

THE INFLUENCE OF HUMANISTIC BUDDHISM IN DEEPENING THE FOUNDING IDEALS OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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Abstract

As a result of government support at the city and county levels, there has been a significant increase in the number of community colleges in Taiwan, with nearly eighty schools added in recent years. However, education cannot be lacking in regard to its fundamental ideals. An issue of concern among the people preparing to establish community colleges was how to avoid turning the colleges into a disguised form of tuition, while maintaining the primary demand of developing civic consciousness by encouraging community participation. Given the demand of civic consciousness, though the emphasis is on principles such as “knowledge emancipation,” “broadening horizons,” and “active participation in public affairs” as its base, at the same time—while emphasizing “knowledge emancipation”—how can we mold a character with individualistic but not selfish, living but not materialistic, localized but not vulgar, convenient but not casual, and learning but dull? These are also issues that community colleges would face in actualizing such ideals.

This paper proposes that while knowledge emancipation serves as a core ideal for community colleges, in practice this should not be dissociated from the ultimate concern for “human” and expand on such ideals without limits. With this in mind, it can be asserted that without a humanitarian concern, the former would lack foundation. Specifically, knowledge emancipation must be grounded in humanism by encouraging the deepening of fundamental virtues of human nature, compassion, altruism, and joy. Not only can these sustain community colleges in practical procedures, that is the consistency and necessity of “individual, community, and civic society.” Additionally, it points to a clear direction of values in the process of knowledge emancipation, serving as the objectives of community colleges to nurture human character. It is the commitment to respect human nature and people-orientedness that we can see Humanistic Buddhism’s influence on the foundational ideals of the community colleges. Through combining

Humanistic Buddhism's ideals of social education and those of community colleges—equality, diversity, freedom, and sharing—“equality with respect,” “diversity with harmony,” “freedom with moderation,” and “sharing with compassion” are achieved from the inside-out.

Keywords: Venerable Master Hsing Yun, Humanistic Buddhism, community college, knowledge emancipation, civic consciousness

1. The Origin

At the end of 2004, the Humanistic Culture and Education Foundation of Fo Guang Shan proposed the establishment of a community college in Miaoli County. Approval was granted after deliberation by the county government. In March of the following year, the new college welcomed its first intake of students. The college was named the Da Ming¹ Community College by Venerable Master Hsing Yun, who named it with the meaning of “limitless illumination.” Through the efforts of monastics, the first enrolment saw more than 800 students. The college was located at the newly-built Cultural and Education Center at the Fo Guang Shan Da Ming Temple in Miaoli. This was not only an initial step in fulfilling Venerable Master Hsing Yun's great vow to propagate the Dharma in Miaoli, but also provided new opportunities for the social education in Miaoli through Humanistic Buddhism ideals.

At the beginning of this inauguration, it was initiated by the Fo Guang Shan members' sense of purpose, the monastics of Da Ming Temple and the members of the Buddha's Light International Association (BLIA) collaboratively completed this community college project. The initial discussions and planning finished after a short three-month period. The proposal was then submitted quickly, followed by review meetings at the County. The next steps included recruitment of teaching staff, completion of human resource management policies and protocols, and the recruitment of students. For all those involved in this planning work, the successful launch of the college's first group of students occurred in March of the following year. At least, they were able to fulfill Venerable Master's wish. Needless to say, the planning process had its challenges and kept the team very busy. However, it was just as Venerable Master Hsing Yun's saying, “Being busy is Dharma joy and a way to cultivate our bodhi mind. It is a way to improve ourselves and focus our minds and bodies.”

While celebrating the launch of Da Ming Community College, there were also some challenges in curriculum planning:

1. As a result of governmental support at city and county levels, at least one community college was established in each jurisdiction. An analysis of the colleges' course content revealed that curriculum planning seemed to be driven by an interest to pursue ways to balance ledgers despite the governmental funding. This need to raise funding resulted in a gradual increase of the percentage of skills-based courses being offered, such as professional certificate programs or recreational courses, while scholarly-focused syllabi were phased out. This was not the original intention of the community colleges. This result was not the original intention of either community colleges, universities, or talent classes. The intent of the community colleges was to focus on experiential training, while universities focus on professional training, and recreational classes on skills counselling. Such "package knowledge" should differ from one another. How to maintain scholarly focused coursework of community college while skillfully offering various recreational courses. At the same time, working together but not overlapping courses with tutoring agencies, is truly the first major challenge for community colleges.

2. The fundamental ideals of most community colleges, though they emphasize knowledge emancipation as the actualization process going from the individual, the group, to the community, fail to provide concrete approaches as to how the individual may resolve questions concerning life purpose and mission through such knowledge emancipation. If learning to engage in civic discourse is solely actualized from the perspective of increasing one's life experiences and reconstructing one's sense of self, would the concept of knowledge emancipation only become an excuse for echoing the views of others, and thus passing up on the opportunity and courage to find a balance between individual experience and universal values? If that is the case, in the midst of disordered values and confusion between truth and falsity, knowledge emancipation would lead to helplessness and passivity. As such, how to deepen knowledge emancipation and to instill positive and proactive characteristics in participants is the second problem that community colleges must address.

3. A third challenge was pushback concerning Fo Guang Shan establishing the

Da Ming Community College, just as the cases of Nanhua and Fo Guang Universities. The general public typically view the monastic community as “a dharm beyond this world.” To them, there is an unbridgeable divide between spiritual cultivation of “supramundane world” and “this-worldly” endeavors. Therefore, we had to properly address the mutuality of the absolute concerns addressed by religion and the relative self-interested pursuits of this-worldly knowledge by coming up with ways to do this through concrete action, such as through joyful learning to developing an affirmation for life, and then realizing the interpenetrating path of “Dharma and enlightenment cannot be attained away from the world,” “transcendence does not hinder engagement,” and “transcendence is engagement.”

Regarding the first challenge, due to the valuable comments as well as related opportunities and assistance provided by the various educational and cultural initiatives undertaken by Fo Guang Shan, like Changhua Community University and Fo Guang Shan Open University, this challenge has been overcome.

However, regarding the second and third challenges, some clarification is required as to why we are committed to imbuing the spirit of Humanistic Buddhism into the academic scholarship of community colleges. That being, to alleviate the potential crisis brought about by knowledge emancipation. This is not only because the Da Ming Community College is organized by the Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Order, but more importantly, because Humanistic Buddhism is principally concerned with the human aspect of life. In applying the Four Givings: “giving others faith; giving others joy; giving others joy; and giving others convenience,”² we can remedy the potential loss of personal values that could occur with knowledge emancipation, as well as the lack of humanistic cultivation resulting from overly focusing on personal development without empathizing with community life. It must also be mentioned that religion is not just transcendent, but also embodies a spirit of engagement. Applying religion to our educational philosophy not only emphasizes a humanistic concern, but also the human path of: “Seeking progress in a state of selflessness, realizing Chan in daily life, attaining happiness in the service of others, finding satisfaction in fulfilling responsibilities, and seeking a peace-of-mind in meeting our obligations.”^{3,4}

2. Knowledge Emancipation: Ideology and Practical Challenges

Ideology is the spirit of education. An ideology determines the kind of learning environment and learning personalities. The most significant difference between community colleges and other institutions (such as universities, continuing education, and accredited courses) is that instead of focusing on academic studies or professional training, community colleges offer a diverse learning experience that develops students' self-awareness of localization. Through identifying the "self with you," "self with others," one changes his or her local environment and contributes to emerging cultures containing life experiences. As such, many familiar concepts today, such as community building, civil society, and lifelong learning are all related to this ideal of community colleges. This means that a culture cannot take root in a community unless people's participation gives it life. Therefore, the goal of community colleges is not to train professionals, nor to offer bridging education that emphasizes adult technical and vocational skills; instead, education is a means of guiding the students through a process of learning and dialog that ultimately awakens the students' willingness and readiness to actively participate in their community through service and contribution.

Since every citizen is entitled to participate in a public discourse, the courses and curricula of community colleges do not have any age⁵ or experience-based restrictions, nor any educational requirements for enrollment. Through such training of localized self-awareness, students subsequently engage in community service and transition from being the recipient of knowledge to the source of knowledge, passive to proactive, audience member to lead actor, and fragmented in learning to engaging in it as a lifelong pursuit. The above progression is the foundational ideal of a community college education, and because in its application possess lifelong quality, hence known as "lifelong education."

Behind this philosophy of lifelong learning, from the perspective of an educator, community colleges do not deem students to be passive recipients of knowledge, but rather the source of knowledge. Community colleges, therefore, seek to facilitate the process for learners to develop self-awareness, self-identity, and to participate in and interact with society. This is why such colleges emphasize the knowledge emancipation, so that every participant may, through the multi-faceted process of the absorption, critique, deconstruction, and reconstruction of knowledge, evolve from being passive recipients of knowledge to active participants. By reevaluating how knowledge is applied

and reforming this process from the viewpoint of life experiences via multiple aspects of dialog, daily experience, and cultural localization, students influence their local culture. Thus, community colleges in different regions have unique features and emphases that reflect the characteristics of their community—including trait, customs, and resources.

In applying the concept of knowledge emancipation, we have also realized that the objective is the process to awaken the subject's self-awareness, while at the same time creating a new culture and way of life through interactions between the subjects, or between the subjects and their environment. Examples of this include the collectively shaped effects on culture that were evident at the Wenshan Community College in Taipei city, and the coffee culture in Gukeng of Yunlin County. However, conflicts and crises are inevitable when dissimilar ideas come together. Without a grounding in the humanistic principles of inclusiveness and respect, it is difficult to see how opposing views can be reconciled. Even so, a foundation in humanistic principles is still required when working towards a common agreement and creating the motivation to advance a culture simply based on the single theory of knowledge emancipation. As such, the concept of knowledge emancipation does not require one to relinquish one's basic internal values as a human in order to bring out the possibility of reshaping knowledge.

However, the concept of knowledge emancipation might have been overly simplified or even misconstrued in today's society. Self-awareness is often replaced by individualism, individuality overrides the collective good, the sum of individuals' experiences becomes limited to the personal experience of a few, and new cultures are created that flaunt differences instead of uniting differences within communities. When discussing civic consciousness, civil rights are often a point of focus, yet the concept of obligation to society is usually neglected. People focus on personal growth, yet have little concern for others. People often expect to be treated fairly, but forget to reciprocate this to others. People demand absolute freedom, but are blind to the harm they cause others.

Freedom is a universal value, core to civil society. However, if exercised without the discipline of respect for humanity and tolerance, freedom becomes an excuse to inflict harm on others. This is illustrated in two recent events in Taiwan: the funeral parlor rice video scandal, and an incident with the actress Xia Yi. In the funeral parlor rice video scandal, the video was released in the name of "exposing social ills," only later

exposed as a complete hoax. Nonetheless, the fake video led to panic among the public. The incident involving the actress Xia Yi began as emotional troubles between two individuals in a relationship. The media, however, portrayed the actress as a “modern-day witch,” leading to the early demise of her career as an entertainer in Taiwan. In advocating for the knowledge emancipation, its true purpose must not be forgotten. Otherwise, pursuing freedom, equality, diversity, and sharing could inevitably lead to abuse of power, formality, distortion, and charity. The capacity to exercise constraint, empathize with others, tolerate others, respect others, and be considerate are all within basic human nature, and these values should not be suppressed in the name of knowledge emancipation or individual autonomy.

In the above cases, the problem seems not to be with knowledge itself, but rather in how knowledge is used. It is important to hold true to those qualities that make us human, as knowledge benefits all when used by virtuous people, but when used by individuals with unethical intentions, it brings harm. Therefore, an understanding of the fundamental values of humanity is essential for a discussion concerning knowledge emancipation. This echoes Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s saying: “To resolve and to develop.”^{6,7} Without first establishing fundamental human values, well-intended endeavors might end up causing upset or even doing harm. Without a virtuous motivation, who would have faith in community colleges’ ability to achieve the goal of developing civic consciousness and building new cultures and ideals? A direction towards a healthy future would not be possible without the right motivation at the start of a journey and establishing fundamental human values.

3. Two-Phase Process of Knowledge Emancipation

The community college movement has always been linked to the democratic process in Taiwanese society.⁸ In politics, “civil society” is emphasized. In caring for the community, “community building” is emphasized. Both share the principle that a participatory educational experience transforms an individual from a passive recipient of knowledge into an active learner, who then learns to participate in the development of their community and a civil society, as well as civic affairs. In this process, the students develop values essential for a civil society—namely equality, diversity, freedom, and sharing.

Looking back at history, one finds that knowledge emancipation and the Age of Enlightenment in the West have their related backgrounds.⁹ At the beginning of the Age of Enlightenment, at that time the Church controlled knowledge in the West; hence, any information that contradicted current doctrine in the Bible risked being banned. For instance, the astronomer Galileo's heliocentric view of the solar system published in *Starry Messenger*,¹⁰ while in line with today's astronomical science, contradicted the Church's geocentric theory at that time. The Church, therefore, condemned Galileo for his heretical views and he was placed under house arrest for the rest of his life.¹¹ Similarly, during the decades when martial law was enforced in Taiwan, the interpretation of knowledge was controlled by the government rather than the people. Those with access to power prevailed, rather than those with facts. Therefore, the movement to emancipate knowledge seems to run parallel with the public's demand for democracy within general society, and has now become mainstream.

While knowledge emancipation might not have always been a prominent issue in history, the demand for it has manifested in different ways throughout time. In modern Taiwan, this appeal was part of the society's call for freedom and building civic consciousness in the post-martial law period. However, knowledge emancipation needs to be implemented within the bounds of the ethical values of "humanity;" a limitless expansion of knowledge emancipation could be aligned with terms such as "rationality," "scientific laws," and "scientific endeavor." However, if ethics are neglected, then whether it will eventually be an emancipation or a disaster for humankind is unknown.

With the rise of the Age of Enlightenment, most people generally believed that the world could be mastered through human rationality. Yet, the study of biology was used to lend support to "Social Darwinism" and its theory of "survival of the fittest"—resulting in the misappropriation of a scientific rationale for narrow-minded racist ideologies. These ideologies were fueled in an environment where it was believed that the powerful may oppress the weak, and where catastrophic disasters could drive entire communities close to annihilation, as experienced by the Jewish and the Chinese people.¹² In the later years of the Eastern Han dynasty, the Disasters of the Partisan Prohibitions led to Confucian scholars becoming increasingly disillusioned with the imperial government, and they therefore began distancing themselves from the government. Over time, the scholars justified their logic with the sayings of Laozi and Zhuangzi, emphasizing the sensibility of such isolationism and creating what is known as Xuanxue.¹³ However, such

a trend of “pure criticism” and “metaphysical talk” caused, as Cao Pi pointed out in his *Classical Treatises*:¹⁴ “Each family to be in disagreement and everyone to be of a different opinion, [so much so that] there was no standard method to weigh discourses and no certain values ascribed to affairs, [thus leading to] the growth of personal favorites and cliques.”^{15,16} Such a trend resulted in most Confucian scholars standing on the sidelines in regard to the survival of the nation, which indirectly led to the demise of the Western Jin dynasty.

Therefore, if we deem knowledge emancipation relevant to our times, and what follows is the demand that what is accepted as true knowledge should no longer be controlled by one centralized authority, but rather shaped by the diverse experiences of many, then the widespread establishment of community colleges is a response to this call for more democratic access. This paper refers to this as “phase one transformation” which emphasizes how to address the problem of increasing access and awareness. Phase two, however, is what the colleges need to address currently: How to strengthen the core value of knowledge emancipation so that it can be relevant to diverse needs. The essential purpose of the second phase is to help people develop a clearer understanding of humanity’s fundamental ethics and values through the process of knowledge emancipation, and thereby establish their lives through settling down in the modernization and diversity of knowledge.

In summary, the author proposes that knowledge emancipation, as the fundamental goal and basic principle of community colleges, may externally be associated with many attributes such as *critical*, *self-aware*, *localized*, *cultural*, *egalitarian*, and *educational* but has to be in essence concerned with the ethical aspect of human self-awareness. It must be grounded in the humanistic values of *humanism*, *compassion*, *joy*, and *altruism*. This method, founded upon an emphasis on humanity developing compassion for all and the willingness to share, simultaneously combined with knowledge to support democratic and modernized developments, seems to be able to ensure the success of knowledge emancipation.

In reality, this beneficial effort to advance from merely purifying minds to purifying the world both emphasizes the fundamental value of “humanity” but also integrates modern knowledge, art and culture. This philosophy was started some sixty years ago under the leadership of Venerable Master Hsing Yun with the founding of Fo Guang

Shan. The objectives of Fo Guang Shan are:

To propagate Dharma through culture,
To foster talents through education,
To benefit society through philanthropy,
To purify human minds through spiritual cultivation.

That is to say, Fo Guang Shan sees self-awareness as its goal and teaches the ideas of benefiting others. In this manner, and by engaging in worldly undertakings, Fo Guang Shan has planted bodhi seeds across the five continents, and has brought them to fruition and is renowned as a result.

Thus, using Humanistic Buddhism as a framework for community colleges engenders a spirit of the fundamental values of humanity. More specifically, it injects a religious concern into the ethical character of modern knowledge in order to elevate its effect of social education through “humanism as its core” and “knowledge as its extension,” “*prajñā*-wisdom as its roots” and “expedient means as its manifestation,” and “compassion as its essence” and “application as its function.”¹⁷ This approach not only aligns well with the fundamental ideals of community colleges, but as informed by Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s model of Humanistic Buddhism, community colleges also reinforce the inward and outward associations of knowledge emancipation. Ultimately, the pursuit of “knowledge of wisdom,” “equality of compassion,” and “application of vows,” found within Humanistic Buddhism promises a civil society that is harmonious, symbiotic, joyful, and interdependent.

4. A Reference to the Ideology of Social Education of Humanistic Buddhism

Fo Guang Shan may be a Buddhist monastic order, but it does not advocate a life of seclusion in pursuit of personal enlightenment just because it is a religious organization.¹⁸ On the contrary, building on the fundamental value of humanism, Fo Guang Shan actively engages in social education through its establishing four objectives of education, culture, philanthropy, and spiritual cultivation. A genuine concern for current issues and needs in society can be observed in Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s writings such as: “Four Transformations Movement,”¹⁹ “Ten Major Characteristics of Fo Guang Shan,”²⁰ and “A Blueprint for Humanistic Buddhism,”²¹ showing us that one has to integrate the practice

of “enlightening oneself and others” and “perfecting self for the benefit of others” into daily life. In fact, we sometimes find that “the Buddha is no less this-worldly than those inhabiting the world,”²² but to deify him and remove him from the human realm stems from a misunderstanding about the term religion in the Buddhist context.

1. The Awakened One and religion

Most people regard religion as a synonym for terms such as folk religion or superstition. The Daoist perspective on deities has had an undeniable influence on the Chinese, which explains why some people erroneously equate the Buddha to an immortal, Buddhist monastics to Daoist priests, and religious practices to reclusive methods of seeking immortality and practicing the Dao.

However, as stated by Venerable Hui Kai, the two characters in the Chinese term for religion in fact refer to two concepts, namely awakening the self and liberating others.²³ Therefore, simply the words inform us that there are differences between religion and folk religion or superstition. Religion should engage the process of awakening the self and further, the liberation of others. In other words, the purpose of religion is not to pursue an other-worldly end through faith, but rather to recognize an integral character which is awakened to realities within this very world, and also to liberate others through this path of awakening. In this sense, Buddhism can be regarded as the epitome of this definition of religion.

In Buddhism, the Buddha is the awakened one,²⁴ and not a god. Hence, Buddhism has been and always will be a living humanistic study built on the foundations of enlightening oneself and others, the equality of buddha nature, and that everyone can become a buddha.²⁵ It further helps one “appreciate dependent origination, be affirmative towards life, make great vows, and practice in the world”²⁶ as a bridge between the transcendent goal of reaching the other shore of suffering and the this-worldly realities we face today.

As stated by Venerable Master Hsing Yun, Buddhism is fundamentally a humanistic religion²⁷ based on the dual relationship between humanity’s self-awakening and liberating others, and as such is a religion which appreciates causes and conditions, the harmony between all and peaceful coexistence. Hence, one may see Buddhism as

awakening one's attitude towards life rather than a religion. As such, Buddhism as a whole may be more fundamentally oriented to ultimate human concerns vis-à-vis other academic studies. Yet it is fundamentally a living humanistic study rather than simply a consolation for the dying.

Hence, it would be a prejudice, seemingly a kind of tendency, to see Buddhism as a superstition or to deify the Buddha simply because there are Buddhist practices such as sutra-chanting and prostrations. Many also regard Buddhism as distanced from empirical knowledge obtained through modern scientific methods and that it overlooks the tradition of scientific reasoning on objective truth, while also ignoring the Buddhist tradition of the five sciences.²⁸

An awakened one bears the attitude towards life with an understanding of the true nature of things through dependent origination and empty nature. Forging forward based on this true nature, seeking stability in the midst of dependent origination, developing equanimity through compassion and putting one's vows to practice. As such, an awakened one, as aptly described by Heidegger's being-in-the-world, uses the three bodhisattva virtues of wisdom, compassion, and cultivation. Additionally to making vows in order to proactively pursue life's ultimate concerns.

Buddhism does not advocate an approach which seeks only supramundane world transcendence, but transcendence through this-worldly engagement and uses such a spirit to abide in a this-worldly environment. To an awakened one, engagement and transcendence are not polar opposites but simply a matter of states of mind and the degree of one's practice. Engaging in this-worldly undertakings with a transcendent spirit, one liberates self through the latter and liberates others through the former—the two are intricately interconnected, and therefore one cannot be without the other. As such, in this respect, an awakened one recognizes the importance of awakening through wisdom, benefiting others through compassion, and perfecting all through cultivation and vows—any of these three is inclusive of the other two, and together form a fundamental way to liberation.

2. The Awakened One and Humanistic Buddhism

The Sixth Patriarch Huineng stated:

The Dharma is within the world,
apart from this world there is no awakening.
Seeking bodhi apart from the world
is like looking for a rabbit's horn.^{29,30}

The Buddha is an awakened one of this world. If awakened, in that moment the human realm is a Pure Land; if not, the distance between the two is insurmountable.

Concepts such as “buddhahood is attained when one perfects what it means to be human” and there being “no awakening apart from this world”³¹ are what motivated Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s lifetime dedication to advocating Humanistic Buddhism. To help illustrate these principles and to give others faith in them, Venerable Master Hsing Yun always pays close attention to what is happening in society, teaches his disciples to be cognizant of social changes, and [when needed] provide solutions. In addition, he humanistically emphasizes taking care of one’s everyday physical and mental activity with self-awareness through the single trajectory of Humanistic Buddhism.³²

In light of the above, under the Venerable Master’s leadership, the Fo Guang Shan monastic order emulates the exemplary character and life philosophy of the Awakened One in everyday endeavors. Seeking to build a Pure Land on earth, Fo Guang Shan engages in social and educational undertakings such as academic journals, newspapers, schools, hospitals, senior care and children’s home, social care, etc.—all of which stands testament to its contribution to Humanistic Buddhism.

Therefore, Humanistic Buddhism is neither a sect nor a school of Buddhism, but an emphasis on the humanistic attributes of Buddhism to correct the common misperception that it is only concerned with supramundane world aspirations and not with this-worldly endeavors. In the same vein, it would be a mistake to deify the Buddha, since he is indeed of the human realm.

5. Application of Humanistic Buddhism by Community Colleges

Modern-day civic education has become increasingly prevalent and fundamental to the aspiration of community colleges, expanding into many related concepts, such

as individualized, critical, localized, daily life, egalitarian, liberty, educational, and cultural as the call for knowledge emancipation becomes fused with civic consciousness. However, as discussed above, if knowledge emancipation is allowed to extend without limits and without regard for its humanistic spirit, it may lead to flaws such as: “Emphasizing rights but not duties, individual concerns but not consideration for others, freedom that may lead to abuse, equality that may just be in name, localization that may lack sophistication, culture that is not international, and emphasizing education but neglecting consciousness.”³³

As such, the concept of social education presented by Humanistic Buddhism puts humanity at its core. By gaining *prajñā* based on humanity through understanding cause and effect, comprehending human ethics, contemplating dependent origination and *samsāra*, and realizing emptiness,³⁴ transforming ruthlessness into peace through wisdom as its essence and skillful means as its function, living with compassion, practicing in the world, and vowing to benefit others.”³⁵ It is hoped that society may progress towards a Humanistic Pure Land. Humanistic Buddhism certainly does not reject dialog between individuals and knowledge or modernization, and accordingly Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s publications are replete with diverse concerns for the relationships between humans, humans and society, and humans and nature. However, at the same time he strongly emphasizes the need to start by making a vow to achieve supreme enlightenment before progressing to internal development, which is a path of inner self-awakening leading on to the external world.

Lu Xiangshan, a scholar of the Song Neo-Confucian Idealistic School said: “Even if I were to not recognize a single word, I must still squarely be recognized as a person.”^{36,37} Huineng, the Sixth Patriarch of the Chan School, may not have been literate, but on hearing this verse from the *Diamond Sutra*:^{38,39} “To give rise to a mind that does not abide in anything,”⁴⁰ he became immediately enlightened. When Venerable Master Hsing Yun speaks to an audience in lecture halls, he does so in a myriad of ways in accordance with truth and capabilities, without subscribing to any fixed rules, but instead touching on many aspects such as emotions, politics, and daily life. In all of this he draws upon the rhythms of life, and through his writings and speeches awakens the benevolent nature of humanity and guides it towards self-awakening. In this sense, buddha nature is really human nature. Therefore Venerable Master Hsing Yun says: “What we call the Dharma is but the benevolent nature of humans.”^{41,42}

It goes without saying that although conscience and capability of being good is not equivalent to knowledge, it may open the gates to wisdom and both meld together to benefit beings through the teachings by *Kalyāṇamitras* and the process of listening, contemplating, practicing and realizing.⁴³ In the dialog between humans and books, if awakened to one's humanity and mind, then one is in conversation with the sages, and the six classics. One further realizes that all dharmas have been spoken of by the Buddha and are mutually evident with the awakened one, thus obtaining a sense of joy from mutual harmony and reflection.

Humanistic Buddhism's guiding approach of developing from the inner to the external self seems to indicate a clearer direction of knowledge emancipation, without which we would not regard it as human in its core. This then leads to the conclusion that knowledge is like a blind beast without any sense of direction.

In terms of designing a syllabus for the community college, we have adopted the three major categories of thought, operation, and application—namely, academic, recreational courses, and community courses. However, in terms of its intention, our community college emphasizes the process of character building before engaging in activity, and engaging in activity before contributing to the world.⁴⁴ Placing community courses (engaging in activity) as a bridge between the person (character building) and society (contributing to the world), participants of these community courses move from the earlier phase of character building, where they have been inspired towards civic consciousness and the value of life, to community courses, which have the elements of participation and engagement with others—applying such spirit into the community or society then brings about a series of symbiotic relationships. The above can be further elaborated as shown below.

Step One: Character Building

Character building is the shaping of one into a mature, proactive, self-awakened, and ethical person through scholarly-focused coursework, recreational training, and seminars, in order to further meet the requirements of participating in public discourses about social issues as given by someone with a mature disposition.

At this stage of learning, the emphasis is on building one's morality, learning, and experience through textual learning and skills development—turning one from a passive recipient developing skills for daily life or scholastic training to a self-awakened, compassionate, learning, and proactive individual. It is not merely a facelift given to vocational training and scholarly-based courses but rather a training in critical thinking from deep within. It is an initiation into self-affirmation and respect for others via an emphasis on scholastic discussions or the learning of lifeskills. Only one with such a mature character can be prepared to participate in public discourse and community development.

Accordingly, this stage is generally split into two parts: scholarly-focused courses—covering topics in the arts and humanities, natural sciences, management sciences, Hakka culture and ethnic studies; and recreational training—dancing, sports, languages, life skills, and topics related to emotional development. In keeping with the educational aspirations of Humanistic Buddhism, our college pays much attention to the subjects of arts and humanities, in terms of introducing students to deep self-reflection and living, and emphasizes the symbiosis between the value of humanity and the application of knowledge. For that reason, our arts and humanities courses are structured based on growing wisdom through textual learning, and is mainly split into three series of texts: China, the West, and religion. The college intends for that the messages contained within these texts to encourage student interest in daily living, beauty, art, life, the humanities, life and death, and temperament.

The primary pedagogical approaches in this phase are:

1. Interdisciplinary education

When it comes to topics for coursework, those relevant to public discourse and important to the community rarely fit into a singular academic discipline; instead, an interdisciplinary approach is required. Therefore, familiarity with general education is a part of learning at community colleges. It is evident that Da Ming Community College have made a deliberate effort to provide general education in courses such as sociology, legal studies, philosophy, literature, and natural sciences, creating a collaborative learning environment based on the ideals of equality and dialog. The ultimate goal is for students to engage and interact with one other, with the external world, and with nature, and that

they may build a reflective and proactive self that is mature, wise, and self-awakened.

2. An emphasis on practical application

In addition to general education courses, Da Ming Community College also place an emphasis on the acquisition of life skills. The primary aim is to stimulate connections between students and the environment and with life in general, and additionally to build a life of self-affirmation and respect for others through exploring, discovering, affirming and enjoying life.

3. Knowledge emancipation

Knowledge emancipation does not eliminate the need for knowledge; instead, it advocates that a reflective and critical approach to knowledge is required. Thus, as the individual develops self-awareness, one is always prepared to acquire new knowledge and reconstruct culture in the face of contemporary changes. On the one hand, by being engaged in the humanities and the arts, one delves into deeper reflections about life's value and purpose of existence, while, on the other hand, one remains open to learning new information, thus is able to find a balance in dialogs about humanistic values and the realities of modernization for future developments.

4. An open dialog

A premise of deconstructing knowledge is a dialog among equals. Thus, the Da Ming Community College seeks to establish an educational environment that fosters an open, interactive, two-way learning model, so as to bridge the dichotomy between educator and educated, and have learners see themselves with confidence as proactive participants of the learning process engaged in the discussion.

5. Ultimate concern

Whether we deal with traditional or modern texts, most designate certain themes or events as the focus of its discussion, yet life's experiences dictate that any attempt to deepen students' understanding of any multifaceted issue (knowledge and value, rationality and sentiments, reality and transcendence, or life and death) requires not

a unidirectional approach but a holistic one. Towards this end, Da Ming Community College draws upon the Buddhist motif of an awakened one, and the corresponding attitude towards life and the universe, so as to expand students' horizons in understanding life holistically. Vertically speaking, this is to inject a humanistic self-awakening into concern for society; horizontally, one benefits society through redefining the value of knowledge given one's humanistic concern. In view of this, we intentionally isolated religious texts as a series, and placed it alongside those of the Chinese and the West, in the hope that it will simultaneously encourage students to learn the texts concerning the arts and humanities, and the holistic reflection and exploration of what it means to be human.

6. Motivate learners by helping others to connect

Given that adults today tend to struggle with purely academic subjects, curriculum design efforts need to focus on what is practical and useful, and what motivates a student. For instance, the course titled Seminar on Education is not an overview of abstract educational theories, but rather is designed to engage learners in a discussion of classical works such as Zhu Bolu's *Maxims for Managing the Home* and *Family Letters* by Zeng Guofan,⁴⁵ so as to be rooted in historical evidence. The course also discusses how lessons from these historical figures' approaches to family relations and education can be applied in today's educational practices.

Similarly, rather than an overview of philosophical theories, the Seminar on Philosophy piques students' interest in philosophical discovery via popular books such as *Sophie's World*.⁴⁶ This approach of focusing on what is practical and relevant is applied to the design of our courses on Chinese, Western, and religious texts, i.e., using the classical works of different fields as recommended readings for learners and taking them through the step-by-step process of increasingly deeper learning and discovery of texts.

Step Two: Engaging in Activity

After training in the first stage, colleges provide space and opportunity to put learning into practice. Community colleges consolidate the needs and resources of students so they can collaborate on issues related to public interest, community care, community building, and cultural projects. By grouping students into a learning environment of

various communities, students who have completed the first phase of training may then take their first step towards civic participation. This follows from stage one, which emphasizes building individuals, and now focuses on developing collaborative and participatory learning communities.

The establishment of various communities, such as those focused on current affairs, culture, social concern, or other activities, allows students a choice of spaces for deep and mature debates or service to the community according to their interest. In principle, all learning communities are student-initiated. They employ the training from the first phase in this new space of debate and practice. As such, the first phase emphasizes the individual while the second phase emphasizes the public. The interplay between these two allows for the application of the critical thinking ability developed earlier and, through practice, allow students to make sense of their theoretical learning and reflect on their value judgements.

Da Ming Community College, currently has community courses including children's percussion ensemble, children's choir, Cloud and Water choir, Chinese orchestra, and English theatre for children, etc. These arts and cultural communities aspire to cultivate an appreciation of the arts among different age groups and backgrounds. In addition, their performances at nursing homes, orphanages, and in the community also make a practical contribution to society.

The humanistic reading group is the most critical component of learning communities established in Da Ming Community College. As stated earlier, the learning communities are the bridge between the stages of character building and contributing to the world. However, most students choose skills-based courses or other courses that offer practical utility, completely neglecting academic learning; this regrettably limits the development of community colleges. In contrast, members of reading groups are not only interested in learning through courses in the humanities and the arts, they also have the ability to take the initiative and draw upon their personal experience in looking for material of interest to form different reading groups. The nature of such groups—self-initiated, cohesive and with a division of labor—accelerates participants' vertical learning in terms of self, community, and society. In terms of its application to their horizontal learning, it goes from human nature to knowledge. This eventually edges the students towards shouldering full responsibility for running the community college's exhibitions,

social philanthropy, and courses. In September this year, the humanistic reading group of Da Ming Community College will be launching a training course for facilitators of humanistic reading group, which we hope will strengthen the reading groups.

(3) Step Three: Contributing to the World

Lastly, when the students have developed a mature civic-mindedness and increased their organizational capabilities, the Da Ming Community College will take on the roles of facilitation and resource integration in the process of students' development of character building, engaging in activity, and contributing to the world. Therefore, the college will be the bridge connecting the individual to society, and a hub for the community's and citizen's development and collaboration. With their continuous participation in educational activities, students contribute to a model of community that values learning, participation, mutual respect and support for culture.

Regarding the model presented above, community colleges are not only in agreement with the principles of "humanism as its core" and "expedient means as the teachings", but also use a pedagogical approach to learning in stages, advancing the reflection of humanity's fundamental values in building a harmonious society. Da Ming Community College simultaneously adopts the values of Humanistic Buddhism and the pedagogical approach of a community college. Its objectives emphasize humanistic self-awareness, compassion that benefits others, cultivation, vows put into practice, and a harmonious society. In terms of methods, it stresses molding students into proactive and self-aware learners, building participatory learning communities, and culminating in building a society that is caring and culturally-attuned. Its goal is to equip individual citizens with self-awareness and civic consciousness in order to move towards public discourse and bring about a civil society.

6. Conclusion

By contemplating the concepts of an awakened one, religion, Humanistic Buddhism, and knowledge emancipation, this paper proposes that the aspirations of community college education and the practice of Humanistic Buddhism have much in common. For instance, the premise that a community college education is to cultivate civic consciousness, respect for others, and ultimately to promote a civil society. This

is echoed in Humanistic Buddhism's focus on promoting humanistic self-awareness, bringing practical solutions to everyday life, and thereby compassionately benefiting humankind to build a harmonious society. One is an approach to modern citizen education and the other is in the spirit of propagating the Dharma to benefit all sentient beings. By first establishing humanity's fundamental values through Humanistic Buddhism, and then deepen the humanistic spirit of knowledge emancipation as employed in community colleges, we can then move towards community education and bringing together civic consciousness to eventually point out a definite path towards a Pure Land on earth, and a harmonious society which embodies coexistence, harmony, and joy.

Notes

- 1 Literally "Great Brilliance".-Ed.
- 2 These four are the working creed of Buddha's Light International Association members. Please see "Class 14: BLIA Members Working Tenets" of the "Volume 11: Fo Guang Studies" in the series *Fo Guang Buddhist Textbooks*.
- 3 「在無我中求進取，在生活中透禪機，在奉獻中求幸福，在盡責中求滿足，在義務中求心安」-Ed.
- 4 See the introduction to Luping Wang, *Mahayana Buddhism and Ultimate Concern* (Chengdu: Ba Shu Shu She, 2001), which contains an affirmative statement on Humanistic Buddhism made by Shi Huihai, abbot of Qianling Mountain in Guiyang.
- 5 At present, according to the constitution of the Miaoli County Community College, though one must be at least eighteen years of age to participate as a registered student, it does not preclude participation for those younger. The only difference lies in that students younger than eighteen years old cannot obtain academic credits.
- 6 「發心與發展」-Ed.
- 7 "To Resolve and To Develop" was the theme of Venerable Master Hsing Yun's speech to the 9th BLIA World Headquarters General Conference held in Japan, during which he spoke to BLIA members about first making resolutions then seeking development, because Buddhism speaks of one's mind which is the source of all virtues. For the online version, please visit <http://www.fgs.org.tw/main.htm>.
- 8 Please see "Civil Society and Educational Reform" by Huang Wu-hsiung of the National Association for the Promotion of Community Universities. Available online at <http://www.napcu.org.tw/napcu/AboutUs/Ideal.aspx>.
- 9 The "Age of Enlightenment" refer to the post-18th century movement of promoting the superiority of human reason in order to escape the bounds of religion that has been in place since the Medieval Age. See pages 226-229 of Charles Wei-hsun Fu's *A History of Western Philosophy*.
- 10 《論天體運行》-Ed.
- 11 See Richard Tamas, *The Passion of The Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped Our World View* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991). A Chinese translation is available under the title 《西方心靈的激情》(Taipei: Cheng Chung Book Co., 1995), see pages 291-5.
- 12 Zengcai Wang, *Modern History of the West* (Taipei: Chung Cheng Book Co., 2003), 207-8.
- 13 Alternatively "Neo-Daoism" or the "learning of the mystery".-Ed.
- 14 《典論》-Ed.
- 15 See Zongqiang Luo, *Arcane Learning and the Psychology of Men of Letters of the Wei-Jin Era* (Tianjin: Nankai Daxue Chubanshe, 2003), 31.
- 16 The quotation given by the author was 「戶異議，人殊論，論無常檢，是無定價，長愛惡，興朋黨……。」, however, "是" should read 事, and the translation reflects this character instead. -Ed.
- 17 「以人為宗」、「以知識為教」、「以般若為本」、「以方便為末」、「以慈悲為體」、「以實踐為用」-Ed.
- 18 Venerable Master Hsing Yun said that "Those who seek self-liberation are not welcomed in Fo Guang Shan" in Chi-Ying Fu, *Handing Down the Light: The Biography of Venerable Master Hsing Yun* (Taipei: Tianxia Wenhua, 1995), 165.
- 19 The "Four Transformations Movement" refers to "equality between monastics and laity, humanization of the Dharma, making reading a part of life, and localization of the monastery" and "systemization of organizational affairs, uniting belief, making the arts a part of life, and, utilizing modern methods." For more information, see Venerable Master Hsing Yun's 2003 "A Letter to Dharma Friends."
- 20 Refers to the qualities of being or related to "humanistic, the people, culture, education, international, philanthropy, the Bodhisattva, harmonious, joyful and tolerant".
- 21 In response to different ways of living, Venerable Master Hsing Yun expounded upon twelve different types of Humanistic Buddhism, including the path for householders, resource utilization, community and self etc. For more details, please see Vol. 5 and 6 of the *Universal Gate Buddhist Journal*.

- 22 「佛比人間人，還要更人間」-Ed.
- 23 Please see Huikai Shi, *Collection of Essays on Confucian and Buddhist Life and Death Studies and Philosophy* (《儒佛生死學與哲學論文集》) (Taipei: Hung Yeh Press, 2005), 63.
- 24 The term “Buddha” literally means “awakened one” or “one who understands.” “Awakened” here refers to a sagely one who has perfected the deeds of enlightenment by awakening self and others. Please see the online version of *Fo Guang Dictionary of Buddhism*.
- 25 「自覺而覺他」、「佛性平等」、「人人皆可成佛」-Ed.
- 26 「欣賞緣起，肯定生命，發大宏願，踐履於世」-Ed.
- 27 See Chi-Ying Fu, *Handing Down the Light: The Biography of Venerable Master Hsing Yun* (Taipei: Tianxia Wenhua, 1995), 164.
- 28 The “Five Sciences” refers to (1) mastery in grammar and composition, (2) mastery in manual arts, (3) mastery in medical science, (4) mastery in logic, and (5) inner wisdom. See Huikai Shi, *Collection of Essays on Confucian and Buddhist Life and Death Studies and Philosophy* (《儒佛生死學與哲學論文集》) (Taipei: Hung Yeh Press, 2005), 94.
- 29 Commonly referred to as the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, the full name of this sutra is “Sixth Patriarch’s Dharma Jewel Platform Sutra”. See the second chapter on *prajna*, T. 2008, 48: 351c.
- 30 「佛法在世間，不離世間覺，離世覓菩提，恰如求兔角。」-Ed.
- 31 「人成即佛成」、「佛法不離世間覺」-Ed.
- 32 For related concepts, please see “A Blueprint for Humanistic Buddhism (I)/(II),” *Universal Gate Buddhist Journal* 5/6 (2001).
- 33 「強調權利而不強調義務，強調個體卻忽略他者，強調自由卻流於濫權，強調平等卻流於形式，強調在地卻顯得俗氣，強調文化卻缺乏國際，強調教育卻流於意識」-Ed.
- 34 「了因果、明人倫、觀緣起、立生死、悟性空」-Ed.
- 35 「智慧為體」、「方便為用」、「慈悲處世」、「踐行於世」、「當願利他」-Ed.
- 36 Lu Jiuyuan (Song dynasty), *Complete Works of Lu Xiangshan*, ed. Wang Zongmu (Ming dynasty) (Taipei: World Book Company), 290 (Fasc. 35).
- 37 「若某不識一字，亦須還我堂堂正正做個人。」-Ed.
- 38 Commonly referred to as the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, the full name of this sutra is *Sixth Patriarch’s Dharma Jewel Platform Sutra*. See the first chapter on action and intention, T. 2008, 48: 349a.
- 39 《金剛經》-Ed.
- 40 「應無所住而生其心」-Ed.
- 41 Chi-Ying Fu, *Handing Down the Light: The Biography of Venerable Master Hsing Yun* (Taipei: Tianxia Wenhua, 1995), 167.
- 42 「佛法者，人的善良本性而已。」-Ed.
- 43 「聞、思、修、證」-Ed.
- 44 This paper’s intent is to raise concerns over the possible warped values that can follow “knowledge emancipation” and propose that the ideal of being humanistically grounded, garnered from “Humanistic Buddhism,” can be an ideal for social education. On such a basis, it is hoped that this paper can provide the concept of “knowledge emancipation” as a humanistic concern, and the actual possibility of building a peaceful society. As such, the fundamental structure for understanding the concept of community colleges continues to be aligned with Professor Huang Wu-hsiung’s proposed model of “person—organization—society,” which our college adopts. For more on Professor Huang’s exposition on the fundamental conceptual structure of “community colleges” please visit the National Association for the Promotion of Community University’s website at <http://www.napcu.org.tw/napcu/AboutUs/Ideal.aspx>.
- 45 《朱子治家格言》、《曾國藩家書》-Ed.
- 46 《蘇菲的世界》-Ed.