

**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 BRILLIANT ACHIEVEMENTS OF HUMANISTIC BUDDHISM IN AUSTRALIA

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Venerable Master Hsing Yun has confidence in, awareness of, and a great aspiration to improve Buddhist teachings, and has for many years promoted the international spread of Humanistic Buddhism. With the establishment of more than three hundred temples worldwide, he has performed the first steps toward realizing his great vow of having “the Buddha’s light shining universally on the three thousand realms and the Dharma stream flowing across all five continents.”⁷ Among these worldwide temples, the construction works in Australia and the teaching of Buddhism in that country have been outstanding, drawing much praise for its speedy execution and extensive influence.

I undertook a study of Fo Guang Shan temples in Australia and New Zealand between January 26 and February 26, 2017,⁸ during which eight symposia were conducted, the attendees included monastics, Buddha’s Light International

Association (BLIA) executives, BLIA members, and people from all walks of life. In total, more than one hundred Australian and Chinese Australians were interviewed, and seventeen lectures were delivered to the locals. This article limits itself to Australia and shares the brilliant achievements of Humanistic Buddhism in that country.

1. The Foundation is Stable and the Infrastructure is in Place

Based on the achievements in building the infrastructure of Humanistic Buddhism in Australia, the foundation is stable and ready to go. The achievements of this construction are reflected in the building of these six things: temples, organizations, institutions, principles of faith, ritual, and a culture of cultivation.

i) Building Temples

There are currently thirteen Humanistic Buddhist temples in Oceania, eleven of which are in Australia. They are scattered among the major cities in densely populated areas along the eastern, western, and southern coastal regions. This distribution shows foresight, as it completely corresponds to the economic, political, and demographic development of Australian society. Nan Tien Temple is built to a grand scale, with a distinctive Chinese style. Chung Tien Temple is also rather large. Other temples have their own characteristics. Some are built in city centers, and some serve as cultural or artistic centers. Based in different cities, the temples have become places for the propagation of the Dharma, platforms for exchanges between devotees, and centers of cultural exchange. These temples will be important bases for future development.

ii) Building Organizations

Fo Guang Shan is an immense team made up of contingents of monastics, BLIA members, and BLIA young adult division members. The concept of the BLIA is completely in line with modern society. Within the BLIA are many subdivisions, there are even organizations set up by Australians, such as the Chung Tien branch. Organization building is about people, the core of which is made up by the monastic team, followed by the BLIA members, and then peripheral groups.

In Australia, Fo Guang Shan has already built the foundation of an organizational system that acts as a cohesive force. This organizational infrastructure can connect Buddhism and society. The achievements of Humanistic Buddhism in Australia are extraordinary. Moreover, they have the characteristics of Australia itself.

iii) Building Institutions

Upon investigation, it is observed that Humanistic Buddhism in Australia has made great efforts toward building institutions. These provide institutional guarantees for the cohesion of personnel, organizational development, and the spread of the Dharma. These institutions involve all aspects of daily affairs. In general, the institutions mirror those of Fo Guang Shan overall, but there are some that are unique to Australia. For example, the lay Dharma teacher institution provides an important platform for devotees, inspires their enthusiasm, and promotes the propagation of the Dharma.

iv) Building the Principles of Faith

Fo Guang Shan's thoughts on Humanistic Buddhism, or rather Venerable Master Hsing Yun's thoughts on Humanistic Buddhism, have been widely disseminated in Australian society. It has been observed that devotees have cohered around the eleven temples and united under the organization of various BLIA chapters because they recognize and seek out Venerable Master Hsing Yun's Humanistic Buddhism. His Buddhist thought, which is popular, approachable, applies to daily life, and is full of wisdom, deeply impacts Australian devotees. This demonstrates that Humanistic Buddhist thought is the fundamental pillar of Fo Guang Shan's development in Australia. Venerable Master Hsing Yun's Humanistic Buddhist thought has been transmitted to the local devotees through the hard work of each monastic. This has become an important piece of "software" for the development of Fo Guang Shan in Australia.

v) Building Rituals

Ritual refers to various Buddhist ceremonies and activities. In Australia, there are morning and evening chanting and regular Dharma services on the

weekend. For example, Chung Tian Temple holds weekly Chinese Dharma services on Saturday and English ones on Sunday. Even the Buddhist cultural activities outside the temples have their own norms. All activities follow an etiquette, protocols of practice that everyone basically agrees on. This mitigates disputes and limits ambiguity. In general, the various Dharma services and rituals of Humanistic Buddhism in Australia are clear, forming a relatively stable system. I believe that these rituals can continue to be adjusted, detailed, and improved to meet the needs of the situation.

vi) Building a Culture of Cultivation

Building a culture of cultivation is another type of “software development.” This points to Fo Guang Shan Humanistic Buddhism in Australia having its own spirit and style. This spirit and style is not only different from Buddhism in other places, but is also more distinctly different from other religions. In comparison, although they dress the same, the Fo Guang Shan monastics in Australia are active, hard working, appreciative, and integrated with modern society. Moreover, their esteem for Venerable Master Hsing Yun and their compassionate and earnest guidance of the fourfold assembly all create a unique look. The monastics of Fo Guang Shan demonstrate a new bearing, with an open, cheerful, and sunny disposition. This is the culture of cultivation of the Humanistic Buddhists in Australia. In the completely western society of Australia, Humanistic Buddhism has carved out a niche, a subculture. With its active morality, Humanistic Buddhism can be confident, stand up bravely, and have a solid foundation in this society.

2. Achievements in Localization: Early Successes in Australia as Localization Takes Root

What is “Australianization”? It is localization specific to Australia, just as sinicization refers to localization in China. The achievements of localizing Humanistic Buddhism in Australia are expressed in transformations of these six elements: philosophy, system, spirit, temple, devotee composition, and activities.

i) Transformation of Philosophy

This is primarily reflected through the greater emphasis on core concepts such as karma, cause and effect, meditation, and wisdom, while promoting the core ideas of Fo Guang Shan such as humanization and the Dharma as a part of life. On the one hand, the philosophy of Humanistic Buddhism in Australia inherits and is in sync with the characteristics of Fo Guang Shan as a whole: humanistic, Dharma as a part of life, easy-to-understand, optimistic, etc. On the other hand, we must consider the needs of local westerners in order for Humanistic Buddhism to take root in Australia. For example, surveys show that some Australians are not completely satisfied with the concepts of God and original sin to explain human destiny, or the past development and future progress of humanity. Instead, the concepts of karma and cause and effect are more convincing. In addition, Australians show less interest in Dharma services and are more concerned with social and cultural activities. They are more interested in the philosophy of meditation and wisdom, and believe that Buddhism provides people with peace and tranquillity, keeping people away from mental agitation, and protecting one's inherent nature. In response, Humanistic Buddhism in Australia has adapted to the needs of Australians by organizing classes for the development of meditative concentration and teaching the philosophy of wisdom. Such an adaptation is a transformation of the philosophy of Humanistic Buddhism in Australia.

ii) Transformation of System

This is primarily reflected in institutional changes in cultivation, organizational structure, and in day-to-day routines. Buddhist activities in Australia—such as the Buddha's Birthday Project, open days, meditation classes, and monastic life—all these have their own sets of norms, which are woven within the Australian community. The construction and management of temples, human resource policies, the development of social affairs, and keeping good relations with society all accord with Fo Guang Shan principles, and are in line with local laws and customs.

iii) Transformation of Spirit

As Humanistic Buddhism enters Australian society, it must necessarily adapt to the local culture, language, ways of thought, habits, etc. BLIA members in Australia gradually learned western culture and adapted to western society. They consciously conformed to Australian habits and ethical values, and gradually acculturated. When they first arrive in a foreign place, mistakes are often made due to their unfamiliarity with and estrangement from local temperament and culture. Having lived in Australia for extended periods of time, Fo Guang Shan monastics have assimilated and can hardly be distinguished from locals. Despite differing in attire and cultural backgrounds, monastics have come to understand local spirituality through continuous interaction. The monastics have adapted to local spiritual temperament and are equipped with many of the spiritual characteristics locals value.

iv) Transformation of the Temple

As in Taiwan, many Fo Guang Shan temples in Australia adopted modern design, serve multiple functions, and have thoroughly surpassed the stipulation of traditional Chinese Buddhist monasteries. In the midst of these transformations, some unique innovations emerged in Humanistic Buddhist temples in Australia. For example, the concept of the “Buddhas of the Five Directions” in the Australian temples is a unique adaptation to western society and pleases the locals. This is because it differs from the concept of the Vajrayana tradition, and is not randomly assembled, but is the combination of traditional ideals and modern innovation. As these temples take root and develop in Australia, they will certainly develop more characteristics unique to Australia, and we can expect this process to continue into the future. In addition, after my visit to ten of the temples, I found that they are all unique in their own ways. Some are located in the city, in high-rise buildings, and some are built in traditional Chinese style. These distinctive features are well-received by the public.

v) Transformation in the Composition of Devotees

This is primarily reflected in the following three aspects. Firstly, westerners make up the majority of the population. Secondly, unlike mainland China and Taiwan, the Chinese population in Australia originated from many different places. As a newly emerging migrant society, Australia is diverse, with large arrivals of immigrants. Aside from regions that have historically had a large Chinese population, the Australian Chinese population in Australia is one of the most rapidly growing in the world. While they share a common Chinese heritage, they are more likely to have different cultural backgrounds, with immigrants coming from the historical Chinese areas of Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam, for example. The devotee composition of Humanistic Buddhism in Australia has been transformed by this culturally diverse group of ethnic Chinese. Thirdly, the proportion of representatives from a higher socio-economic demographic participating in Australian Humanistic Buddhism appears higher than that in mainland China and Taiwan. Although there is also a substantial portion of middle-aged or older people in Australian Humanistic Buddhism, a wealthier and more educated class of people play a greater role in Australia when compared to Humanistic Buddhism elsewhere. In this regard, we have yet to obtain complete statistical data, and going forward surveys are needed.

vi) Transformation of Activities

In Australia, this transformation is primarily reflected in the special emphasis on activities. Examples of these activities with a local flavor include the Buddha's Birthday Celebration, open days, Chinese New Year celebrations, etc. Humanistic Buddhism organizes many such activities in Australia, spanning both Buddhist and secular festivals. Furthermore, it is involved in many important events in the lives of devotees, such as birthdays, weddings, childbirth, pregnancies, graduations, etc. Every temple is actively engaged in developing activities that relate to everyday life, which are not only linked to Buddhism, but also to local customs. Some are purely cultural; some are social activities that promote interpersonal exchange; while others are religious ones. In general, these activities tend to be standardized across other global Fo Guang Shan temples, but those in Australia are characterized by a high degree of localization.

3. The Achievements in Dharma Propagation: The Sound of the Dharma Reverberates and Dharma Water Continuously Flows

The achievements of Humanistic Buddhism in Australia in terms of Dharma propagation are realized through the following six methods:

- 1) Dharma publications available in both the English and Chinese languages. In Australia, there are Chinese Language publications to suit the taste of Australian Chinese, while there are also English ones for the western readers.
- 2) Extensive development of Dharma services. There are a variety of services held for disseminating the Dharma. The services also help people come in contact with Buddhism.
- 3) Continuous improvements of Dharma services. During my visits, I found that all the temples held excellent Dharma services, with some being exceptionally memorable.
- 4) Advancements through Dharma talks. Whether it be through lessons delivered by lay Dharma teachers or through Dharma conversations between individuals, discussions on Dharma topics are constantly occurring.
- 5) The number of devotees are continuously increasing in Australia—those who have faith, understand, and practice Buddhism are growing in numbers, and the true Dharma is thriving. The emphasis here is on true Dharma. As there is religious freedom in Australia, all sorts of religions are practiced. Australia is different from China, in that it has many religions competing with each other for devotees. This presents a mix of positives and negatives. With the popularization of Humanistic Buddhism, the true Dharma prospers in Australia, and so beliefs which deviate away from the true Dharma hold less influence.
- 6) The spiritual experiences of both monastics and devotees in Australia

are enriched and enlightened. This is the reflection of many Australian devotees, who approach Buddhism with hesitation and feel that it is clouded in mystery, but have yet decided to enter the faith in a bid to find a spiritual home. In this process, their spiritual experiences are enriched and mature. As they become more acquainted with the Dharma, they also grow in merit and virtue. This is the general picture many lay devotees have provided to me. Apart from this, when monastics face hardships and injustice, they are also developing through challenging circumstances. The continued enrichment and advancement of the spiritual experiences of monastics and devotees is evidence of sustained achievements in the propagation of the Dharma.

4. Contributing Towards Increased Social Strength in Chinese Society: Building Cultural Identity and Spiritual Cohesion

Humanistic Buddhism in Australia is an important embodiment of Chinese culture and plays a vital role as a cultural nexus and spiritual agency of Chinese society. In a strongly ethnic-conscious Chinese society, Humanistic Buddhism is bound to help unite people and build cultural confidence, thus increasing the social strength and cohesion of Chinese people.

1) Humanistic Buddhism in Australia has promoted a cultural identity among, and built an ethnic identity for, the overseas Chinese community in Australia. It has enhanced their cultural—and certainly ethnic—consciousness, confidence, and esteem. This is due to an important historical change for Chinese people after the Cold War. They began seeking their roots in ethnic culture in order to build a spiritual home. This is because they were deeply nourished by their traditional culture after a post-Cold War ideological disintegration. Naturally, overseas Chinese followed this international trend, and they felt cultured, perhaps due to the vastness and profundity of Buddhist culture. The development of Humanistic Buddhism in Australia has led the way for the development of Chinese culture as a whole, which is beneficial to Australian Chinese in finding their own culture and establishing their cultural identity. The establishment of such a culture is conducive to cultural consciousness,

confidence, esteem, and helps Chinese people stand firmly in their ethnicity.

- 2) The spread of Humanistic Buddhism was accompanied by other elements of Chinese culture, thus creating a spiritual home for overseas Chinese which comforts their vagabond spirits. Many overseas Chinese people have a limited circle of friends as they struggle to make a life in a foreign country. They therefore feel lonely, fearful, and adrift. In order to obtain a sense of belonging, some return to their hometowns, while others meet this need by travelling long distances to meet with Chinese friends. Such roaming spirits need a cultural and spiritual home. The establishment of Buddhism in Australia is comforting to these people and provides a common refuge which is a spiritual home. It has both Chinese cultural elements and a religious significance.
- 3) Humanistic Buddhism is a spiritual axis which unites the overseas Chinese community. Humanistic Buddhist temples enable them to unite, love and care for one another, and provide mutual assistance. They also provide a place where people can progress together so that the community continues to strengthen. Humanistic Buddhist temples in Australia are a platform, one which is warm and enables cooperation. On this platform, people gather, communicate, share information, and engage in mutual support and encouragement. From this platform it is possible to see the Chinese community growing from strength to strength. Humanistic Buddhism provides Chinese people in Australia the strength and space for continuous development and progress.
- 4) Humanistic Buddhism strengthens the social foundations of Chinese culture in Australia. With increasing numbers of Chinese people, their social foundation has deepened and broadened, and is also creating a welcoming environment for Australians to Humanistic Buddhism, thus further strengthening the foundation. This also provides important support for the further growth of Chinese culture in Australia. There are also similarities to the earlier years when Venerable Master Hsing Yun visited Australia to propagate the Dharma. At that time, there were many Chinese

people in Australia who requested that Venerable Master Hsing Yun to visit. Because of his visit, Buddhism developed further. Subsequently, he started building temples and sending monastics to Australia to oversee the temples and spread the Dharma. In this process, Chinese culture was introduced to Australia alongside Humanistic Buddhism. After years of effort, Fo Guang Shan has eleven temples, dozens of monastics, and numerous BLIA members in Australia. The development of Humanistic Buddhism also encourages the development of other elements of Chinese culture, such as Taoism and Confucianism, as well as that of other Buddhist organizations. Together, these elements deepen the inroads of Chinese culture into Australia and add to the social foundations of the Chinese people.

- 5) Humanistic Buddhism promotes the introduction of Chinese culture into Australia, increases the sense of approval of Australia among Chinese people worldwide, and contributes to the willingness of Chinese people to migrate to Australia. This fifth aspect is a natural extension of the fourth aspect. That is, overseas Chinese are willing to migrate to Australia because of its strong Chinese foundations and many cultural strengths. They would be much less willing to migrate if Chinese culture was nonexistent or there were no Chinese temples.
- 6) Humanistic Buddhism raises the cultural and ethical standards of Australian Chinese, thereby increasing their acceptance and respect among mainstream Australian society. People who participate in Humanistic Buddhist activities differ from others in their cultural and spiritual depth, and are significantly more approved of and respected by Australian society.

5. Contributions to Australian Society: Promoting Multiculturalism and Harmony

The development of Humanistic Buddhism in Australia has also been positive for the local society, mainly in the following aspects:

- 1) The introduction of Chinese culture into Australia demonstrates not only that Chinese culture is growing beyond China, but also that multiculturalism in Australia continues to strengthen.
- 2) Through self-improvement and constant development, Humanistic Buddhism has enhanced the image of Chinese culture, and elevated its status within a multicultural setting.
- 3) Humanistic Buddhism has consistently proven to be a strong player in a multicultural setting, and by actively participating in multicultural dialogue and exchanges, it has further stimulated and promoted the intrinsic vitality of Australian multiculturalism. In general, external cultural stimuli have to be applied to a single dominant culture in order for it to transition into genuine multiculturalism. This was true in the history of Chinese culture. Waves of stimulation—the introduction of Buddhism being a major one, but also the repeated waves of nomadic peoples coming to rule China—led to Chinese society becoming increasingly multicultural and with a strong vitality. The introduction of Humanistic Buddhism is likewise increasing the internal vitality of Australian culture.
- 4) Through activities such as political and religious dialogues, multi-ethnic exchanges, and caring for others, Humanistic Buddhism has continually increased the harmony in multifaceted community relationships. Throughout the world, Fo Guang Shan monastics enjoy good relationships with those in political office. Through communication with politicians, intimate engagement with the community, and exchanges with many different groups of people, Humanistic Buddhism has made community ties more harmonious. This has also built an excellent social foundation for Buddhism and contributed to the harmony of a multicultural Australian society.
- 5) Humanistic Buddhism actively engages in charity, which benefits society.
- 6) In promoting the Three Acts of Goodness, Four Givings, and Five Harmonies, Humanistic Buddhism develops the cultural standards of its

devotees as well as other people who are also culturally influenced by it, thereby contributing wisdom to the cultural fabric of Australian society.

6. Cultivating Talent

The development of Humanistic Buddhism in Australia depends a great deal on the efforts of multitalented monastics and meritorious lay practitioners. Talent is core to Fo Guang Shan, and Venerable Master Hsing Yun has always regarded the cultivation of talent as the foremost priority in developing Humanistic Buddhism. The development of Humanistic Buddhism in Australia likewise provides rich historical evidence of people applying their talent, and thus their talent being further developed through Humanistic Buddhism. At present, the achievements in cultivating talent are primarily reflected in the following ways:

- 1) The monastics of Humanistic Buddhism are pioneers in Dharma propagation. Such pioneering skills are required when Humanistic Buddhism is initially establishing itself into a new local community. With their ability to bear solitude, their tenacity, and their courage, Fo Guang Shan monastics in Oceania have developed a number of important qualities such as fearlessness, insight, resilience, and self-sacrifice.

- 2) In adapting to a new culture, Humanistic Buddhism has cultivated westernized individuals who are proficient in English, understand western culture, and have adapted to western society in order to propagate the Dharma. For Humanistic Buddhism to become localized to Australia, its monastics had to connect with local society and adapt to western ways of life. Moreover, Australian society differs from those in Europe or America. A case in point is in their contrasting spiritual temperament. We observe that Fo Guang Shan monastics here are highly proficient in the English language and their interactions with Australian political leaders have been very fruitful. Their deep understanding of the characteristics of western societies have firmly established these monastics in Australian society, demonstrating adaptability to local conditions.

- 3) Humanistic Buddhism has cultivated talent in individuals who are familiar with the physical and mental conditions and characteristics of overseas Chinese. These individuals understand their needs and their situation, and by establishing broad and intimate relationships with them, have formed deep-rooted friendships and developed deep interpersonal networks in Australia. Via the Fo Guang Shan temples in Australia, Chinese society and the Humanistic Buddhist monastics have consolidated into a reliable force for Dharma propagation and form a Saṅgha which receives the approval of Chinese people.
- 4) Humanistic Buddhism fostered talent within people who are established in Australia while connected to Kaohsiung in Taiwan. Kaohsiung is where Fo Guang Shan is headquartered, and all Humanistic Buddhist temples in Australia are under the direction of Kaohsiung. Therefore, all efforts are in sync and are well coordinated. In the process of its development in the Southern Hemisphere, Humanistic Buddhism cultivated the management talent of those who descend from the Fo Guang lineage, who are adept at working within a centralized organization, and who are versed in the Humanistic Buddhist system of Australia.
- 5) Through means such as attracting monastic talent with a western educational background and the establishment of Nan Tien Institute, Humanistic Buddhism further cultivated scholars in Buddhist studies programs who can communicate between Chinese and Western cultures.
- 6) Through diving into western society and serving its various sectors, Humanistic Buddhism has cultivated talented people in social service who can uniquely serve Australian society. For instance, many monastics also play the roles of wedding celebrants, committee members of police academies, etc., and thus have to make appearances as guest-of-honors at official functions. Appearance at such important functions speaks of the positive image Humanistic Buddhism enjoys, which is in fact also a service to Australian society. Australia is in need of such service-orientated individuals, and their areas of service can extend to many other areas.

Notes

- 1 《哲學研究》-Ed.
- 2 《世界宗教研究》-Ed.
- 3 《觀音信仰的淵源與傳播》-Ed.
- 4 《古代印度觀音信仰研究》-Ed.
- 5 《世親大師傳》-Ed.
- 6 《真諦大師傳》-Ed.
- 7 「佛光普照三千界、法水長流五大洲」-Ed.
- 8 I was invited to give a lecture on “The Brilliant Achievements of Humanistic Buddhism in Australia” on February 15, 2017 at the Nan Tien Temple, which was attended by over 40 monastics including Venerable Man Ko, Head Abbess of Fo Guang Shan Oceania; Venerable Manshin, Abbess of Fo Guang Shan New Zealand; Venerable Chueh Shan, Abbess of Chung Tien Temple; Venerable Jue Wu, Superintendent of IBAA Parramatta (Nan Tien Vihara); Venerable Miao Yao, Superintendent of IBAA Hurtsville (now renamed IBAA Kogarah); Venerable Ru Yi, Superintendent of IBAA Chatswood; Venerable Jue Min, Superintendent of Fo Guang Shan Melbourne; Venerable Man Qing, Superintendent of Er You Temple, Melbourne; Venerable Miao Bo, Superintendent of Fo Guang Yuan Melbourne; Venerable Miao Xi, Superintendent of the Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Temple of WA; Venerables Man Wang and Jue Ning, Superintendents of Nan Tien Temple; Venerable Ru Lian, Superintendent of Fo Guang Shan North Island New Zealand; and Venerables Juewei, Jue Fang, and Miao You of Nan Tien Institute. This article draws from the audio recordings of the lecture.