

**STUDIES ON
HUMANISTIC BUDDHISM Ⅳ**

**HUMAN LIFE
人間佛教研究論文選**

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

OBJECTIVELY VALIDATING THE PRACTICE OF HUMANISTIC BUDDHISM

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Source

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Venerable Master Hsing Yun once said that Humanistic Buddhism is the union of tradition and modernity; it fuses mountains and forests with society, temples with homes, monastics with lay practitioners, profound words with service and practice. Therefore, an important future direction for the practice of Humanistic Buddhism would be to embed the spirit and values of Buddhist traditions into all levels of society.

At present, Buddhism has had some budding successes in terms of building social organizations to engage in social work, and founding institutions of higher education to pursue academic research. This is especially true of the Buddha's Light International Association (BLIA) and the five universities established by Fo Guang Shan, the accomplishments of which are widely recognized. I would like to humbly offer two points regarding their development based on the above-mentioned foundations.

1. Continue to Engage in Dialogue with Modern Paradigms through Academic Research.

Holding to Venerable Master Hsing Yun's ideal, the Center for Buddhist Studies at Fo Guang University strives to establish an international platform for the academic research of Chinese Buddhism. This is to allow for a more in-depth understanding of Chinese Buddhism and to encourage more scholarly exchanges, so that this field of research can grow in the academy. At present, the center annually runs two major research projects, two international conferences, three training workshops for young scholars of Chinese Buddhism, and an academic journal, the *Fo Guang Journal of Buddhist Studies*. All these efforts are directed to the goal of gaining a more prominent role for Buddhist Studies in the modern academy.

The themes of the two major research projects are "East Asian Buddhism from the 16th to 19th centuries" and "The *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra* and East Asian Culture." The former has two sub-projects. The first is focused on identifying the essence of Humanistic Buddhism in scriptural sources and finding objective foundations for its theoretical basis. The second studies

developmental processes of recent East Asian Buddhism. How it emerged from remote rural contexts, maintaining the spirit of older Buddhist traditions in terms of novel processes of modernization. “The *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* and East Asian Culture” has sub-projects centered on the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, researching its related documents extant in Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese, as well as its philosophical and doctrinal aspects. It enquires further into the text’s influence on East Asian literature, art, philosophy, and culture, with a view to discovering new possibilities for the enrichment of modern society and Humanistic Buddhism. Both research projects are part of an attempt to establish a productive and rigorous dialogue between Humanistic Buddhism and modern academia.

In the past, Fo Guang Shan published the *Fo Guang Buddhist Journal* (six volumes over five years) and *Universal Gate Buddhist Journal* (sixty volumes over five years) with the aim of making available publications relevant to the academy as well as enhancing the understanding of the Dharma and refining human character. This responsibility is now taken up by the Fo Guang University Center for Buddhist Studies, due to publish a new volume in January 2015. This is an important step in the academic study of Humanistic Buddhism, and for sustaining its influence and authentic growth into the future.

However, in addition to producing journals, it is essential to promote collaboration between Buddhist studies and other academic disciplines, so that research on Buddhism is not limited to the study of doctrinal arcana, but can further develop the areas of Buddhist influence on political science, economics, sociology, psychology, and so on. In this way, the essence and spirit of Buddhism can be elaborated on in different disciplines, so that Buddhism can emerge from the “mountains and forests” and enter into broader society.

Buddhist psychology can be taken as an example. As a modern discipline, psychology has developed as a behavioral science, and as the cognitive psychology of humans and animals, based on the experimental methods of the natural sciences, as well as with respect to the Freudian

schools of psychoanalysis founded upon the analysis and treatment of the mentally ill. Besides these, there are also humanistic psychologies that oppose the materialistic reductionism of human psychology to purely biological phenomena, and instead emphasize human value and dignity. Similarly, Jungian psychoanalysis was influenced in its inception by Tibetan Buddhism and Chinese Taoist alchemy. Although a religion, Buddhism emphasizes the guiding role of the mind in the cycle of life and death, as in the achievement of *nirvāṇa* and liberation. By analyzing the mind, we understand that when it is confused and disturbed with respect to its function as the intellect, emotions, and will, we cannot see the world clearly.

Knowing this allows us to identify the behaviors that lead to the arising of feelings such as happiness or suffering in the world. If we want to extricate ourselves from worldly suffering, we must acknowledge the cognitive-affective afflictions of our minds. Mahāyāna Buddhism emphasizes that we should do this, but even more that we develop the *bodhi* mind. This approach of benefiting the self while benefiting others is similar to humanistic psychology's emphasis on self-actualization. In Buddhist doctrine, the mind is frequently mentioned. Although its understanding is not grounded in experiments using modern scientific methods, it is expressed in the terms of the personal experience of those who have dedicated themselves to spiritual practice. If we were to more systematically theorize these descriptions of the mind, this theorization could form the basis of the sub-field of Buddhist psychology, and be recognized within the discipline of modern psychology. Another direction that the development of Buddhist psychology is taking is in the study of mental and neurological conditions of people in meditative states, which employs the observational and experimental methods of neuropsychology among others. This, however, assumes the adoption of modern psychology's theoretical models and methods in its attempt to explore such states.

2. Align Buddhism with Professional Development through the System of Accreditation

Many Buddhist groups engage in charity and disaster relief, social care, psychological counselling, hospice care, and funeral services, with levels of professionalism that are on par with those of qualified social workers and counsellors. In fact, these professionals sometimes turn to monastics when faced with work stress, as the latter have cultivated a detachment from worldly pressures that enhance their capacity to aid others, developed especially through Buddhist practices of discipline, concentration, and wisdom. It is imperative that Buddhist teachers and theorists consider how monastics and Buddhists generally can play a more active and significant role in modern society.

At this stage, all relevant professional accreditation is associated with different academic disciplines, each with its own theory, training, and assessment methods. Buddhist students should comply with these requirements, and incorporate the spirit of Buddhism in their professional practice after obtaining professional certifications. If the Buddhist community can do this, it can then engage in dialogue with the latest knowledge in academic disciplines. It can then go on to develop a specifically Buddhist understanding of each field before developing a corresponding set of training mechanisms and assessment methods. In this way, Buddhist institutions and teachers can nurture more professionals in service to society, and thereby inspire a spirit of compassion that benefits the world. Future generations of Buddhist youth will then be able to acquire professional skills and certifications within a Buddhist system of educational training that equally emphasizes compassion and wisdom, cultivating personal maturity and responsibility.

While Humanistic Buddhism has achieved much, it is crucial for its ongoing growth that it is objectively validated for society at large. In an ecumenical spirit, Venerable Master Hsing Yun has proposed that the Buddhist community should propagate teachings of all eight schools of Buddhism inclusively, on the basis of their individual lineages. We should

bring a similar openness to infusing the spirit of Humanistic Buddhism in all academic disciplines and professions. This may perhaps serve as the goal to work towards in the general social application and appreciation of Humanistic Buddhism.

Notes

1 中華民國現代佛教學會 -Ed.

2 「佛教文化與當代世界－慶祝印順導師百歲嵩壽學術研討會」-Ed.

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