

**STUDIES ON
HUMANISTIC BUDDHISM** 

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

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THE MODERNIZATION AND GLOBALIZATION OF HUMANISTIC BUDDHISM AND CHINESE BUDDHISM

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Abstract

The most prominent element in the success of Humanistic Buddhism is the modernization and internationalization of Chinese Buddhism. Under the premise of returning to the original intents of the Buddha, advocates and practitioners of Humanistic Buddhism look forward to spreading the Dharma in ways that are readily embraced by people of current times. For example, in the 1950s and 1960s, Fo Guang Shan's Venerable Master Hsing Yun was already advocating for reform in Buddhism: its ranks, its organizations, its administrative systems, its precepts, its means of propagating the Dharma, its education, its culture, and its internationalization.

Keywords: modernization, globalization, Humanistic Buddhism, Chinese Buddhism

In both theory and application, Humanistic Buddhism is one of the outstanding accomplishments of Chinese Buddhism in the past century. Humanistic Buddhism was founded in the twentieth century within a context made up of four main elements. First, the transformation of the Chinese society from an agrarian society to an industrial and commercial society. Second, the transformation of the Chinese society from an autocratic society to a democratic society. Third, the transformation of the Chinese society from a closed society to an open society. Fourth, Chinese scholarship transformed from one based on the classics, Buddhism, and Daoism to one based on subjects such as literature, law, science, engineering, agriculture, medicine, and other modern Western disciplines.

In its final years, the Qing dynasty was thrown into disarray under the Taiping Rebellion of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. Because of the four elements

mentioned above, and because of the disruption to the establishment of new schools of thought due to the chaos of the imperial court, the progress of Chinese Buddhism was impeded. Only because of the efforts of multiple generations of eminent monks was Humanistic Buddhism finally able to achieve a breakthrough. The development of Humanistic Buddhism resulted in the modernization and globalization of Chinese Buddhism in a landscape where Chinese and Western cultures had many collisions and interactions. Chinese Buddhist culture is an important part of the broader Chinese culture and played an influential role in its history. Therefore, it is vitally important to summarize the experiences and the failures of Humanistic Buddhism in both theory and practice .

The most prominent element in the success of Humanistic Buddhism is the modernization and internationalization of Chinese Buddhism. Under the premise of returning to the original intents of the Buddha, advocates and practitioners of Humanistic Buddhism look forward to spreading the Dharma in ways that are readily embraced by people of current times. For example, in the 1950s and 1960s, Fo Guang Shan's Venerable Master Hsing Yun was already advocating for reform in Buddhism: its ranks, its organizations, its administrative systems, its precepts, its means of propagating the Dharma, its education, its culture, and its internationalization.

These reform measures are making significant progress based on their causes and conditions, with the latter three reform measures becoming the religious character of Fo Guang Shan.

Other monastic groups in Taiwan such as Dharma Drum Mountain, Tzu Chi, and Chung Tai Chan Monastery are all exemplary in their propagation of Humanistic Buddhism. Buddhism in mainland China has faced multiple challenges, but has had notable success in the realization of Humanistic Buddhism, ranging from Zhao Pu Chu's theoretical ideas on Humanistic Buddhism to Elder Jinghui's Living Chan Practice. The modernization of Chinese Buddhism and its contributions to society are clear. Its experience is worth promoting. In particular, the practice of Humanistic Buddhism in Taiwan is an important reference point for mainland China's religious practice, religious interactions, social harmony, ethnic harmony, and religious administration.

In the course of the development of Humanistic Buddhism, it is particularly admirable that Chinese Buddhism has emerged from China and moved out into the world, starting from the initial propagation of Dharma teachings in Southeast Asia, to the propagation of Dharma teachings in Europe, America, and then the entire world. The initial propagation of the Dharma was limited to the Chinese community, but then moved to teaching the Dharma directly to Westerners. In this way, the localization and internalization of Dharma teachings is being realized. The contribution of the Taiwanese Buddhist monastic groups is particularly prominent, and the achievement of Fo Guang Shan, Dharma Drum Mountain, and the Tzu Chi Foundation is impressive. The penetration of Chinese Buddhism into the Western world started later than Japanese Buddhism. Nonetheless, with the expansion of the overseas Chinese community and the emphasis on quality within the Chinese Buddhist monastic groups, Chinese Buddhism has gained its voice, and made its own special contributions to other societies. These Dharma footprints being left by the overseas Saṅgha result from continually adapting teaching content and methodology in response to Western culture and institutions. With the overall influence of mainland China and Taiwan rising, and Chinese language and culture increasingly becoming the objects of attention, it can be concluded that the experience of the localization of Chinese Buddhism, in terms of Chinese and Western cultural exchange, and the increasing appeal of Chinese culture, has an important significance. It is worth noting that the Confucian institutes in mainland China can benefit greatly from the experience of the localization of Chinese Buddhism.

Both academic and religious research should take three-dimensional and diversified approaches when studying Humanistic Buddhism. I have four suggestions:

Humanistic Buddhism needs to build up a research model which combines the study of historical documents with religious fieldwork. A century of Humanistic Buddhism practice has left behind a significant amount of documents. In recent years, compilations and photocopies of Buddhism periodicals and newspapers have been made in China, and two large series of books have been published. Several large Taiwanese monastic groups and research institutes have also issued a huge amount of documents. The documents are essential for a thorough historical

investigation and theoretical interpretation. More importantly, these documents need to be cross-referenced with the findings from field investigations to gain a more thorough understanding. The benefits from the experience of Humanistic Buddhism will reap ample rewards only after conducting field research.

Humanistic Buddhism needs to establish an interdisciplinary research perspective. The theory of Humanistic Buddhism was established by Master Taixu. While he proposed the theory, he completely failed to put it into practice. The theory was successfully implemented in 1949 by a group of monks who further elaborated and practised the theory. One of the most successful practitioners is Venerable Master Hsing Yun. He is not only a practitioner, he has also published a large number of books and established temples and religious communities around the globe. In order to gain an interdisciplinary perspective, investigations into the practice of Humanistic Buddhism require collaboration between the humanities and social sciences.

Humanistic Buddhism needs to establish a vision that combines macroscopic and microscopic research. Fo Guang Shan and Dharma Drum Mountain, are both a part of the century-long historical process of Humanistic Buddhist teaching. Conclusions drawn from investigating any classic case must be put into the macroscopic context of this history. For example, the research on Venerable Master Hsing Yun requires reviews of not only his publications after establishing Fo Guang Shan, but also his earlier works. The investigation of Venerable Master Hsing Yun should not be limited to the man himself, but should also include Fo Guang Shan monastics, the elder monastics, individual temples, and member associations. Beyond its development in Taiwan, research should also include the expansion of Fo Guang Shan globally. Furthermore, study should not be restricted to Fo Guang Shan only, but also the development of Buddhism as a whole in Taiwan and mainland China over the last hundred years.

In short, we should pay more attention to putting Fo Guang Shan into the historical context of Humanistic Buddhism and even all of Chinese Buddhism. The conclusions drawn from such a perspective are usually more objective and authoritative. Given the increasingly close cooperation between religious scholars and academics, promoting this research vision is even more important. The

religious community has itself nurtured a group of scholars. This group of scholars share the religious practice of their religious group. They can provide academics their religious experience and data sources that are not available in academia. If they can go beyond their own religious teaching vision and get engaged in research, then their understanding of their religion will be more rational and definitive. Academics who participate in conferences organized by the religious community often need to write articles based on the theme of the conference. How well they fit the requirements of the conference into their macroscopic research often determines the quality of their academic papers.

It is necessary to combine history and actual experience in order to conduct a proper study. Although the theory and praxis of Humanistic Buddhism have been essential phenomena within the development of Chinese Buddhism only in the past century, all promoters and practitioners follow the Buddha's original intents, and are nurtured by the theories of Chinese Buddhism. Therefore, for the religious community, the Buddha's original intents and the experience of Chinese Buddhism will be an inexhaustible source of nourishment for the growth of Humanistic Buddhism. For the academic community, beginning a dialogue between Humanistic Buddhism and history will inspire many research topics, which will become important references for the broader society and the larger Buddhist community. For example, the experiences of localization and internationalization of Humanistic Buddhism in China, Japan, South Korea, and Vietnam can be investigated. Research into the praxis of Humanistic Buddhism requires a lot of fieldwork, while the historical record is comprehensively reflected in the Chinese translations of Buddhist scriptures and the writing of monks from the past. This kind of research is of great significance for enriching the localization of Buddhism and for promoting Chinese culture.