

**STUDIES ON  
HUMANISTIC BUDDHISM** 

**GLOCALIZATION OF BUDDHISM  
佛教全球本土化研究**

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

**THE KEY TO PROMOTING LOCALIZATION  
IS NOT TO “DISCARD” BUT TO “GIVE”  
—MY VIEW ON “DE-SINICIZATION”<sup>1</sup>**

**Venerable Master Hsing Yun**

*President, Buddha’s Light International Association  
World Headquarters*

In Taiwan, issues of provincial origin<sup>2</sup> and ethnicity are often intentionally used to manipulate elections. During the March 2004 presidential election, ethnic sentiment was once again provoked to the extent that some people chanted slogans of “localization” and “de-sinicization.” This throws us into doubt. In this era of multiculturalism, when countries are making every effort to absorb other cultures, it is indeed perplexing—and even unfathomable—why some Taiwanese people are moving to “discard” a culture via “de-sinicization.”

The Chinese have always been proud of their five thousand years of history. This accumulation of Chinese wisdom and experience was made possible by absorbing and amalgamating with other foreign cultures while creating their own civilization. Chinese culture can certainly also be adopted by countries in the West. Therefore, cultures should be involved in mutual exchange, and it is only natural that they share and absorb elements. I have however never heard of any country that wants to discard elements of other cultures once they have been incorporated.

I have traveled the world in order to propagate the Dharma. Once, when I was at Cornell University in the United States to give a lecture, I had a chat with Professor John McRae. He said, “It is fitting to come to the United States to propagate the Dharma, but it is not appropriate to solely speak of Chinese culture when propagating the Dharma. It seems like you are intent on conquering American culture when you do this.”<sup>3</sup> When I heard this I had a realization: I must respect the cultures of others. We are only here to make contributions and offerings, just as Buddhists offer incense and flowers to the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

## **What language would I speak after de-sinicization?**

In the past, I felt helpless when I heard people promoting de-sinicization. Recently, upon waking one morning, I could not help but feel anxious as I thought of the latest round of advocacy for de-sinicization.

Consider this: My forefathers were Chinese, I would lose them with de-sinicization; my hometown is in China, I would lose that with de-sinicization; I converse in Mandarin, with no knowledge of the English language or any other languages. What language then would I speak after de-sinicization? It suddenly dawned on me the source of my anxiety: with de-sinicization, “I” would no longer exist, without which I feel like my whole being is suspended in the air without any support. How could I not fear this?

There is a saying that “tolerance makes greatness.” A country desiring to be dignified and graceful, it has to be broadly inclusive, akin to “[a] mountain which rejects no earth, and the sea which refuses no stream.”<sup>4</sup> Only by integrating a diversity of cultures can a country grow in greatness.

## **Humans can make enemies among themselves, but not of cultures**

As I travel, I have always advocated for “localization,” with an attitude to contribute, be amiable, and to add to others—instead of rejecting or negating others. For instance, when I came to know there were many Chinese who have naturalized in the United States, but do not see it as their country, I encouraged Buddha’s Light International Association members to say “I am an American” when marching in the Independence Day parade. I believe people living in America should integrate into the local community instead of forming ethnic enclaves.

## **Embrace foreign cultures: Use their strengths to make up for our shortcomings**

We definitely do not accept enclaves of people from the “United States” or the “Empire of Japan” in China, but we also should not reject American or Japanese cultures. Likewise, since we are both Taiwanese and Chinese, must

“localization” necessarily mean a complete refusal of all things Chinese? Why do millions of Taiwanese businessmen travel to Mainland China? Why do those with foresight constantly advocate for the Three Linkages?<sup>5</sup> As these trends prevail, can we really de-sinicize?

For many years, I’ve promoted the Dharma all over the world, with a hope of “internationalizing” and also “localizing” Buddhism. What I advocate is not “discarding,” but “giving.” My intention behind building temples across all five continents is to enrich people’s spiritual lives through Buddhism within their own communities.

For example, I thought when building the Hsi Lai Temple: “With the advanced technology and many religions in the United States, wouldn’t it be even more wonderful if people could enjoy the option of another style of Buddhism?” And the facts verify that the United States is a great melting pot of immigrants—it accepts foreign cultures, using their strengths to make up for its shortcomings, and thus became a great country.

### **Live together in coexistence: Avoid divisions at all cost**

Although I was born in Yangzhou, Mainland China, I say I am “Taiwanese” and that I am also “Chinese.” In fact, all who reside in Taiwan are Taiwanese—this is a fact that goes without question. Therefore, I would like to ask all Taiwan politicians to be magnanimous, and work towards harmony.

The people of Jiangxi, Mainland China, have the most adorable habit of making people their “cousins”—addressing anyone with even a hint of relations this way. As the saying goes “A cousin could be from three thousand miles away.”<sup>6</sup> It is a pity that they might only be three hundred miles away if we limit ourselves to Taiwan. All men are brothers, so we should all agree to live together in coexistence, and avoid divisions at all cost.

Putting aside the issue of whether Taiwan possesses the conditions to be independent, I am certain that even if it were politically divergent from China, the two are culturally alike.

As with taro and sweet potato becoming inseparable,<sup>7</sup> we should let things naturally integrate, just as a new product [apple mango] is produced by grafting the mango to the apple tree. Is it not true that different species of flowers can be hybridized to form a beautiful new flower? Even plants know to develop in conformity to the circumstances they are in. Are humans inferior to plants?

Therefore, I would like to ask our politicians to avoid de-sinicization, especially since this will lead to division. Such ideas undoubtedly raise alarm bells for the future of Taiwan; please do not play with fire lest you yourselves be burned. The only meaningful way to make a mark is to rid ourselves of all selfishness. In order to leap across the barriers of history, we need to practice mutual respect and tolerance. Together we may realize happiness and peace for all. This is the future that all citizens look forward to, and which is my hope.

(First published in *United Daily News* on July 1, 2005)

## Notes

- 1 This article can also be found under the title “The key to promoting localization is not to deny but to give: my view on ‘de-sinicization’.” -Ed.
- 2 The Chinese term “省籍” is common among Taiwanese to refer to their provincial origin. For more information, see “Bensheng ren” (inside-province people) and “Waisheng ren” (outside-province people) in the appendix “Special Terms” in Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 287-89. -Ed.
- 3 「你來美國弘法可以，但是不能開口閉口都是中華文化，好像是故意為征服美國文化而來的。」 -Ed.
- 4 「泰山不辭土壤，大海不揀細流」 -Ed.
- 5 The Three Links or Three Linkages (三通) was a 1979 proposal from the National People’s Congress of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) to open up postal, transportation, and trade links between China and Taiwan. For more information, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three\\_Links](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_Links).
- 6 「一表三千里」. The author is doing a word play on this very common saying, which in itself refers to how distant relations can be claimed between virtually any two persons. Here instead, the author altered the thousand into hundred, to emphasize that such a saying, when taken literally, could not be applied to Taiwan.
- 7 The author is probably referring to a local variant of sweet potato here which is purple in color, named “芋仔蕃薯,” which is a famous food of Jiufen in Taiwan. Choosing to use this metaphor might also be highly symbolic, as “outside-province people” from the Mainland are nicknamed “old taro,” while local “inside-province people” serving in the army are termed “little sweet potatoes.”