leaders establish their influence by affirmatively enacting their invocational sense in situations, while at the same time trying to undo themselves of the effects of traditional sources of authority, such as formal roles, hierarchical differences, and expertise. Consequently, they only assert themselves if the situation requires it and try to make space for others by looking for individuals' qualities rather than foibles. Moreover, they take criticism as a learning opportunity and try to be aware of their human tendency to frame situations by narrowly focusing on their own feelings, desires, intentions, and views. As the Director of Da Ai's Internet Radio noted, working at Tzu Chi boils down to being mindful of the interconnections between one's own life and the lives of others:

I think building good relationships is very, very important. It will help to remove the barriers in the ways we do things, conduct ourselves, even in the next life…It is even more important than our work ability. Therefore, Master often tells us, "Organizing an event or activity requires one day of work, but please don't fight with others due to the event. It takes one day to organize an event, but conducting yourself properly takes a lifetime" . . . So cherish each karmic affinity, treat it like it were the only opportunity you have . . . [Therefore,] every morning I wake up, I feel grateful that I can work here in this great environment.

Taken together, our analyses show that leaders are thankful for the challenges involved in mindfully authoring Tzu Chi because carrying out the Master's vision and shaping the co-construction of their organization's

thirdness makes them more aware of life's interdependencies. As we have seen, invoking the Master forms an integral part of navigating this ongoing process since it enables leaders to practice a shared sense of selflessness arising from a collective awareness of the suffering caused by clinging to conceptual distinctions in an impermanent world.

Discussion

Contributions to Organizational Communication Research

In a recent review of management research on religion and organizations, Tracey (2012) noted "that we know relatively little about the dynamics of religious organizational forms or the influence of these forms (and the values and practices that underpin them) on broader social processes and other kinds of organization" (p. 87). As the author suggested, much can be learned from investigating these kinds of organizations, even if religion or spirituality appears to be too far removed from the "business" of nonreligious organizations, such as companies or secular nonprofits. Tracey also noted that the bulk of "the existing literature focuses overwhelmingly on Western Christianity, and seldom examines other faiths or parts of the world" (pp. 88-89). In light of these observations, this article exemplifies the usefulness of studying the constitution of a spiritual organization in an Eastern culture.

First of all, this study demonstrates the value of viewing mindful organizing from a communicative perspective, as this moves us beyond Langer's (1989) Western, individualistic, psychological conception of mindfulness as well as Weick and Putnam's (2006) theoretical speculations about the potential benefits of individual mindfulness meditation in organizational contexts. In turn, our study demonstrates that naturalistic research on mindful authoring through invocation can provide useful empirical insights into the ways leaders of a Buddhist organization transform challenging situations into opportunities for becoming more compassionate and wiser and thus author their organization without "freez[ing] a dynamic reality into something that people can cling to" (Weick & Putnam, 2006, p. 276). This can be accomplished by developing a practical sense for invoking a dharma master in interactions and using this sense to cultivate collective awareness of the detrimental effects of self-fixations so that people enact the organization "fully in contact with the realties and needs of the situation and unencumbered by the strategies of the self centered ego or by preconceptions or methods" (Rosch, 2008, p. 153).

Second, from a broader perspective, our study provides a prime example of a successful "new religious movement" that reflects ongoing "processes of globalization and secularization" (Tracey, 2012, p. 93, referring to Robbins &

Lucas, 2007) by offering valuable insights into an effective organizational translation of Buddhist philosophy that privileges collective action over individual meditative practice and the study of canonical texts. Hence, Tzu Chi can be seen as an "alternative discourse community" in which members have developed a specific counter discourse "of gender, power, and organizing amid cultural and material constraints" (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004, p. 17). While our research did not look at Tzu Chi leaders' micro discursive practices in relation to macro discourses, nor at their ways of "doing" gender, it suggests that Buddhist philosophy can serve as a basis for "feminist organizing" (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004) in a highly patriarchal sociocultural context, such as Taiwan, due to its emphasis on interdependence, impermanence, and selflessness. Of central importance to this kind of organizing is invoking the spectral authority of an inspirational, revered figure in everyday organizational life. What is all the more remarkable in the case of Tzu Chi is that this figure is a woman and that the organization resists traditional masculine forms of organizing, since, historically, Buddhist philosophies have been translated in institutionally masculine (and even sexist) ways (see Gross 1993). What is also surprising is that Tzu Chi's invocational practices make sense in Taiwan's collectivistic, high-context culture and other Asian contexts, such as The Philippines, where Tzu Chi has an active following. However, Tzu Chi's form of mindful organizing is also quite popular in many Western countries, such as the United States (see Huang, 2009), which shows that the Master's spectral presence transcends way beyond Taiwan's borders through the invocational practices we have described.

Third, our article offers important insights for research on the communicative accomplishment of organizational authority. By looking at this phenomenon in the context of a new religious movement like Tzu Chi, our research reveals how vital acts of invocation are in the authoring of an organization, because they enable leaders to shape the ongoing co-construction of thirdness. As indicated, a revered leader embodies the organization's thirdness and thus serves as a continuous point of reference that guides the sensemaking of those who enact the organization. In this case, organizational leaders' invocation of this figure enables the figure to speak and act through their bodies, speech, and minds, yet it also enables them to perform through his or hers.

While a statement like this may seem incredible from a rational, scientific point of view, the fact that invocation plays a central role in the constitution of Tzu Chi leaders' (as well as volunteers' and other employees') day-to-day reality is unquestionable. Scientific/rationalistic objectivity is therefore an unsuitable criterion for judging how valuable invocation is *for them* or for others who regularly engage in similar invocational practices. Some may nonetheless see Tzu Chi's invocational dynamics as a prime example of

Foucault's (1977) bodily inscription, which suggests that bodies are "site[s] where regimes of discourse and power inscribe themselves" (Butler, 1989, p. 601). Our fieldwork suggests, though, that Tzu Chi members delight in "subjecting" themselves to this kind of inscription since doing so provides them with existential meaning and purpose.

In turn, our research suggests a close connection between the concepts of "voice," "invocation," and "vocation," and their role in constituting a spiritual organization. In Tzu Chi's case, invocation does not merely imply speaking and acting in a revered figure's name but trying to speak *in* her voice, using her same discourse, intonation, rhythm, and so on, and acting in ways that are similar to hers. In so doing, invocation allows Tzu Chi leaders to carry out their vocation or "calling" (the etymological meaning of the term "vocation"; see Wrzesniewski et al., 1997; see also Berg, Grant, & Johnson, 2010; Bunderson & Thompson, 2009); it enables them to heed the master's call multimodally, and to constitute a performative link between hearing and voicing her.

As we have shown, this ongoing performance requires time, effort, and dedication. It is not an uncontested process, but involves constant negotiation in which leaders manage tensions between their own sense of self in relation to their sense of the master—and of others, whether volunteers, employees, or people outside the organization. Invoking the Master forces Tzu Chi leaders to cut through their traditional self-conceptions as professionals or managers. By engaging in this practice, they remind themselves of the benefits of nonattachment to conceptual distinctions, which gradually erodes their desire for individual selfness. And through this process of "self-development" or "self-discipline," which entails the *undoing* of this desire, leaders establish themselves as Tzu Chi's rightful authors, again and again, allowing them to compose their organization one interact at a time.

Contributions to Organizational Communication Practice

Research on positive organizational scholarship (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003) and organizational spirituality (Calás & Smircich, 2003) has become increasingly popular. Yet, this research tends to be rather speculative (and ironically also prescriptive; see Fineman, 2006; Sass, 2000). Thus, organizational practitioners are left to "fill in the blanks" in terms of how spiritual philosophies can be used to improve organizations (see also Tracey, 2012). By studying mindful authoring through invocation in the context of an actual organization, we have addressed this issue and provided useful insights for organizational practitioners interested in finding new ways of organizing, grounded in non-Western ideas and principles.

Most importantly, this study deepens our understanding of transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1994) by revealing how a central organizational figure can become a spectral authority (see also Fairhurst & Cooren, 2009) and how invoking this figure enables organizational leaders to accomplish their authority. As we have shown, this figure needs to provide a broad framework for sensemaking (the organization's thirdness) that leaders and followers can work out in their daily lives. This figure's omnipresence therefore depends on leaders' and followers' personal and collective engagement with this framework, which they co-construct and re-enact through invocation—plausibly even after the figure's demise.

Our study also illustrates how developing an invocational sense can help leaders, such as directors or managers, overcome challenges typical to the management of nonprofit organizations, like feeling discouraged by the lack of volunteer participation or smaller remuneration. Extant research shows that nonprofits, which are frequently governed in nontraditional, nonbureaucratic ways, "face significant challenges to their existence, let alone success" due to "ambiguous and diverse goals" and large numbers of "external constituencies" (Lewis, Hamel, & Richardson, 2001, p. 7), resulting in authoring processes that are fraught with difficulties (Lewis, 2005). This article shows how calling upon the spectral authority of an inspirational figure can give leaders a perspective that allows them to deal with these challenges by transcending their selves—and the selves of others. To accomplish this, they infuse the figure's omnipresent compassion and wisdom into their daily management practices through using aphorisms, which are simple yet profoundly meaningful mantras to organizational members, and demonstrating the same compassion and wisdom in their interactions with others.

Suggestions for Future Research

Since our research centered on leaders, future studies will need to pay closer attention to the role of followers or "followership" (see Conrad, 2011) in Buddhist mindful organizing to develop a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon. Moreover, to gain insight into the "transferability" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of our insights to other contexts, future research will need to examine the role of invocational practices in the authoring of other spiritual nonprofits, be they Buddhist, Christian, Islamic, Hindu, Judaist, or other, in different cultural contexts. What will also be useful is to explore the degree to which invocation of a revered figure plays into the constitution of nonprofit and for-profit organizations that do not pursue an expressly religious or spiritual mission. Investigating this question may reveal how spiritual nonspiritual organizations are and how important the study of invocation is for our understanding of organizational life.

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Author Biographies

Boris H. J. M. Brummans (PhD, Texas A&M University, 2004) is an associate professor in the Département de Communication at the Université de Montréal. His research looks at Buddhist mindful organizing in various parts of the world.

Jennie M. Hwang (PhD, University at Buffalo, The State University of New York, 2007) is an invited researcher in the Département de Communication at the Université de Montréal. Her research focuses on the effects of new media on individual health and well-being.

Pauline Hope Cheong (PhD, University of Southern California, 2004) is an associate professor in The Hugh Downs School of Human Communication at Arizona State University. Her research focuses on understanding communication technologies and culture, including how religious communities appropriate digital and social media for the construction of authority and community.