

HUMANISTIC BUDDHISM AND ITS “HUMANIZATION, MODERNIZATION, AND INCORPORATION INTO DAILY LIFE”

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1. “Humanization” in Humanistic Buddhism

Since the twentieth century, Chinese Buddhism has entered a golden age of development and an opportune time for the development of Humanistic Buddhism. As a stronghold of today’s Humanistic Buddhism, Fo Guang Shan has made great contributions to its development and shoulders the responsibility of creating a new era of Humanistic Buddhism. Since we have the good fortune of being able to participate in Fo Guang Shan’s development of Humanistic Buddhism, we naturally also bear its mission. This is a great opportunity that should be cherished. Venerable Master’s philosophy of Humanistic Buddhism is deep and wide like the ocean, and his undertakings have been brilliant. I have recently read Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s works, and some of his discourses have given me a deeper appreciation of the spirit of Humanistic Buddhism. I have lately been reflecting upon Buddhism’s “humanization, modernization, and incorporation into daily life” as proposed by Venerable Master Hsing Yun. He stated:

Buddhism was originally very good but has undergone several changes over time. The problem now is that Buddhism has been secluded up in the mountains, and it seems like the monopoly of monasteries. I want to bring Buddhism into the family and society. Also, past discussions of Buddhist scriptures focused on the aspect of mysticism—heavenly and supramundane world. It was useless to people! I want it to be applicable to people’s lives. So, I want to reform. I want to humanize, modernize, and incorporate Buddhism into people’s lives.¹

Here the Venerable Master proposes Buddhism’s “humanization, modernization, and incorporation into daily life.” These accurately convey the three essential features

of Humanistic Buddhism on which I would like to elaborate. First, the Venerable Master uses “humanization” to indicate Buddhism’s concern with humanity. Although the Buddha directed his teachings towards “all sentient beings,” he became enlightened, taught the Dharma, and passed away in the human world to set an example of freedom and liberation. The primary purpose of our faith and study of Buddhism is also to relieve the fundamental suffering of human life and to attain the unsurpassed *bodhi* and reach the state of *parinirvana*. For us, non-human realms (such as heaven) and non-human life (like the *asuras*) are too far removed. Although they can be studied, they are not pressing issues nor matters of life or death. What Humanistic Buddhism is most concerned about are the issues faced by people, humanity, and the human world. There are many kinds of issues in the human world but they can generally be delineated into politics, economics, spiritual, culture, technology, education, sports, and so on. The contemporary world faces many problems, such as environmental pollution, energy crisis, genetic modification, ethnic strife, separatism, authoritarianism, terrorism, women’s issues, labor issues, and many more. These are all very real human problems, and most are a result of the “collective karma” of human beings, especially the problems of the “material world.” As Buddhism disseminates in the human world, it inevitably must face these issues. The Dharma must be used to explain these issues and to suggest solutions. In traditional Buddhism, some eminent monks only wanted to “escape” from the world and hide deep within the mountains to attain their own spiritual goals, which runs contrary to the humanistic nature of Buddhism.

2. “Modernization” in Humanistic Buddhism

Venerable Master Hsing Yun uses the term “modernization” to show the modern nature of Buddhism, and especially Humanistic Buddhism. To discuss the modern nature of Buddhism is not about whether it was present in different periods of Buddhism—such as Early, Sectarian, Mahayana, Sui-Tang Buddhism—given that Buddhism is led by this modern nature, its propagation and the dissemination of the faith in the Dharma will necessarily have modern characteristics, and will inevitably be in line with the “general principles” of sentient beings under the conditions of modernity. From the time when Master Taixu began, Buddhism in the world was trying to adapt to modern society and attempting to create a “modernized” Buddhism. Taixu undertook “three great revolutions” of Buddhism to systematically reform traditional Buddhism from the three aspects of doctrine, organizational structure, and temple property. In interacting

with people from all walks of life (including politicians) in modern society, engaging in dialogue with modern thinkers from different areas of study (such as Russell), spreading the Dharma through various new technologies (media and technology), and through new organizations (schools, women’s associations, etc.), Taixu was engaging in the modernization of Buddhism. More significantly, Taixu’s philosophy of Humanistic Buddhism reflected an important component of modernity: “revolution,” and could also be considered a “revolutionary” form of Buddhism. As a monastic, he devoted himself to revolution, and pointed out the limits of worldly revolutions from the perspective of Buddhism—this encompassed some extremely important ideas. On this foundation, Venerable Master Hsing Yun engages in the “modernization” of Buddhism and is advancing it to new heights, writing a new glorious chapter in the history of Chinese Buddhism. Fo Guang Shan, where it is situated now, is a modern Buddhist organization. I was astounded after my visits this year to temples in Kaohsiung and Taipei—situated in bustling cities, they brought Buddhist teachings to the modern metropolis, which was extremely different from the reclusive and distant monasteries I had been familiar with. Of course, the modernity of Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s Humanistic Buddhism is better embodied in his identification of modern concepts of “liberty, democracy, equality, and justice” and how he uses the wisdom of Buddhism to explain these concepts and vice versa.

Venerable Master Hsing Yun once said:

I am not one who likes reform—I am very conservative, but when the systems and rules are obsolete, I must be brave enough to dispense with them and not simply stick to tradition. Neither am I one who likes innovation—I am very traditional but, in the spirit of pursuing excellence, I should strive for breakthroughs and not stick to old rules. Even less am I one who enjoys power—I prefer collaborative effort, but when rules are broken, I must make sure justice prevails. I also do not like being a leader—I am very happy to be led by others and to cooperate with others, but when something must be done, I will shoulder the responsibility. I am not one who likes to talk—I prefer silence and solitude, but when the world needs the voice of justice, I must rise. Nor am I one

who likes to argue—I prefer to go with the flow of conditions and let go, but when someone goes against the truth and harms the public, I must argue strongly for what is right; it is like picking out the bad apples in the basket so they do not affect the good ones.²

I find this passage extremely intriguing.

3. “Incorporation into Daily Life” of Humanistic Buddhism

Venerable Master Hsing Yun uses the expression “incorporation into daily life” to indicate that Buddhism is applicable to everyday living. He has often said, “Buddhism and daily life are inseparable. We cannot study Buddhism purely as knowledge, but we should integrate it into our daily lives.” Also, “People cannot be separated from their daily life, and that should be guided by the Dharma.” Therefore, “daily life and faith in the Dharma should be united, that is, using the Dharma to guide life.” To attain “the Dharma as part of life” and “life as part of the Dharma,”³ is to engage in spiritual cultivation in daily life, and to put the Dharma into practice are all to manifest the spirit of the Dharma in all aspects of life—this is what Humanistic Buddhism is all about. Humans live within societies, families, within various social groups and within a web of interpersonal interactions. Buddhism, therefore, must penetrate deeply into society, the family, and the multiple aspects of life. From dressing, eating, sleeping, walking, drinking tea, chatting, playing cards, playing chess, listening to music, watching the scenery, to dating, raising children, honoring parents, and funerals, these are part of human life, all need the guidance of Buddhist wisdom and methods of Buddhist cultivation. The *Doctrine of the Mean* states: “The Way of the Noble Man starts with the average men and women.”⁴ The wisdom of the Dharma is also found within “the average men and women, even though [they are] lacking in ability.”⁵ Venerable Master Hsing Yun speaks of forty ways of practicing Chan, which greatly enriches the tastes of daily life and is replete with the flavors of Chan and truth.

4. The Actualization and Future Prospects of Humanistic Buddhism’s “Humanization, Modernization, and Incorporation into Daily Life”

In the development of Humanistic Buddhism till today, its “Humanization,

Modernization, and Incorporation into Daily Life” spoken of by Venerable Master Hsing Yun have become a reality to a large extent. Take the Buddha’s Light International Association (BLIA) as an example. It was founded to take Buddhism “from traditional Buddhism to modern Buddhism, from secluded Buddhism to societal Buddhism, from Buddhism that avoids the world to Buddhism that benefits and engages the world, from individual Buddhism to collective Buddhism, from monastic Buddhism to monastic and lay Buddhism, from a Buddhism of followers to a Buddhism of lecturers, from a penitent Buddhism to an enterprising Buddhism, from a Buddhism of good deeds to a missionary Buddhism of advocacy, and from disorganized Buddhism to systematic Buddhism.”⁶

The BLIA today has indeed aided Buddhism in its move from the mountains and forests to the city, from China to the world, from the temple to the community, and from the meditation hall to the family. It has made great contributions to world peace, an accord between Taiwan and Mainland China, normal familial relations, and harmony between the self and others. What we face now is how to promote the “Hsing Yun Model of Humanistic Buddhism.” I believe the opportunity for this is ripe. I believe there is a great opportunity for the future of Humanistic Buddhism. I also believe that, under the illumination of Humanistic Buddhism, Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s hopes that “everyone will act in accordance with the compassion and wisdom of the Dharma, be respectful and tolerant, be joyful and harmonious, be genuine and sincere, and jointly create lives of wholeness and ease”⁷ will be realized. Let us respond to Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s appeal to working together to build “a Humanistic Buddhism that brings out the joys of living,” “a Humanistic Buddhism of wealth and abundance,” “a compassionate and ethical Humanistic Buddhism,” and “Humanistic Buddhist families full of harmony and respect!”⁸

Notes

1 「佛教本來都很好，不過流傳久了以後，就有一些不同。現在的問題是，佛教都到山裡去了，似乎成了寺廟所有，我要把佛教帶到家庭，與社會接觸。還有，過去講佛經，都談玄說妙，動不動天地怎麼樣，對人沒有用啊！我要把它落實到人的生活裡來。所以我想改革，把佛敎人間化、現代化、生活化。」-Ed.

2 「我不是一個喜歡改革的人，我很保守，但是當典章制度不合時宜的時候，就要勇於除弊，而不能因循苟且；我也不是個喜歡創新的人，我很傳統，但是本著精益求精的精神，我應該力求突破，而不應墨守成規；我更不是一個喜歡權力的人，我喜歡集體創作，但是當有人破壞章法時，我必須主持公道；我也不是個愛做領袖的人，我很樂於被人領導，與他人配合，但是應有所為的時候，我當仁不讓；我不是一個喜歡說話的人，我更喜歡寧靜自處，但是當世界需要正義之聲時，我必須奮起疾呼；我也不是個喜歡計較的人，隨緣放下，但是當有人侵犯真理、危害大眾時，我必須據理力爭，就如同挑出籃中的壞蘋果，才不會影響其他好蘋果。」-Ed.

3 「佛教與我們的日常生活有密不可分的關係，我們不可以把佛教全然當成學問來研究，應該把它融會在我們的日常生活裡。」「因為人不能沒有生活，而生活需要用佛法來指導」，所以「應該把所信仰的佛法 和生活打成一片，也就是用佛法來指導生活」，以達到「佛法生活化」和「生活佛法化」-Ed.

4 「君子之道，造端乎夫婦。」 Charles Muller’s translation, see <http://www.acmuller.net/con-dao/docofmean.html>. -Ed.

5 「夫婦之愚」, adapted from Charles Muller’s translation, see <http://www.acmuller.net/con-dao/docofmean.html>. -Ed.

- 6 「從傳統到現代、從山林到社會、從遁世到救世、從獨居到大眾、從唯僧到和信、從弟子到講師、從經懺到事業、從行善到傳教、從散漫到制度。」-Ed.
- 7 「人人本著佛法的慈悲智慧，彼此尊重包容，歡喜融和，真心實意相待，共創圓滿自在的人生」 -Ed.
- 8 「生活樂趣的人間佛教」、「財富豐足的人間佛教」、「慈悲道德的人間佛教」、「眷屬和敬的人間佛教」-Ed.