

**STUDIES ON
HUMANISTIC BUDDHISM ❶**

Foundational Thoughts
人間佛教論文選要

Fo Guang Shan Institute of Humanistic Buddhism, Taiwan
and
Nan Tien Institute, Australia

Can “Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s Values” Increase Social Harmony?



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Charles Kao was born in Nanjing and spent his childhood in the Jiangnan region before coming to Taiwan in 1949. He first graduated from the National Taipei College of Business¹ and subsequently from the National Chung Hsing University. After completing his postdoctoral research at the Michigan State University in 1964, he taught at the University of Wisconsin for more than three decades. In 1971, he received the Outstanding Educator of America Award and in 1974, the University of Wisconsin’s Distinguished Professor of the Year Award. He is currently Advisor to the Executive Yuan, Advisory Member of the Control Yuan, Professor at the Chung Hsing University Charles H.C. Kao Institute of Knowledge Economy, and Chairman of Global Views - Commonwealth Publishing Group, and Publisher of HBR Taiwan. Throughout these engagements, Charles has continued to promote progressive thought, with more than twenty publications in Taiwan and six in Mainland China.

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A very good afternoon to Venerable Tzu Hui, the master of ceremony, scholars, and experts from both sides of the Taiwan Straits, and venerables, whom I have come to know and respect. Let me speak standing, as I am still young. Of the close to twenty experts and scholars who are in attendance, the youngest should be Professor Shang, could you please raise your hand? Professor Shang, you are only 36 years old and teach at Nanjing University. The oldest here is 78 years old, and he is standing right here (Professor Charles Kao). I too am from Nanjing and our difference in age is 42 years. Since one is more academically vigorous in one’s youth, please give me a hand if you find any mistakes in what I say.

I was born in Nanjing and then grew up in the Jiangnan region. When Venerable Master called me saying, (in an accent much like Venerable Master Hsing Yun) “Professor Kao, I am Hsing Yun, we welcome your visit to the Buddha Museum when you have the time,” I immediately went. Participating in this very important forum today, I see that your areas of research are all related to the study of culture—fields like philosophy, Buddhism, and religion—while I study economics, which might seem a little distant, but yet could be somewhat related.

We just heard several venerables introduce the Buddha’s Light International Association (BLIA) as an NGO recognized by the United Nations. NGO stands for “nongovernmental organization,” but it suddenly occurred to me that “N” could mean “neat” (clean and simple), and “G” for “great” (upright and noble), and so “NGO” could be a “neat great organization,” which the BLIA is. I believe no one will object to this re-interpretation. The BLIA operates across boundaries of region, religion, culture, and ethnicity, and has made major contributions to humankind in the past 60 years.

Two years ago, when we celebrated the 100th founding year of the country, we at the Global Views-Commonwealth Publishing Group published a book entitled *A Hundred Years of Faith and Hope*.² We invited twenty experts and scholars to choose who they thought was most influential in the past millenia according to their expertise. Of those chosen, eighteen are deceased, leaving two of them with us. One is winner of the Nobel Prize in Physics, Chen-Ning Frank Yang, while the other is Venerable Master Hsing Yun.

We chose Venerable Master Hsing Yun because he reformed religion, improved people’s minds, changed the world, and bettered society. These “four advances” are his concrete contributions.

I have known Venerable Master for more than two decades. He knows that my extended family consists of three families. Counting my sons and daughters, we are a total of twelve people. Both my children are in the US, because they were born, grew up, and married there. Among my family, eleven are devout Christians—I am the only exception—and so they pray for me every day, and feel there is a little less hope whenever I meet Venerable Master.

Over the years, Venerable Master has had major impact on Taiwan, Mainland China, the international Chinese community, the US, as well as Australia. Three days before the Spring Festival in January this year, I came to visit Venerable Master with a few of my colleagues. He happened to be writing One-Stroke Calligraphy. He was very spirited and his strokes bold and strong. As Venerable Master spoke to me, he wrote four characters—*he er bu liu* (和而不流), meaning “peaceful coexistence without going with the flow”³³—as a gift to me. In response, I told Venerable Master that I hope he will promote four other characters in future: *he ping hong li* (和平紅利), meaning “peace dividend.”³⁴ “Dividend” might seem a little commercial-oriented but this term derives from the arms race in the early 1980s between US President Ronald Reagan, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and the Soviet Union’s Mikhail Gorbachev. Given this historical background, people were saying that if the three parties could de-escalate the nuclear arms race, then the huge military budget saved could instead be diverted to many non-military purposes. This concept of “peace dividend” thus became very popular in the West.

At that time, I was teaching at the University of Wisconsin’s Department of Economics. I always felt that the US government expenditure was very high and the tax revenue was not adequate. One major reason for this was the large military spending.

When I had opportunities to speak publicly in Taiwan, I often recalled the lessons I gleaned in the US. Therefore, I often say that “what I study is economics; what I am most concerned about is education; but what I yearn most for is peace and a civilized society.”

I remember returning to Mainland China in 1988 for the first time in 39 years since my 1949 move to Taiwan. I gave a talk at Beijing University, discussing the 1919 May Fourth Movement that took place in Beijing when Mr. De and Mr. Sai were advocated—Chinese nicknames for democracy and science, respectively. It was a correct but incomplete approach. Why? There were two other terms which were missing—economy and education. Without the economy, we have nothing. With economic strength, we should

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immediately improve education; and only with economy and education can science and technology be developed. This is the correct sequence. If we focus on democracy at the very beginning, the outcomes are hard to predict. Therefore, the order should be from economy to education, to science and technology, and then to democracy.

Speaking of cross-straits relations, I myself am also part of it. I traveled to Taiwan from Shanghai on a ship in 1949 when I was 13 years old. Only after Mr. Ma Ying-jeou was elected president in 2008 did direct flights across the Straits become a reality and relations begin to stabilize. At present, there is no longer the threat of war between the two sides. Only with this peace is there a sense of stability, and then investment, free-and-easy travel, trade, etc., can take place. Peace is an essential prerequisite however. Today, we may say that Taiwan is a democratic society, but it is a crippled one; and the same can be said for being a fair society and an open society. Currently, Taiwan is still some distance away from being a civilized society. Of course, Mainland China is somewhat farther away even, but we should be moving towards that direction.

In this context of great uncertainty, religion can play a critical role. However, religion faces different restrictions and limitations in every country and period of time. Therefore, we do not discuss religion but instead discuss faith, which is broader in scope, more inclusive, and the power it generates is incomparably important. When discussing Humanistic Buddhism from this perspective, its activity is truly broad—educational, artistic, humanistic, and social. If I may say so, it is even more efficient than a government agency. With about two thousand monastics and the support of millions of kind-hearted people, Humanistic Buddhism became very influential. Humanistic Buddhism has already generated dividends, peace, and happiness for the world.

At the second Hsing Yun World Humanities Forum held at the Buddha Museum on September 15, 2013, Mr. Mo Yan, Venerable Master, and I respectively spoke on “A Writer’s Dream,” “A Religion Scholar’s Dream,” and “An Economic Educator’s Dream.” Two thousand people in the audience paid their full attention and were deeply enchanted by these dreams, but woke to the shock of reality. On the mountain was a civilized society, off the mountain was a parliament full of bitter disputes.

In the turbulent era of 20th century China, Venerable Master from Yangzhou and Mo Yan from Shandong were born 28 years apart. They both had a hungry and poor childhood, and did not complete primary school. Sustaining himself by his hometown’s soil and

tempered by the rural poverty, Mo Yan devoted himself to writing and scaled the peak of world literature, winning the Nobel Prize in Literature last year.

Venerable Master renounced at the age of twelve, came to Taiwan in 1949, and devoted himself wholeheartedly to Humanistic Buddhism. For 64 years, he built a boundless “World of Hsing Yun.”⁵ Poor in their childhood, both are now enriching generation after generation of young people with their words and beliefs. If Taiwanese society can comprehend the ten points of “Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s Values” summarized below, would Parliament operate more smoothly and bring some harmony between the two political parties?

1. All of these are not mine; I don’t even have a desk. (Happiness is found in emptiness)
2. Owning everything by having nothing; not taking things as my own. (The strong have no desires)
3. You are in me and I am in you. (Sharing a common fate)
4. The public comes first before me. (Philosophy of being second)
5. You are right and I am wrong; You are important and I am not; You can have, while I keep nothing; You enjoy happiness, while I take on suffering. (Tolerance and humility)
6. Deal with that which is difficult and face those who are demanding. (Overcome difficulties)
7. With sentiment and righteousness, there is a win-win situation for all. (Balancing sentiment and righteousness)
8. I don’t understand management but I understand people’s minds. (Leading with the heart)
9. Developing affinities with people only with sincerity. (Making friends wholeheartedly)
10. I have a little compassion and a heart for China. (Taking the heart as the foundation)

All of “Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s Values” are centered on “being willing to give.” Especially for those who relentlessly pursue power and wealth, “being willing

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to give” is more effective than taking any medication. It can save your health, family, integrity, reputation, and even sleep.

Notes

- 1 Now known as the National Taipei University of Business. -Ed.
- 2 《百年仰望》 -Ed.
- 3 「和而不流」 -Ed.
- 4 「和平紅利」 -Ed.
- 5 「星雲世界」 -Ed.