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NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

**SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL
SCIENCES**



**Understanding Buddhist Environmentalism
in Singapore: Explaining how religious
ideas motivate environmental action**

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of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Sociology**

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ABSTRACT

Under conditions of globalization, religious groups and traditions have been responding to environmental challenges as part of their efforts to remain socially relevant. This study conducts a sociological investigation of religious environmentalism in Singapore. It examines the relationship between religious ideas and environmental action. Qualitative research methods including participant observations of Buddhist youth groups' activities and interviews were conducted on young Buddhists aged 18-25 in Singapore. The analysis also includes the influence of local socio-political conditions. Findings suggest that young Buddhists' knowledge and awareness of environmental concern is not a guarantee of actual action. I argue that purposeful environmental ethics and action may only be deduced from specific interpretations of ideas of salvation.

Key Words: Buddhism, Religion, Environment, Ethics, Youths

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“I want you to be critical and sceptical of every damn thing.” – Prof. Johnathan London

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To my grandmother, Thank you for your unconditional love and May you rest in peace.

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~ May all beings be well and happy! ~

Quek Ri An, April 2011

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Humanity is on the brink of destruction. Many environmentalists and scientists believe that the unchecked exploitation of natural resources and the increase in carbon emissions over the past two centuries have contributed to the current state of environmental crisis. Even natural disasters are being attributed to the environmental consequences of human activities.¹ There has been an urgent demand for the development of environmental ethics² from the international community to address the challenges of this crisis. Environmentalists from the ‘deep ecology’ movement argue that the prevalent environmental damage is due to a lack of spiritual and ethical awareness of man’s interdependent relationship with nature (see Arne Naess 1994).

Indeed, some of these environmentalists see religious teachings as providing the spiritual and ethical ballast against the lifestyle habits capitalist economies promote, i.e. high consumption and wastage levels. Religious worldviews specify Man’s role and responsibilities in relation to Nature. It promotes moral teachings through ethical principles interpreted from sacred texts. Buddhism, with its emphasis on compassion and non-harm to other sentient beings based on the idea of interdependence of all life forms, is commonly thought of as ‘eco-friendly’.

Since Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2001[1930]), sociologists have been examining the relationship between religious ideas and social action. Weber showed that the work ethics of capitalism can be deduced from Protestant ideas of salvation, demonstrating how religious ideas may shape economic action. The central aim of this research follows Weber’s view of the sociological task in understanding and explaining the meaning behind social action. It investigates how individuals’ interpretations of religious ideas can shape or motivate environmental action.

‘Eastern traditions’ such as Buddhism has been argued as being the remedy to the current ecological crisis (see chapter 2). Can empirical evidence support textual interpretations of this

¹ Typing the words “global warming causes Tsunamis” in internet search engines provides a huge amount of online articles, news and materials in support of this claim. While there are comparable responses to counter this unsupported claim, it is interesting to note how people have linked environmental issues with natural disasters which are often unsubstantiated.

² Ethics for the purpose of this paper is defined as ‘the principles and method of determining what is right and wrong in human action (Sidgwick 1899:1)’. Environmental ethics refers to ‘the study of normative issues and principles relating to human interactions with the natural environment, and to their context and consequences (Attfield 2006:69)’.

possibility? Can religious ideas really change attitudes towards the environment and lead to purposeful environmental action which includes but are not limited to lifestyle changes, participation in ‘green volunteerism³’ and environmental movements?

Through examining the local conditions in which Buddhism has flourished, I attempt to shed light on how religious environmentalism may have taken shape among young Buddhists in Singapore. By focusing on awareness and knowledge of global warming, I examine how young Buddhists in Singapore use their understandings of religious ideas of salvation to motivate purposeful environmental action in daily conduct. I will investigate the conditions in which Buddhist ethics can shape attitudes towards environmental issues and motivate actual action. Religions constantly transform to become socially relevant through responding to contemporary issues such as environmentalism. My study contributes to the wider discussion on how religious ideas are still significant for understanding social action in contemporary societies while taking into account the influence of local social and political factors. My findings show that ideas of salvation which encourages social engagement will more likely motivate individuals to carry out purposeful environmental action.

³ ‘Green volunteerism’ refers to participation in environmental projects, movements, campaigns etc in efforts to address environmental issues.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The relationship between religion and environmental issues has been discussed by scholars such as Peter Beyer (1992), Laurel Kearns (2007) and Roger S. Gottlieb (2004) among others, recognising that historically, literature on religious environmentalism dates back to the 1940s. Environmental issues have struggled to compete with the main agendas of religious groups and organisations (Kearns 2007). However, religious groups and traditions are increasingly concerned with such global environmental issues as a wider response to the conditions of globalization. One aspect of globalization includes the ‘intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole (Robertson 2004:8)’; environmentalism⁴ is both a carrier of this growing awareness and a product of globalization processes. The social transformations brought about under conditions of globalization⁵ makes a compelling reason for the constant re-examination of the role religion play and the solutions it may offer to environmental problems.

Key environmental issues that have captured the attention of global leaders and environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs), namely climate change and global warming, are now global in nature – the “outcome of a politics of problem-labelling (Yearley 2005:46)” by the NGOs and intergovernmental organizations. International conferences and dialogues such as the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro and the 2009 15th United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties held at Copenhagen are evidence that the international community recognises the urgency and challenge of global climate change. In addition to the efforts made at the intergovernmental level led by the United Nations, International Environmental Non-government organisations (NGOs) including Greenpeace and the Earth Charter International represent the global initiatives in responding to the challenge of climate change. The growing number of such organizations and the intensity of their political voice and pressure on the international stage have led to the need for responses from both the level of societal institutions and individuals.

⁴ Environmentalism shall be defined as ‘a social program, a charter of action which seeks to protect cherished habitats, protest against their degradation, and *prescribe less destructive technologies and lifestyles* (Guha 2000:3)’.

⁵ The impact of globalization on religious change and vice versa has been discussed in-depth elsewhere (see Beyer & Beaman 2007). It is important to note that religion, to maintain social relevance and preserve social authority, has to adapt and respond to the effects of globalization, including environmental awareness.

Two camps of thought appear to dominate the debate over how to resolve the environmental crisis. First, we have natural scientists and politicians who believe that modern science and a “Capitalist World Economy (Wallerstein 1979)” can spur developments in green technology and innovations in cleaner yet efficient alternative sources of energy to reduce carbon emissions level. Second, we have environmental activists and academic scholars who argue that the modern consumerist values and lifestyle habits characteristic of capitalistic economies – endless cycles of production and consumption that is fast depleting our natural resources – have led to the environmental crisis that expatiated since the 18th century (Rupp 2001). In other words, environmental issues such as climate change and global warming are seen by activists and their supporters as an ethical issue, one that requires a spiritual understanding of the relationship between humans and nature and more importantly, a response that demands for changes in our values system and consumption patterns (of which are key to the environmentalism movement as a social program and charter of action). Indeed, these two camps of thought are not exhaustive as there are those who push for ethical ways of utilising the technology made available to us within a world capitalistic system. What is of importance to my discussion here is to examine the ethical aspect of environmental issues and its consequences for action; the ways in which religious ideas makes sense of the current environmental challenges and encourage an ethical way of life that motivates environmental action through lifestyle changes and ‘green’ voluntarism.

Talcott Parsons (1978) sees religion as a ‘telic system’ (p. 356) in that it provides answers to questions of suffering and existence of evil. Religion provides resources, including emotional support, for the individual to draw upon when faced with existential anxieties of loneliness and meaninglessness in life. The environmental crisis causes experiences of existential anxieties related to the threats to humanity and the witnessing of suffering among human populations. Such experience of uncertainties and anxieties may lead to their commitment and acceptance of religious ethics that will then motivate and guide their daily conduct, including purposeful environmental action.

Since Lynn White’s famous article, “*The Historical Roots of the Ecological Crisis*” (1967), academics, politicians and religious leaders have been involved in debates over the interpretations of various religious sacred texts and the degree to which different understandings of these texts can and have guided individuals’ environmental action. Scholars such as Helfand (1986), Bratton (1986) and Ayers (1986) have argued against White’s claim that the current ecological crisis we face today is a result of the interpretation of human’s

right to dominate and exploit nature in one of the paragraphs in Genesis (Genesis I: 26-28, 9:2-4) in the Christian-Judeo traditions. These scholars suggested that White's interpretation was flawed and incorrect; they offered an alternative interpretation in that Man is to be seen as stewards of God, helping Him to manage nature (part of God's creation) responsibly with love and respect. In addition, they questioned the validity of White's suggestion that 'Eastern traditions' such as Buddhism offer a remedy to the ecological crisis through an advocacy for a harmonious and respectful relationship with nature – a spiritual understanding in the interdependency of man and nature. My study shall engage White's argument that 'Eastern traditions' offer such a remedy. My findings suggest the importance of the influence of ideas of salvation in understanding the possible elective affinities between religious ideas and environmental action.

Conditions of globalization have resulted in values such as peace, progress, justice and equality gaining prominence across the global community. Traditionally, religions have been involved in discussions of social justice issues such as those concerning gender equality, poverty alleviation and racial/ethnic discrimination etc. The focus on "environmental justice" has been gaining ground in the development of religious environmentalism. Environmental justice has its social dimensions relating to unequal distribution of negative environmental effects on health, wealth and power among, within and between communities (Mascarenhas 2009). Vulnerable groups within and across societies are more likely to suffer the impact of environmental problems while lacking the political voice to air its grievances. Religious worldviews help people to make sense of perceived environmental injustice and promises of power to overcome them (Beyer 1992).

The involvement of religious groups in environmentalism is seen in their participation in international conferences and interfaith dialogues targeted at increasing efforts "to take global warming seriously as well as a variety of energy related issues [...] in a global, multi-religious context (p. 309)". The development of religious environmentalism has seen major world religious leaders promote environmental awareness and ethics among their followers by legitimising it through religious beliefs and practices. Religious ethics derived from religious worldviews expressed as duties and/or rights may guide and give meaning to the social conduct of followers. While religious worldviews and their derived ethics do not necessarily determine social action, worldviews and ethics are to be seen as resources for social action (Hackett 2010).

Buddhism is often seen as an ‘eco-friendly’ religion that ‘is perceived as pursuing a path of harmonious integration with nature and as fostering identification and mutual respect within the natural world (Keown 2005:39)’.

Damien Keown’s discussion on Buddhist ethics suggests that there is an uneasy relationship between Buddhism and ecology. This is because the core teachings of Buddha 2,500 years ago did not say much about the environment and did not lay down explicit guidelines for the way humans should treat the environment and how they should respond to the environmental crisis. Rather, the concern and action towards the environment may be largely prescribed for the focus on individual cultivation of wholesome virtues such as compassion and loving-kindness⁶. While the disciplinary code of conduct (i.e. the *Vinaya* rules) for the monks does state that monks are prohibited to harm the environment, there are no similar regulations for the laypeople. Scholars skeptical of Buddhist Environmentalism have pointed out that Buddhist texts do not necessarily support Buddhist environmental ethics⁷; translations from scriptures of Sanskrit words such as ‘*pratītyasamutpāda*’ (i.e. dependent origination) into the English word ‘nature’ are also seen as problematic (Harris 1991).

Research projects elsewhere have been aimed at establishing the connection between Buddhism and nature through textual interpretations.⁸ Most of the current Buddhist ethics concerning the environment are derived from the principles of the “common moral core” from the teachings of the eightfold noble path. The five precepts⁹ undertaken by the lay Buddhist is also commonly accepted as the basis of Buddhist ethics which can be used to guide environmental action in daily conduct. Rita M. Gross (1997) argued how Buddhist ethics are inherently ‘green’ and promotes lifestyle changes environmentalists called for.

At the simplest level, because non-harming is so fundamental to Buddhism ethics, once one realizes that excessive consumption and reproduction are harmful, one is obliged to limit such activities. (p. 336)

⁶ In Theravada Buddhism, the four sublime states of mind (*Brahmavihara*) are guidelines for individuals when facing difficult social situations. Compassion (*Kurunā*) is differentiated from loving-kindness (*mettā*).

⁷ Environmental problems of today’s scale did not exist during Buddha’s time.

⁸ One example is the project titled “Buddhism and Nature Conservation” funded by Wildlife Fund Thailand (Kabilsingh 2004).

⁹ The five precepts that lay followers take are namely: (1) abstain from killing; (2) abstain from stealing; (3) abstain from sexual misconduct; (4) abstain from slandering and false speech and (5) abstain from intoxicants.

There are other Buddhist literature affirmative of the close affinity between Buddhist teachings and environmental concern, one in particular is from the Mahayana school and Engaged Buddhism movement's attempt to mobilise efforts and response to climate change (Le Manh That & Thich Nhat Tu 2008). Many Buddhist environmentalists have also used the central tenet of interdependence to explain how compassion will arise through realization that all life forms are mutually connected; harming the environment and other beings is the same as harming 'self'¹⁰ (Swearer 2001; Kaza 2004). Kenneth Kraft (1994) argues that many aspects of Buddhist practices will lead to a deepening of appreciation for nature and induce lifestyle changes encouraged by environmental activists. Beyer (1992) asserted that religious traditions including Buddhism had to accommodate to 'changing social contexts as a condition for their growth and survival (p. 7)'. Various Buddhist branches have to retain social relevance and authority through a certain degree of engagement with social and environmental issues.

In Singapore, Buddhism is one of the major religions for the Chinese ethnic population¹¹. Buddhism in Singapore has been transforming over the years to adapt to the demands and needs of modern societal changes. According to Kuah-Pearce (2009), Buddhists in Singapore are undergoing a type of religious revivalism that involves the 'adaptation of religious ideas and practices to modern culture' (Caplan 1987:9; Cited in Kuah-Pearce 2009:138). According to her, the younger Buddhists are involving themselves in scriptural knowledge and are also interested in the social activities Buddhism may have to offer. These social activities include fellowship, sharing sessions, youth camps, volunteering opportunities which include charity drives and environmental work.

Kong and Onn (2002) found that young Singaporeans, the next generation of leaders and actors in society, are generally aware of the environmental problems and are also aware of its global nature. They have knowledge of environmental concepts and have expressed willingness to engage in environmentally friendly actions and activities, however, this is not usually translated into actual practices. There is a lack of 'activist-oriented' action and a strong belief that the government should continue to take the lead in effecting changes and policies to address the environmental issues (Kong & Onn 2002). It is interesting to

¹⁰ Note that this 'self' is not to be understood as a discrete individual separable from the environment; this 'self' is dependent and connected to the wider environment and indeed the whole cosmos.

¹¹ According to the 2010 Census report, Buddhism accounted for 33 percent of the resident population 15years and over (Singapore Department of Statistics 2011:13)

investigate the extent to which young Buddhists are environmentally aware, concerned and active.

However, as Kuah-Pearce noted, the Singapore state is highly sensitive to religious organisations engaging in activities that may pose a threat to the established political and social order. As such, when religious groups organise social welfare activities, they are careful not to challenge the political or social authority of the state. Kuah-Pearce states that Reformist Buddhist has offered its support to various government campaigns including environmental campaigns. By adapting Buddhist moral teachings with moral values promoted by the state, “Buddhism is made socially relevant to the modern secular state (p. 244)”.

My study is thus situated between sociological studies of religion and environment. Its theoretical contribution lies in investigating how religious ideas may be relevant in motivating certain types of social action, specifically environmental action. Much research has examined the relationship between the state and religion, state and environmentalism. There are also research analysing the changing social role of religion with regards to their provision of welfare services for the needy, charity for the poor and education for the young. Research is found lacking on religious environmentalism in Singapore. Specifically, empirical research is lacking in existing literature with regard to how individuals in Singapore experience and interpret Buddhist religious ideas and ethical guidelines that may motivate their involvement in environmental issues and action.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Ethnographic methods including participant observations and conversations (including both small talk and full interviews) were used in the data collection. Fieldwork was conducted on Youth Buddhist Organisations; including Nanyang Technological University Buddhist Society (NTUBS), Singapore Buddhist Mission (Youth), Tzu Chi Foundation, Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery (KMSPKS) and the Singapore Buddhist Library. The interview respondents were drawn from the above organisations and Amitabha Buddhist Centre (ABC) Youth group.

Fieldwork was carried out from October 2010 to January 2011. Participant observations were carried out for the weekly activities from NTUBS and SBMY including sharing sessions, dharma talks etc. Visits were conducted at the remaining organisations' premises. Permission for access was requested first through email introducing myself and my research aims. Often, the leaders of one organisation will introduce me to the other youth organisations, thus aiding in the process of gaining access to various groups. These leaders and first contacts later became my interviewees and went on to refer me to other suitable respondents.

Employing purposive sampling methods, a total of 15 interviews were conducted, comprising of 10 male and 5 female respondents. All 15 respondents were young Buddhists aged 18-26 and were active in their respective youth Buddhists' circles, i.e. they were members of youth Buddhist groups and regularly attended the groups' activities. Young Buddhists from age 18 to 26 represents the core of the next generation that will have to address the environmental challenges in the 21st century. The upper limit for the age is based on my oldest respondent who is a senior youth leader in one of the groups, the lower limit is based on pilot interviews carried out where it was found interviewees below 18 had difficulties articulating their knowledge and views on Buddhism and environmentalism. These youths completed a minimum of secondary school education, at the time of interview they were either pursuing tertiary education or in the process of completing their national service commitments. In addition, I make no distinction between the various branches of Buddhism in Singapore for my sampling. From Kuah-Pearce's research, it is found that young Buddhists here tend to be non-sectarian in their approach to Buddhism.

Interviews were conducted with their expressed consent and respondents were made fully aware that their responses will be transcribed and used only for research purposes. They were also assured that their responses were treated confidentially and pseudo names would be used

if their responses were to be published. Respondents had the right to skip questions, or stop the interview at any point of time.

Each 60-minute interview was structured according to four areas related to participants' accounting practices on: their Buddhist identity and views on the Singapore Buddhism scene, their level of environmental knowledge and awareness, their understanding and views on Buddhist environmentalism and finally the level of their participation in environmental movements, campaigns and actual lifestyle habits that reflect their environmental concern and awareness. The questions were not necessarily asked in a neat order so as to ensure a smooth conversation. Interviews were conducted fully in English language. These were recorded and transcribed. An analysis of findings and discussion follows in the next two chapters.

Chapter 4: Findings

Respondents may be classified into three groups. Group 1 and 2 respondents mostly come from organizations such as SBMY and NTUBS, while those from group 3 are generally active in Tzu Chi and KMSPKS. The groupings were based on their responses to the interview questions. The grouping reflected differences in respondents' comments for the following four areas.

First, 'scriptural orientation' refer to the tendency of respondents to be primarily concerned with knowledge gained from understanding and studying Buddhist scriptures. Emphasis is placed on learning the Dharma¹², acquiring basic knowledge of Buddhist teachings such as the four noble truths, eightfold path and the doctrine of Karma.

Second, 'environmental knowledge and awareness' is determined by the ability of respondents to provide basic and religious understandings of issues such as global warming and climate change, i.e. a discussion of its causes, impact and possible solutions. It is also an assessment of the extent to which they are aware of existing environmental movements and public campaigns.

Third, 'environmental concern' refer to the attitude of respondents towards environmental issues. Respondents were also asked to rationalise environmental issues and concern with religious ideas.

Lastly, 'purposeful environmental action' refer to the practices individuals undertake at two levels, the first being participation in environmental campaigns and 'green' volunteer work, the second being their own lifestyle habits that reflect environmental consciousness in everyday life.

In addition, it should be noted that responses to the questions are in continuums which reflects varying degrees of concern, orientation or awareness where applicable. Visits and participant observations of activities respondents attended are necessary to contextualize their comments.

Young Buddhists' quest for individual salvation: different interpretations of pathways

¹² Dharma refers to the teachings of Buddha.

My findings suggest that while young Buddhists are well versed in the basic teachings of Buddhism, they have different ideas about how one should go about attaining salvation; this is manifested in their different focus in the religious activities they engage in.

Most of the respondents come from either Chinese religion or Buddhist families. As such, most of them were exposed to Buddhist teachings since young.

I joined this camp organised by NTUBS when I was 13 years old, it was for youths... my mum just signed for me. They introduced very basic Buddhist concepts in it [...] My father was the first to go and join Buddhism classes after my grandmother passed away, because it was like wah... impermanence... [Laughs] then followed by... I got interested... [Jane, 20, Group 1]

Their involvement and commitment increased as they grew older, this often coincided with questions of spirituality, suffering and existence they face as adolescents. Most of them are able to recount the key teachings of Buddhism and its emphasis on cessation of suffering. In addition, they tend not to identify too strongly with the different branches of Buddhism.

But I think like for the younger ones they are more integrated in the way that generally they will feel like although we are attached to the Theravadan tradition temple or we are attached to the Mahayanist temple right, *either way we are still following the Buddha's teachings and the essence is like still there, the four noble truths, the eightfold path* so the young actually like put aside all these more than like the old lah I feel. [...] For the younger ones, it is more like fused already, for myself, I don't consider myself a Mahayanist or a Theravadan, like I am a Buddhist. [Peter, 24, Group 2]

The Buddhist eightfold path is believed to be the pathway to enlightenment. By practising this path, one can cease suffering through cultivating wisdom, morality and the mental states (i.e. the mind). However, the respondents differ in their ideas about how this path should be practiced and what to focus on. The idea of Karma¹³ is also important in the respondents' pathway to salvation. Acknowledging that the universal law of Karma applies to all sentient beings in linking current and past lives, they are motivated to perform meritorious and wholesome deeds to aid their self-cultivation.

¹³ Buddhism's understanding of Karma is slightly different from its predecessors' perception (Hinduism and Jainism) of it as actions or deeds and its results. The volition behind the action (including thoughts and speech) is important when assessing if one's action is positive or negative. *Samsāra (cycle of birth and rebirth) is partly a result of this production of Karma.* Some believe the accumulation of good Karma will aid one in attaining *nibbāna (where Samsāra and Karmic production ceases)*.

For those in group 1, their focus is on meditation practices; the cultivation of mind will help them to develop wisdom and insight, eventually leading one on the path to enlightenment. Dharma lessons, meditation sessions and Buddhist rituals are the core activities organised by the religious groups of group 1's respondents. The group 2 respondents share a similar inclination for studying Dharma and meditation practices. Accumulating good Karma is done through wholesome actions of offering robes and food to the *Sangha*, learning and spreading the Dharma teachings, often through formal lessons. Of the religious groups which respondents from group 1 are part of, their priorities are in organising Dharma camps, fellowships and sharing sessions so as to change the image of Buddhism among youths and to spread the Dharma teachings more effectively.

Personally for many young Buddhists, the priority is to help increase cohesion and build more unity within the young Buddhist community. Another issue is how to go about attracting new recruits and spread the Dharma. Many youths are not attracted to Buddhism because of the stereotypes and misconceptions they have about Buddhist teachings and activities. Many Buddhist youth leaders are working hard to solve these priority issues. [John, 23, Group 1]

In the sharing sessions I attended for SBMY, weekly sharing sessions focused on discussion of basic Buddhist teachings. Each week, a topic was selected based on the various Buddhist virtues such as compassion and loving-kindness. A leader facilitates the group discussion on how these teachings can be applied to daily conduct and aid the pathway to nibāna. Similarly, the camp organized for youths had lessons introducing Buddhist teachings and applied learning through fun activities and games. NTUBS also encourages its members to attend Dharma talks delivered by invited members of the *Sangha*. In both groups, meditation practices were common as part of each session. In the aforementioned activities, individual effort in studying and understanding the teachings, application to daily life and diligent meditation practices were reiterated as key in their quest for individual salvation.

Group 3 respondents are less scripturally oriented (focus on intellectual study of scriptures) than those in group 1 and 2. They focus on activities that can help accumulate positive merit and Karma so that others and self can benefit. While group 1 and 2 respondents may see the pathway to salvation through methods of self-cultivation and an emphasis on meditation practices to gain insight and enlightenment, group 3 respondents believe focus should be on volunteering one's time and effort in helping others. This is done through immersing oneself in community (i.e. helping the poor and needy) and environmental efforts, activities frequently organized by the organization.

Our master taught us that we should use our two hands to work and help others, not sit with two hands clasped and only helping yourself. By helping others we will help ourselves, when others are happy, we are happy too. [Michael, 24, Group 3]

Tzu Chi foundation encourages its members to focus on social engagement as a means of self-cultivation and attaining happiness. Volunteers I spoke to during these visits shared with me the wide range of volunteering activities; blood donation drives, education aid for the poor, recycling activities to help the environment, home visits for the elderly etc. They believe in doing these actions to alleviate suffering of not only self but others as well, rooted in understandings of interdependence of all sentient beings.

In sum, the quest for individual salvation is interpreted differently among the respondents. Group 1 and 2 respondents prefer a pathway that focuses on meditation and Dharma lessons. Group 3 commit themselves towards social and environmental volunteerism.

Man and Nature: Rationalising Buddhist environmentalism among Young Buddhists

Respondents differ in the extent to which they make use of Buddhist ideas to understand environmental issues and concern such as those related to global warming. Some respondents from group 1 may go as far to suggest that Buddhist teachings is mainly concerned about individual cultivation and has nothing to say about environmentalism. Such attitudes were consistent with my participant observations of weekly sharing sessions and Dharma talks where discussions of Buddhist environmentalism and its related topics were found lacking.

I don't consider myself an environmentally conscious individual. I think I am like most other youngsters, we just don't care! [Laughs] also, I don't think it is a key issue for Buddhism. [Nigel, 21, Group 1]

However, most group 1 and group 2 respondents are still able to use their Buddhist knowledge to rationalise about environmental concerns.

I think fundamentally it is still about compassion, if you think about it, if the world is going to deteriorate to the kind of extent predicted by scientists, such as the impact of deforestation, we are killing a lot of animals and destroying habitats, so for Buddhists, we should not kill or harm other beings and creatures including animals, we should be compassionate. [Dave, 19, Group 1]

I think Buddhism and environmental issues are similar in the sense that they are involved in changing our lifestyle habits and being more environmentally conscious such as recycling

behaviour, you won't see any direct positive benefits to yourself. For example, when you study like how your mind works, how does it instantly relieve your pain, it does not do that, so when you recycle things or when you try to plant a tree like how does it directly impact the world tomorrow, [...] you won't be able to see visibly the direct impact but we need to have this social consciousness. [Ricky, 23, Group 2]

It is evident from the above comments that young Buddhists are able to use Buddhist ideas of compassion and the ethical precept of non harm to other living beings to rationalise the need for environmental concern and lifestyle changes to reflect awareness of such concerns.

Group 3 respondents are evidently more concerned with environmental issues, their knowledge of which comes from both Buddhist teachings and secular information¹⁴. KMSPKS and Tzu Chi foundation were two religious organizations (of which three out of the four group 3's respondents come from) I visited that had outreach programs where pamphlets and publications was used to teach people about importance of environmental efforts. They see being environmentally conscious as natural for Buddhists; that Buddhist ethics would require one to be so.

Everyone has a responsibility to be environmentally conscious and do their part to help the global warming and climate changes, it is not just Buddhists. *But as Buddhists, following the precepts, the teachings and practice ought to motivate them to naturally be so.* [Jennifer, 25, Group 3]

While the information in these publications may not emphasize on Buddhist understandings of environmentalism, the Buddhist volunteers of these groups I interviewed used Buddhist virtues, specifically compassion, to justify environmental concern and rationalise the need for action.

In sum, respondents from all groups were adept at using Buddhist teachings to rationalise about environmental issues and the need for concern. The difference is that respondents from group 3 focuses on learning Buddhist environmentalism through participation in purposeful environmental action while for those in group 1 and 2, it is indirectly through their focus on

¹⁴ Though respondents from this group 3 acquires such knowledge from religious sources too, it is commonly reported by respondents of group 1 and 2 that they acquire environmental knowledge from secular sources such as science textbooks from school or scientific materials from internet and media.

meditation practices¹⁵ and Dharma lessons. Specifically for group 1, such methods usually do not translate into actual action.

Perceptions of state led initiatives and urgency of environmental issues in Singapore

Young Buddhists' perception of responsibility for environmental concern, awareness and action is influenced by the saliency of environmental issues here in Singapore and who they believe ought to take the initiative to make changes. Evidently, group 1's respondents see this responsibility as lying in the hands of the government. They also point out that environmental consequences are not negatively experienced in Singapore, at least not sufficiently to develop a 'culture' of environmental consciousnesses of which they perceive to be stronger in other countries.

Because environmental problems are more salient in other countries as compared to Singapore in terms of the impact felt, people living in those countries are much more environmentally conscious and concerned than just with superficial concerns. For Singaporeans to do action, there has to be a very strong reason, and the reason has to be very visible. [Robin, 22, Group 1]

They probably push the responsibility to take action on these bigger issues to those 'higher power', people who have a say, because anyways when it all boils down to full action, people who are making the most money have the greater say in it because if they were to change the way they manufacture things, the way they are produced or the methods for disposing of waste, then a big change can surface. [Daryl, 23, Group 1]

As the last comment show, some young Buddhists do not think that as individuals they have the power and resources to make significant changes. During my fieldwork observation, I asked one youth leader why their group is not active in organising environmental awareness campaigns and projects.

Me: So why is the youth group not as engaged with environmental programs as compared to other social welfare involvement?

Buddhist Youth leader: We prefer to keep a low profile. There may be some groups, who are more involved and interested in this type of activity, but for us, we don't want to cross certain boundaries, you know what I mean? [Johnny, 26]

¹⁵ Buddhist leaders such as the Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen teacher, has suggested meditation enables practitioners to discover the interconnectedness of Man and nature, hence leading to deeper appreciation of the environmental predicament and changes in lifestyle habits.

His response hinted that state policies may influence the perception among some religious groups that being environmentally active would incur scrutiny for being politically motivated. As pointed out earlier, respondents who were more active in these groups (e.g. SBMY and NTUBS) are more exposed to religious activities such as meditation and Dharma talks. Respondents also agreed that priorities ought to be on the ‘bread and butter’ issues of spreading the Dharma; environmental activities for some of them are seen as marketing strategies by Buddhist organizations to attract more recruits.

Conversely, Group 3’s respondents and most of those in group 2 believe that state led initiatives should be complemented by individual responsibility.

The government can only do so much. As individuals, it is important we play a part for environmental efforts. We have to put cultivation into practice, including the awareness of the consequences of our actions. Buddhism is like about awareness of what we do and changing the habitual tendencies we have such as anger, laziness, procrastination. We should then be aware of such habits and change them accordingly. Each individual can make a change. We have to help people to see this and we have to start soon. [Mark, 24, Group 3]

They believe individuals ought to be environmentally concerned, actively participating in ‘green’ projects.

Awareness and Knowledge translated into purposeful environmental action

My findings suggest that ideas of salvation related to strong social ethics – as the preferred method for accumulating positive Karma on the pathway to cessation of suffering – is more likely to lead to actual environmental practices and changes in lifestyle.

There is a significant lack of motivation and effort among the group 1 respondents to engage in environmental projects and change their lifestyle habits to be more eco-friendly. Group 1 respondents are more scripturally oriented, adept at using Buddhist concepts to understand environmental issues but such knowledge and concern are not translated into purposeful environmental action. There also appears to be an attitude of indifference towards environmental issues among some of them.

Erm... nope, I don’t really make the effort to recycle. I think most people don’t too, it is just too troublesome at times. [Ryan, 23, Group 1]

Among group 2 respondents, there is more effort put into engaging in purposeful environmental action, however, they only make individual lifestyle habit changes and do not see a need nor show an interest in participating in communal level environmental projects.

So it is like I will do the smaller things like recycling paper, cans etc, also, I reduce my energy consumption levels. But I won't say what I do is like what some hardcore environmentalist will do like I have neighbour who does sort out her rubbish very diligently. I won't go to this extent, but when it is convenient like in hall where there are recycling bins located nearby I will just like do it for since it is there already and that is the extent to which I will go. I don't think I will participate in any environmental projects in future... [Michelle, 20, Group 1]

Group 3's young Buddhists clearly demonstrate a strong involvement in environmental action. Their strong social ethics is complemented by their religious groups' organisation of regular environmental projects, encouraging them to actively participate. They make efforts to reduce consumption, reuse and recycle materials in daily life too.

I am a vegetarian for "consciousness reasons". I don't think it is a "why" question but should be a "why not?" Because a lot of the concerns these days it is all pointed towards the "why not" question and it is like solving a few questions by doing one thing. I think also in the long run, being vegetarian can help the environmental challenges in reducing carbon emissions arising from the animal rearing methods. [...] Recycling, reusing, bringing chopsticks out. [Wayne, 23, Group 3]

These religious groups (KMSPKS and Tzu Chi) organize monthly recycling activities at neighbourhoods around Singapore and at the main centre. The young Buddhists help out by going door to door to inform residents of their efforts and collecting the donated items. I was told the youth wing will soon be given the responsibility of managing one collection zone. After collection, these young Buddhists then bring it back to the main centre for further sorting of the recyclable materials. Young Buddhists of this group believe that action is the key and doing all these projects can make significant changes to the environmental situation, no matter how small. They are convinced that knowledge and awareness is not enough, meditation practice cannot directly lead to actual action taken, and the latter is more urgent and important. Their master's teaching is influential here, respondents often relate to how their master has inspired them to put Buddhism and self-cultivation into action through helping the community and the environment.

To summarize the findings of this research, Table 1 shows the classifications of the 3 groups respondents fall in to. From it, an analysis of their similarities and differences helps us to understand the key explanations for how religious ideas motivate environmental action; a discussion follows in the next chapter.

Group	Scriptural Orientation	Environmental Knowledge and Awareness	Environmental concern	Rationalising Environmental Issues through religious meanings	Environmental Activeness and action taken
Group 1	High intellectualism and scripturally oriented	Level of environmental knowledge and awareness are relatively high	Low; many are indifferent to this issue	Often use a range of Buddhist teachings to make sense of environmental issues	Low; not much action taken in daily life that reflects environmental concern
Group 2	High intellectualism and scripturally oriented	High	High; believes that we should be deeply concerned about environmental issues	Able to use doctrinal knowledge and Buddhist-related concepts such as Karma to explain current crisis – causes, consequences and suggestions for remedies;	More than Group 1; practice environmentally conscious actions such as recycling, energy conservation in daily life; however, action limited by convenience and practicality

Group 3	Not as highly scripturally oriented; more into socially engaged Buddhism, i.e. focus on volunteering for social and community work	High; sees environmental issues as pertinent and action urgent	High; sees environmental issues as pertinent and action urgent	Uses more of secular understandings of environmental issues; uses less of Buddhist teachings to rationalise environmental crisis	Focus is on action in daily life and communal action through 'green' volunteerism
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Table 1: Typology of Respondents

Chapter 5: Discussion

“Of all the manifestations of human culture, language and religion are two of the most basic, the most universal and most important for understanding the world view and motivations of any group of people.” (Clammer 1985:33)

The above quotation encapsulates the importance of religion in motivating social action. Clammer further argues that far from conventional understandings of secularization, religious traditions in Singapore has never really declined, rather, it has only transformed and is ‘actively responding to the challenges of rapid social change’ (1985:51). As Casanova (2007) argued, there is no global rule for religious transformations throughout history; transformation will continue in face of the need to respond to new challenges such as that of the environmental crisis. Religious environmentalism in Singapore is still in its infant stage, perhaps over time, people will come to realize the urgency of environmental responses through lifestyle changes at societal and individual levels. My findings have suggested that Buddhism is constantly transforming in Singapore in diverse directions among the youths. There are different interpretations of the same basic ideas and teachings, leading to different pathways to salvation.

Engaging Lynn White’s argument: religious ideas of salvation and environmental action

As discussed in the literature review section, rapid social changes have led to environmental problems being one of the top concerns for humanity. Consequently, Buddhism and other world religions have responded by including environmental involvement as part of their main agenda and concern, referring to the compatibility of their sacred texts and traditions in promoting environmental concerns and eco-friendly way of life.

Knowledge and awareness of environmental issues and the need to resolve it does not necessarily translate into actual action. Religious ethical teachings may also not necessarily be understood or practiced in the same way by followers. Buddhism and its teachings may indeed be textually interpreted to be eco-friendly and that it promotes eco-friendly attitudes, lifestyles and activism. However, when one looks deeper into empirical investigations of the ways actors interpret ideas of salvation from written texts and verbal teachings, a better understanding of the effects of these interpretations may be reached.

As group 3’s young Buddhists have shown, religious ideas of salvation can motivate purposeful environmental action. While the scope of this study does not allow an in-depth

discussion into the complex cosmological worldviews of Buddhism, I will attempt to understand some aspects of this worldview through my respondents' articulation of what they believe and use in daily conduct. My analysis shall draw attention to the ways young Buddhists from my interviews have rationalised their interpretations of this worldview and how it helps them to make sense of the social world and guide their environmental action.

As Buddhists, Group 3 respondents' worldview is shaped by the four noble truths, that suffering exist and one can be freed from suffering through practicing the eightfold path to eliminate the root causes of suffering, i.e. attachment to (worldly) desires. The idea of Karma also helps them explain that suffering is a result of actions in their past lives. Through the accumulation of positive Karma, one may gain better rebirths which are helpful in the long journey towards attaining salvation, i.e. the cessation of *Samsāra* (cycle of birth and rebirth). Rebirth may take place not only in the human realm but also in other realms, e.g. the animal realms. To be reborn in this life as a human being may be a result of good Karma accumulated from previous lifetimes, it is hence imperative that one makes full use of this human life to continue cultivation and accumulate more merits so as to benefit future rebirths. To understand the Buddhist scriptures, one has to have wisdom; attempting to understand at the intellectual level the teachings is inadequate, one has to practice discipline and develop a compassionate heart. Through helping others, one can develop and practice compassion while accumulating merit for use in one's path to salvation. Wisdom is believed to be acquired through developing compassion. Chanting of sutras, intellectual understanding of scriptures and reflection through self study has to be complimented by active social engagement or volunteerism, i.e. helping those in need, including purposeful environmental action. This is the reason why many of the respondents in this group chose to become vegetarians and to actively participate in environmental projects and make lifestyle changes that is more environmentally-friendly. Being vegetarian is partly due to compassion for the animals, and partly for the environmental cause of reducing carbon emissions produced by meat production. Their respective religious groups stress such practices by organizing environmental projects and community work for the needy and poor. Knowledge of the environmental crisis and the need for individual lifestyle changes are also transmitted and encouraged through seminars and publications. Environmental action is thus motivated by the idea that salvation must be attained through helping others and being socially engaged in community and environmental volunteerism. Only through actual involvement can change occur and help alleviate suffering, making others as well as the individual achieve happiness.

An idea of salvation linked to this-worldly oriented social ethics thus motivates young Buddhists towards purposeful environmental action on both communal and individual levels.

Group 1 on the other hand, presents a case for analysing how a similar worldview but with some difference in ideas of attaining salvation may lead to unsuccessful motivation of environmental action. The basic teachings of Buddha, i.e. the four noble truths and eightfold path lead to understanding of suffering and karma as key to explaining the human conditions of existence. Young Buddhists in this group are much more intellectually inclined in their focus on studying the scriptures. They also differ in their interpretation of how to cease suffering and gain salvation. Here, the focus is much more on activities such as meditation to eliminate the roots of suffering, i.e. greed, anger and ignorance. Whereas accumulation of positive karma is believed to be essential for group 3's respondents, group 1's respondents subscribe to the belief that elimination of the ego and the roots of suffering will stop further production of Karma; their actions will then be karmic neutral, attaining enlightenment in the process. Religious activity is associated with quiet withdrawal from the distracting social environment to facilitate concentration on meditation practices to attain insight and wisdom, congruent with the eightfold path for cessation of suffering. Accepting Buddhist ethics, i.e. the five precepts, in daily conduct is instrumental for this self-cultivation process. There is a lack of activities aimed at environmental volunteerism. However, social engagement in the form of helping the needy, elderly, donation drives are provided as a means of legitimising the groups' social relevance and maintain some form of social authority and visibility. These group 1 respondents proficiently use their knowledge of Buddhist ethics and doctrines to discuss environmental issues and the need for urgent concern and action. However, there is a distinct lack of actual individual lifestyle changes that will help the environment and also participation in environmental projects. It appears that young Buddhists in this group are so focused on their spiritual search for salvation through individual self-cultivation that there is a lack of social engagement of the levels represented by group 3. This group of respondents focuses on the path to *nibānna* through cultivation of the mind. While hoping for action to naturally follow, the empirical findings suggest that the translation of ideas to actual practice is lacking. While intellectualism and a focus on meditation practices in their religiosity may enable respondents to be articulate in Buddhist environmentalism, it unintentionally impedes actual action.

There are also those among the group 1 respondents who do not believe in Buddhist environmentalism. As with Harris's findings (1991), they point to how interpretations of

Buddhist environmental ethics from canonical sources may be contemporary developments and not 'from the heart of Buddhist traditions'. As such, they justify their lack of environmental concern and action as young Buddhists.

Similar to group 3, respondents from group 2 support the argument that Buddhist religious ideas may motivate young Buddhists towards purposeful environmental action. Their understanding of Buddhist teachings such as compassion and their practice of the five precepts guide their daily conduct including environmental action and concern. While their religious groups may not offer environmental projects, these individuals make the effort to take part in projects offered elsewhere and make lifestyle changes to be more environmentally-friendly in their consumption practices. The pathway to salvation is a middle path between meditation practices and being socially responsible. Here, Buddhist religious ideas encourages young Buddhist to be mindful about their daily conduct and the impact of their action, motivating them to change their lifestyle habits to be more environmentally friendly in consequence.

Lynn White has argued that we can find from literal interpretations of texts from the Judaeo-Christian traditions their encouragement of an exploitative relationship between man and nature. But as Gottlieb (2004) asserted, 'religions have been neither simple agents of environmental domination nor unmixed repositories of ecological wisdom (p. 7).' My findings suggest that we have to look further into the ideas of salvation to examine the extent to which actors interpret and comply with religious moral teachings which provide guidelines for daily conduct including those to do with environmental concerns. The answers to these environmental concerns cannot be found in 'past views'.

To understand the relationship between religious ideas and action in contemporary times, one has to analyze how people interpret their religious ideas of salvation, not just through an abstract analysis of literal interpretations of text, but to analyse the accounting practices of religious actors about the meanings of religious ideas on environmental issues. Some Buddhists focuses on the accumulation of merits through helping others to alleviate suffering, environmental problems causes suffering to others and hence justifies a need for practical action. In sum, only an interpretation of ideas of salvation that is compatible with social engagement may lead to Buddhism's elective affinity with eco-friendly attitudes and behaviour.

State policies on environment issues: perceptions and impact on motivations

Kong & Onn (2002) found that the Singapore government takes the lead in pushing for environmental campaigns and movements¹⁶ through the Ministry of Environment and Water Resources and the National Environmental Agency. These sentiments are echoed by news reports of how green initiatives such as research in the use of solar energy and hydro-power are led by the state in collaboration with private sectors. Such projects are often tied to ‘strong profit motives’ (Asia Times 2008). Government agencies also work with other non-governmental environmental groups such as Eco Singapore and Nature Society (Singapore).

Respondents in group 1 appear to be relatively unaware of government environmental initiatives and do not think environmental problems are a big issue for Singapore since its impact is not salient in their everyday life. From my findings, it seems that some of the religious groups and actors do not see the practical benefits, i.e. attracting more recruits or acquiring more government funding, in prioritising environmental concerns and projects. Furthermore, it is common to expect and rely on the government to take the responsibility and initiative.

While most youths are ‘more willing to engage in environmentally friendly activities which constitute part of their daily routine’, as group 2 respondents have shown, it is not the case when it comes to requiring effort out of the ordinary (Kong & Onn 2002:87). My findings suggest that some of the young Buddhists are willing to leave environmental initiatives to the government agencies as they believe individuals lack the power and resources to make a significant difference. Their lack of environmental action is explained by their over-reliance on the government and the lack of saliency of environmental problems in Singapore.

Relationship between state and religion: perception of boundaries and compliance

In examining the influence of state policies over young Buddhists’ willingness and motivation to engage in environmental issues and concern, one finds a familiar issue of the relationship between state and religion in Singapore. Gottlieb (2004) discussed how religious involvement in environmental movements and issues may be political in nature.

When religion engages in environmental concerns, the customary boundaries of “religious issues” in political life are decisively broken. Asserting that environmental degradation is not only a health danger, an economic catastrophe, or an aesthetic blight but also *sacrilegious*,

¹⁶ An example is the Green Plan 2012 (Ministry of Environment & Water Resources 2002, 2006), a government blueprint for ensuring environmental sustainability for Singapore’s future economic growth.

sinful, and an *offense against God* catapults religions directly into questions of political power, social policy, and the overall direction of secular society. (p. 507)

As discussed in chapter 2, religion and environmentalism is both concerned with issues of justice and equality. Singapore is a secular state; it does not have a state religion but adopts a multi-religious policy where citizens are free to choose their religious affiliation or not to have any affiliations at all. Religious harmony is highly valued after the experience of racial riots in the 1960s.¹⁷ The Singapore state is also wary of religious groups threatening its secular authority in political issues of social justice and equality. The state argues that religious interference would destabilise the delicate racial and religious harmony in Singapore, leading to tensions between communities, impede economic growth and threaten stability (see Kuah-Pearce 2009). The State's suspicion and caution of religion is reflected in the White Paper on Maintenance of Religious Harmony (MRH):

Religious groups must not get themselves involved in the political process (MRH: 1).¹⁸

The state however recognises the potential in tapping religious organizations to provide welfare and help for the needy in communities¹⁹; hence, they actively encourage such activities and provide financial grants for its provision. The state guides religious organizations to conduct activities that are within established state-defined boundaries. These are social welfare services and facilitation that do not threaten state autonomy and authority in political matters. Religious organizations compromise and focus on these activities to gain social legitimacy and retain social relevance.

Borrowing Berger's (1967) concept of 'plausibility structure'²⁰, while Buddhism may promote an eco-friendly worldview, actual action depends on the conditions provided by local socio-political arrangements. As such, young Buddhists especially the leaders keep to the safer options of providing welfare services and focus on strictly religious activities such as Dharma classes and meditation sessions. This ensures that they do not cross the boundaries by

¹⁷ Religious beliefs tend to be divided along racial lines in Singapore (see Tan 2008).

¹⁸ The MRH was presented to Parliament of Command of the President of the Republic of Singapore, 26 December 1989. My quotation here is extracted from Kuah-Pearce's 2009 book titled *State, Society and Religious Engineering: Towards a Reformist Buddhism in Singapore*.

¹⁹ This is because the Singapore government is adamant on not being a 'welfare state', but encourages self-reliance and for individuals to seek aid from their respective ethnic or religious communities.

²⁰ Plausibility structure here refers to the existing socio-political arrangements that make it possible for Buddhist worldview (including its system of belief, action and meanings) to be accepted by individuals as 'self-evident' in its support of environmental concern and action (see Berger 1967).

venturing into environmental movements or campaigns that may be viewed as potentially political in nature.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Further Research Suggestions

Religions are responding to global challenges and undergoing organizational transformations to be more socially relevant. However, knowledge and awareness gained from intellectual understanding of religious scriptures are not enough to motivate behavioural changes and actual action. In sum, religious traditions and their ideas motivate social action only under certain conditions.

This study started with the aim of exploring the relationship between religious ideas and social action, specifically examining Buddhist religious ideas and environmental action. Existing literature review has suggested how Buddhism is argued to be eco-friendly supported by textual interpretations. My findings only partially affirm Lynn White's assertions: first, environmental action could be deduced from religious ideas and second, 'Eastern' religions could hold the key to inspiring a more respectful view of the man-nature relationship and motivating environmentally friendly attitudes and action. My findings shed light on the complexity of the relationship between religious ideas and environmental action. Weber has shown that capitalism's economic ethics and action can be deduced from Protestant – specifically Calvinist – interpretation of ideas of salvation. In the same way, I argue that purposeful environmental ethics and action may only be deduced from specific interpretations of ideas of salvation. In examining Buddhism among youths, it was found that purposeful environmental action was motivated only among those with interpretation of ideas of salvation more compatible with social engagement. There is a lack of environmental action among those young Buddhists who believe that a quiet withdrawal from societal distractions to focus on meditation and scriptural study is crucial for attaining salvation. In contrast, when individuals believe that a high degree of social activism is crucial for attaining salvation, they are more likely to be motivated towards lifestyle changes and involvement in environmental causes. In Singapore's context, a lack of action among young Buddhists could further be attributed to the impact of state policies on religion and environment. In addition, respondents point out the lack of urgency for environmental action at the individual level given their other material concerns and lack of environmental disasters being experienced in Singapore.

My research paves the way for future research into how the various schools of Buddhism and their different ideas of salvation, such as Theravada and Mahayana schools in Singapore's context, may be interpreted by actors in motivating environmental action. Even though it was not within the scope of this study to conduct an in-depth analysis into how various religious organizations in Singapore across faiths are responding to environmental issues, it is

worthwhile to examine the differences and similarities between various religious traditions in their environmental involvement for future larger scale research projects. Research is also lacking in the impact of state policies on religious environmentalism in Singapore. This would require interviews to be conducted with government officials and religious leaders.

Kearns (2007) argued that environmentalists may find across different religious traditions compatible ethical ballast against the environmentally damaging lifestyles and habits prevalent today. While such a view that religion can be the remedy to the current environmental challenges is conceivable, it is equally arguable that current environmental issues have ignited and spurred a search for spiritualism and new thinking about the causes of environmental issues; ecology 'rescuing' religion so to speak (McKibben 2001). It will be interesting for future empirical research to examine how the current environmental crisis has shaped recent religious revivalism for the various world religions and new religious movements.

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