

**STUDIES ON
HUMANISTIC BUDDHISM ❶**

Foundational Thoughts
人間佛教論文選要

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and
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Editor's Preface: A Treasury of Academic Thought on Humanistic Buddhism

Taking the Retrocession of Taiwan in 1945 as the starting point of the restoration of Chinese Buddhism, along with the emergence of the four major monastic orders¹ on this island, Humanistic Buddhism has just celebrated its seventy-first birthday. However, we should consider that Master Taixu (hereinafter Taixu) first proposed the concept of “Humanistic Buddhism” in his article “On *The China Times* and the so-called ‘Sūtras and Mantras to Save the Nation’” published in *Ocean Waves Magazine* Vol. 13, No. 9 (1932)², and that he delivered his lecture on “How to Build Humanistic Buddhism”³ at the Hankou Chamber of Commerce in October of the following year. These first definitions of Humanistic Buddhism included a preliminary explanation of the methodology and philosophy of Humanistic Buddhism, and how it could be developed from this foundation. From this other perspective, it can be said that modern Humanistic Buddhism has been practiced for more than eighty years.

Furthermore, if we understand Humanistic Buddhism from an even broader perspective and consider it a product of the innovative thinking of modern Chinese Buddhism, the time-frame can then be greatly extended. For example, if we start from Yang Wenhui's (1837-1911) founding of the Jinling Scriptural Press in 1866, then the development of modern Humanistic Buddhism has one hundred and fifty years of established history.

If we seriously consider the repeatedly expressed opinion of Fo Guang Shan's Venerable Master Hsing Yun, a leading master of contemporary Humanistic Buddhism, that: “Humanistic Buddhism does not belong to any individual; It is not mine; It is not Taixu's, nor even the Sixth Patriarch Huineng's, but it is the Humanistic Buddhism of Śākyamuni Buddha.” Or, if we seriously consider the nearly identical opinion of

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the renowned Vietnamese Buddhist master Thich Nhat Hanh, who actively promotes “Engaged Buddhism” to people in the West, then we have good reason to agree: Humanistic Buddhism is not only modern Humanistic Buddhism, it is also the Humanistic Buddhism of the premodern era, and of the ancient world. It is even the embodiment of holding true to the Buddha’s original intent—it is the Buddha’s Humanistic Buddhism. Furthermore, if we accept this understanding, then the manifestation of Humanistic Buddhism within the course of human history is as old as the glorious history of the Buddha’s teachings.

No matter which of the above perspectives is taken on the historical development of Humanistic Buddhism, it is clear that Humanistic Buddhism is an important modern phenomenon that will also be influential remove into the future. To date, Humanistic Buddhism has been creatively interpreted to produce profound fresh ideas, thoughts, research, and culture. It already has an unprecedented and powerful effect in reviving the age-old Buddhist spirit—allowing Buddhism to radiate a new and almost unexpected light of wisdom on modern society.

In regards to Humanistic Buddhism, it is important to mention the illustrious name of Venerable Master Hsing Yun, founder of the largest and most influential Han Chinese Buddhist Saṅgha in the world today. He is the guiding force behind the Buddha’s Light International Association (BLIA), a highly dynamic Buddhist social organization. He founded four Buddhist universities in Taiwan and abroad (Fo Guang University and Nanhua University in Taiwan, University of the West in the USA, Nan Tien Institute in Australia); and is in the process of establishing a fifth Buddhist university in the Philippines—Guang Ming College. Venerable Master Hsing Yun also propagates Buddhist teachings worldwide by establishing Dharma centers. Venerable Master Hsing Yun has deservedly become the most outstanding spiritual master of Humanistic Buddhism in the twenty-first century, and one of the world’s most influential spiritual leaders. He is a Dharma friend of great merit—welcomed and respected on both sides of the Taiwan Straits.

As early as 1946, while training as a monk at Jiaoshan Buddhist College, the nineteen year old Venerable Master Hsing Yun published two articles in the *Awakening the Multitude Weekly News*⁴, which were edited by Taixu: “Forwarding an Explanation for the Saṅgha Asking after Government without Interfering in Governance”⁵ and “The

Ideal Establishment of a Monastic Economy.”⁶ In these two articles, he proposed the principles of striving to be proactive and having positive interactions between Buddhism and politics, and of earnestly promoting an autonomous and independent economy for the Saṅgha. The relationship between politics and Buddhism, and between Buddhism and economics are the two most sensitive and pertinent issues that Buddhism must properly deal with during this current period of change and modernization. That, as a young debutant, Venerable Master Hsing Yun went directly to these themes and discussed them in such a profound manner clearly demonstrated at this early stage that his thinking about Buddhism had a humanistic spirit. Furthermore, it also highlights Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s strong sense of social responsibility that would later characterize his theory and practice of Humanistic Buddhism.

When he first arrived in Taiwan, Venerable Master Hsing Yun underwent many hardships. By the time he was thirty years old, Venerable Master Hsing Yun had written a series of books that were well received, such as *The Biography of Sakyamuni Buddha*⁷, *National Master Yulin*⁸, *Bells, Gongs and Wooden Fish: Voices for Buddhist Change*⁹, as well as a series of articles with deep, penetrating ideas such as “Trends in Taiwan Buddhism Over the Last Six Years”¹⁰ published in 1954. In these publications, Venerable Master Hsing Yun proposed four major concepts: “the human Buddha,” “the revolutionary spirit of Śākyamuni Buddha,” “Buddhist youth with integrity,” and “socialization and popularization of Buddhism.” Through exploration in practice, these ideas formed an ultra-modern model of Dharma propagation with the characteristics of the “Yilan Experience.”

Therefore, we believe that the period before 1966 can be considered the first stage in the theory and practice of Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s Humanistic Buddhism. In the mid-1950s, the “Venerable Master Hsing Yun Model” of Humanistic Buddhist theory and practice had already reached a preliminary stage of maturity. Beginning with the founding of Fo Guang Shan in 1967, the four objectives of Fo Guang Shan: “To propagate the Dharma through culture; to foster talent through education; to benefit society through philanthropy; and to purify human minds through spiritual cultivation” were already being advocated. In the second stage of the development of Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s Humanistic Buddhism, he focused on theory and practice. During this period, he devoted himself to advocating the four objectives and establishing the Fo Guang Shan

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Saṅgha. In 1985, he established the Fo Guang Shan lineage system, then retired as abbot in accordance with the Dharma. From 1986 to 2000, the third stage of the “Venerable Master Hsing Yun Model” was introduced. It was during this stage that he systematically elaborated the theory of Humanistic Buddhism and guided its propagation globally. Beginning in 2001, in the first decade of the new century, the fourth stage of his theory and practice of Humanistic Buddhism began. Venerable Master Hsing Yun vigorously promoted the return of Humanistic Buddhism to the Mainland China. It was during this stage, a period of new historical heights, that he and the Fo Guang Shan team began to consider new possibilities for the future.

From this four-stage development, it is possible to grasp the inherently consistent thoughts of Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s Humanistic Buddhism, to feel his compassionate mind, the power of his vows in the continuous implementation of the Dharma, and the intensification in the expansion of the blueprint for Humanistic Buddhism.

In order to systematically summarize and reflect on the path taken in the past hundred years, and to provide clear guidance for the future development of Buddhism, Venerable Master Hsing Yun founded the Fo Guang Shan Institute of Humanistic Buddhism in 2012. The Institute has since convened multiple academic seminars on the theory and practice of Humanistic Buddhism, where many scholars and prominent members of society have been invited to discuss the current situation and future vision of Humanistic Buddhism. Furthermore, since 2015, Venerable Master Hsing Yun has created a special arts and literature issue of *Humanistic Buddhism: Journal, Arts, and Culture* which includes a collection of excellent studies on Humanistic Buddhism. From the perspective of academic thought and culture, the garden of Humanistic Buddhism teachings is being carefully cultivated.

In the special arts and literature issue of *Humanistic Buddhism: Journal, Arts, and Culture*, the Institute of Humanistic Buddhism edits and publishes *Studies on Humanistic Buddhism I: Foundational Thoughts* in the hope of gaining a better understanding of the general current of thought, the level of development, and the future direction of Humanistic Buddhism. This volume contains a total of 15 articles authored by Master

Taixu, Venerable Tzu Hang, Elder Zhao Puchu, Venerable Master Hsing Yun, and other scholarly experts such as Professors Lewis Lancaster, Chen Bing, Dong Ping, Cheng Gongrang, Li Li'an, Guang Xing, Kan Cheng-tsung, and others. These articles examine Humanistic Buddhism through various perspectives of doctrine, scriptural analysis, history, religion, culture, contemporary social developments, etc. It is a record of the mature reflections of these virtuous monastics and scholars. Each piece inspires and reveals the thought and development of Humanistic Buddhism from a different point of view. Each can be regarded as an important and constructive work of academic thinking on Humanistic Buddhism.

It should be noted that studies on Humanistic Buddhism are numerous. Regrettably, this volume cannot include all of them due to its limited length. This work should be considered just the beginning. In the future, the Institute will continue to compile and edit research articles related to Humanistic Buddhism, in order to cater to readers who have an interest in the development of Humanistic Buddhism.

Notes

- 1 The four major monastic orders are Chung Tai Chan Monastery, Dharma Drum Mountain, Fo Guang Shan, and Tzu Chi. -Ed.
- 2 〈論時事新報所謂經咒救國〉《海潮音》13卷第9期（1932年）-Ed.
- 3 〈怎樣來建設人間佛教〉-Ed.
- 4 《覺群週報》〈為僧伽問政而不干治進一解〉〈理想中寺僧經濟之建設〉-Ed.
- 5 〈為僧伽問政而不干治進一解〉-Ed.
- 6 〈理想中寺僧經濟之建設〉-Ed.
- 7 《釋迦牟尼佛傳》-Ed.
- 8 《玉琳國師》-Ed.
- 9 《無聲息的歌唱》-Ed.
- 10 〈六年來台灣佛教的趨勢〉(1954) -Ed.