

**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

# **YANG RENSHAN, A BODHISATTVA<sup>1</sup>**

**Venerable Master Hsing Yun**

*Founder, Fo Guang Shan*

## **Source**

Venerable Master Hsing Yun, “Yang Renshan, a Bodhisattva,” *Studies on Humanistic Buddhism*, no. 4 (September 2021): 183-186, <https://journal.nantien.edu.au>.

On July 5<sup>th</sup> 2016, the recently expanded and rebuilt Jinling Scriptural Press in Nanjing held an event to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding. The organizer invited me to speak at this event, and I was delighted to be there to express my respect, remembrance, and gratitude for Yang Renshan.

By the end of the Qing dynasty, when Buddhism was suffering from the ravages and destruction of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom movement, Buddhist texts had almost disappeared. During this time, Yang Renshan spent sleepless nights reading the *Treatise on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna* and the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*.

He felt that there were too few Buddhist texts available. At the age of thirty, he vowed to set up a scripture publishing operation in his own house in Nanjing. He collected Buddhist scriptures from all around and met with Buddhist monks from all walks of life. He even met with Nanjo Bunyu, one of the leading Buddhist masters in Japan at the time, and asked him to help collect sūtras in Japan. He also worked with Dharmapāla from Sri Lanka to develop Buddhism internationally.

He later founded the Jetavana Hermitage, a Buddhist college, and trained many prominent Buddhist thinkers including Liang Qichao, Zhang Taiyan, Master Taixu, Ouyang Jingwu, Mei Guangxi, Venerable Renshan, Venerable Zhiguang, Yu Yu, Lu Cheng, Tan Sitong, and others. All of these students became leading figures and contemporary bodhisattvas in the promotion of Buddhism.

If not for Yang Renshan, Buddhism could have been at a fault line. Because of his safeguarding of Buddhism and maintaining a connection with its traditional history and culture, Buddhism has managed to develop to the present. Therefore, in my address, I referred to him as a “bodhisattva,” and I said I was giving the talk for “Bodhisattva Yang Renshan.”

In my opinion, Yang Renshan had the spirit of the Four Great Bodhisattvas,

namely compassion, wisdom, vows, and practice. For example, he and his wife were engaged when they were young. Before getting married, his wife suddenly contracted smallpox and her face became pockmarked. Even his in-laws thought they should not go through with the marriage, but Yang Renshan insisted. He was also patriotic, cared for the people, and devoted himself to the revitalization of Buddhism by printing scriptures. With his compassion and willingness to save people from suffering, was he not like Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva?

He established his press to allow for the circulation of Dharma treasures. His wise mind was well versed in astronomy and geography, optics, as well as Buddhist studies. Was he not like Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva?

He was devoted to his work providing education and establishing the Jetavana Hermitage. He made a vow to nurture Buddhist talents and to help promote Buddhism. Was he not like the great Samantabhadra Bodhisattva?

He had a broad, holistic vision and aspired for the internationalization of Buddhism. His granddaughter Yang Buwei and his granddaughter's husband Zhao Yuanren are both internationally renowned scholars. After the Cultural Revolution, they wrote to Premier Zhou Enlai asking for permission to revive the Jinling Scriptural Press, and they also received support from the President of the Chinese Buddhist Association, Zhao Puchu. He spread the Dharma widely. Was he not like the Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva?

I think that, while the four great mountains of the Four Great Bodhisattvas are visible places of worship, the one established by Bodhisattva Yang Renshan is an invisible, cultural place of worship. It can be seen as the location of the wisdom-life of Buddhism, a place of worship that is different from the four great mountains. His contribution to the revival of Buddhism and Chinese culture can be said to be even greater than Vimalakīrti in the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, and greater than that of Elder Sudatta, who paved the ground with gold to buy the land to build the Jetavana Vihāra.

I call him “Bodhisattva Yang Renshan,” but perhaps the leadership and disciples in Mainland China do not understand what I mean. A bodhisattva is not a being who is enshrined in a temple, but a person who can develop bodhicitta, who can attain awakening while liberating living beings, and who can bring universal benefit to the public. Therefore, Yang Renshan can be described as a living bodhisattva. If he was still alive today, he would be one hundred eighty years old. I am ninety this year, only half as old as he would be, but this living bodhisattva has always appeared in my heart.

Although he was a layperson, he could still become a bodhisattva, just like Mañjuśrī, Samantabhadra, and Avalokiteśvara who are depicted as laypeople (only Kṣitigarbha is shown as a monk). Do depictions of bodhisattvas distinguish them as male or female? What is the difference between a monk and a layperson becoming a bodhisattva? Therefore, I am right to call him a bodhisattva. Anyone who has developed bodhicitta can be called a bodhisattva.

## Notes

1 Originally published in Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s book 佛法真義 3 (*Buddha-Dharma: Pure and Simple 3* [Kaohsiung: Fo Guang Shan Institute of Humanistic Buddhism, 2018]).

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