

**STUDIES ON
HUMANISTIC BUDDHISM**

**VENERABLE MASTER HSING YUN:
A LIFE REMEMBERED
緬懷星雲大師：人間佛教的思想與實踐**

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CONNECTING THE SELF WITH OTHERS: THE ETHICS OF GIVING IN FO GUANG SHAN HUMANISTIC BUDDHISM

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Abstract

This article aims at enriching the interdisciplinary research on Venerable Master Hsing Yun's (星雲) Humanistic Buddhism (*renjian fojiao*, 人間佛教) from the anthropological perspective. Drawing on the author's ethnographic fieldwork at Dajue (Great Awakening, 大覺) Temple, the ancestral temple of Fo Guang Shan in the People's Republic of China. It examines how monastics and lay practitioners perform Buddhist giving in accordance with Venerable Master Hsing Yun's philosophy of generosity (*bushi*, 布施): providing material or immaterial support to those in need, making offerings to the Triple Gem, and developing affinities (*jieyuan*, 結緣) to create positive relationships with both Buddhists and non-Buddhists. The author argues that giving in Fo Guang Shan Humanistic Buddhism is culturally different from alms-based giving in other Buddhist traditions. Departing from the strict monastic-lay performative divide, it emphasizes an ontological equality between two parties grounded in shared merit accumulation and the foremost cultivation for altruism. Humanistic Buddhist giving can assist practitioners in nurturing selflessness and overcoming attachments, thereby embodying the bodhisattva spirit of benefiting the self through benefiting others. It can also encourage an expansive understanding of wealth which moves beyond material possessions and incorporates immaterial phenomena such as joyfulness and social connections.

Since the establishment of Fo Guang Shan, Foguang people have been following the tenet of giving in their daily work: giving others confidence, giving others joy, giving others hope, and giving others convenience. Giving is not only a way of practicing generosity, but also a way of offering. Although only small gestures, it can create causes and conditions.¹

1. Introduction

Imagine a line of Buddhist monastics, holding their lidded alms bowls

and walking slowly with majestic gaits along the street. They halt in front of a layperson who has knelt down on the pavement. Opening their bowls, they wait for the layperson to place food inside. Replacing lids, they move on silently without a smile, a glance, or any sign of gratitude. The daily alms round, a morning ritual, is one of the most common ways for Buddhists in Theravādin societies to practice generosity. Inheriting the Buddha's mendicant lifestyle, monastics constitute a fertile 'field of merit' for the laity to accumulate merit.

However, daily alms collection is absent in some Buddhist contexts. It is quintessential in Chinese Buddhism that the Buddhist order have settled down and developed complete economic independence² through agriculture, rental of land, donations from devotees, remuneration for Dharma services, as well as later from tourism and modern enterprises.³ This article therefore considers how generosity can be practiced if the tradition of alms giving and receiving is lacking in the Chinese context, thereby enriching the interdisciplinary research on Venerable Master Hsing Yun's philosophy of generosity.

In Mahāyāna Buddhism, bodhisattvas are admired as the enlightened and compassionate beings whose daily cultivation demonstrates much concern for the well-being of others as for themselves on the path toward Buddhahood.⁴ Striving for the ideal of compassion at the highest level, practitioners cultivate themselves in the perfection of generosity. As the archetypal approach to altruism on the bodhisattva path (*pusa dao*, 菩薩道), generosity is highly valued as the foremost practice in the four embracing virtues (*sishe*, 四攝)⁵ and the six perfections (*liudu*, 六度).⁶ Generosity can be actualized in three different ways: the giving of wealth, the giving of the Dharma, and the giving of fearlessness. The giving of wealth includes all forms of material gifts such as money, food, and other daily necessities. The giving of the Dharma is usually conducted by monastics who give lectures or provide advice to laypeople on dealing with life's problems. The giving of fearlessness finds expression in liberating beings from the fear of mortal danger. In Fo Guang Shan (Buddha's Light Mountain, 佛光山), Venerable Master Hsing Yun's innovative interpretations, encapsulated in the philosophy of giving, expand the traditional teachings of generosity.

Drawing on my ethnographic research at Dajue Temple, I will examine how monastic and lay practitioners perform Humanistic Buddhist giving in accordance with Venerable Master Hsing Yun's philosophy of generosity: providing material and immaterial support to those in need, making offerings to the Triple Gem, and creating positive affinities with wider audiences. I argue that the ethics of giving in Fo Guang Shan's Humanistic Buddhism is culturally different from the alms-based giving in other Buddhist traditions. Departing from the strict monastic-lay performative divide, it emphasizes an ontological equality between two parties grounded in shared merit accumulation and the foremost cultivation of altruism. Humanistic Buddhist giving can assist practitioners in nurturing selflessness and overcoming attachments, thereby embodying the bodhisattva spirit of benefiting the self through benefiting others. It can also encourage an expansive understanding of wealth which moves beyond material possessions and incorporates immaterial phenomena such as joyfulness and social connections.

2. Gift Giving in Anthropology

The topic of gift giving has a long history in anthropology, going back to Marcel Mauss's seminal work *The Gift* published in 1925. Mauss discovered the centrality of reciprocity in gift-exchange in Melanesian and Polynesian societies: the gift is never 'free' and must be returned. Focusing on the core question of the force that compels the recipient to make a return, Mauss found his answers in the Maori concept of *hau*, a mystical power existing in the forest.⁷ Because the gift is endowed with the nature or spiritual essence of the giver, it is the danger of keeping the thing and the moral burden of indebtedness caused by receiving that strongly urges reciprocity. Mauss's arguments on gift giving have been inspiring anthropologists for a century. Earlier discussions focus on the obligation of return and the superiority of the giver. It is the gift that engenders continuity in the relation between the giver and the recipient, and assists in maintaining social solidarity at large.

The social function of gifts, based on an expected and equivalent return, had long been assumed by many anthropologists until Jonathan Parry made

his insightful observations on the Maussian gift and challenged the widely recognized idea of reciprocity in gift giving. Rethinking the rationale of reciprocity, he claimed that Indian religious gifts are ‘free/pure,’ without any expectation of material return.⁸ Parry reasoned that gifts may transfer danger and all forms of impurity or inauspiciousness from the donor to the recipient. Where these negative ‘substances’ move from the dominant caste to the subordinate one, they constitute a mode of cultural domination.

The exploration of gift giving in different Buddhist contexts also considers reciprocity and the relationship between giver and receiver: whether the gift is ‘free,’ whether the gift creates a connection between the two parties, and what kind of relationships can be produced. Many anthropologists conducted their fieldwork in Theravādin countries and their views tend to fall into two camps. Some scholars suggest that Buddhist giving represented by alms donation is free because monastics do not necessarily reciprocate what has been given and no particular relationship forms between monks and the laity.⁹ Ivan Strenski argues that there is an indirect reciprocation between what is provided by monks and what is given by the laity due to the third party of merit.¹⁰ Joanna Cook argues further that only with unreciprocated intentions can the ‘selfless giving’ be rewarded.¹¹ However, scholars like Michael Carrithers reject the validity of Strenski’s argument and believe that the actual relations between monks and the laity exist in terms of the exchange between known persons who have well-established ties.¹² The connection between monastics and the laity has been thoroughly explored by Hiroko Kawanami who investigates various reciprocal transactions in the ‘interdependent’ Burmese society: monastics closely bridge the monastic community and the laity via multiple roles such as recipients, redistributors of wealth, ritual performers, and Buddhist consultants or protectors.¹³

Although scholars hold different views on reciprocity and relationships produced by gift giving, they agree on the inequality between monastics and the laity in gift giving because material gifts are usually given by the laity and services are commonly provided by monastics. Although monastics can redistribute what has been given or give to the laity or junior monastics in

immaterial ways, the gift itself does reproduce the hierarchical status between monastics and layperson,¹⁴ between senior and junior monastics,¹⁵ and even between male and female monastics.¹⁶

In the Tibetan context, Buddhist giving is a central, but not an outright essential, component in Buddhist lay–monastic relations. Rather, transactions centered on ritual services, performed by monastics and remunerated by the laity, are more important.¹⁷ Nicholas Sihlé argues that remuneration cannot be perceived as a gift, nor categorized as common market relation.¹⁸ Therefore, he addresses the question of the extent to which we can speak of reciprocity in actual Buddhist gifts, and further classifies reciprocity into two groups: (1) ‘weak reciprocity’ instantiated by sermons or blessings, and (2) ‘strong reciprocity’ which we see in long-term relationships between an individual lay donor and an individual monastic recipient, and in monastics’ direct responses to laypeople’s particular needs.¹⁹

Scholarly analysis of gift giving has so far paid limited attention to Chinese Buddhism. Previous studies invoke the concept of developing affinities (*jieyuan*) to explain gift giving in the Chinese context.²⁰ I will dedicate the following sections to exploring diverse forms of Buddhist giving based on my fieldwork at the Dajue Temple. Then I will demonstrate how Humanistic Buddhist giving straddles the general interpretations of Buddhist giving and the Chinese cultural discourse, thereby distinguishing Humanistic Buddhist giving from other forms of giving summarized in this review.

3. Diverse Forms of Giving in Humanistic Buddhism

My ethnographic fieldwork was conducted at Dajue Temple in Yixing, China, over multiple visits with sustained participant observation centered on a five-day Cultural Creativity Market (*wenchuang shiji*, 文創市集) held during a nationwide holiday in early October 2021. This event provided the primary ethnographic case for this article, as its wide involvement of participants—monastics, long-term devotees, youth volunteers, non-Buddhist exhibitors, and visitors—made it a particularly rich setting in which to observe

the diverse forms of Humanistic Buddhist giving in practice. My research methods included extensive participant observation throughout the market's daily activities, informal conversations, and semi-structured interviews with a wide range of participants. As a former monastic retreat participant, I was assigned to assist the stall of the temple's academy during the market. The positionality granted me close access to observe giving within Fo Guang Shan Humanistic Buddhism. The market thus serves not only as illustrative material, but also an ethnographic lens through which this article examines how the ethics of giving is embodied in a contemporary Chinese Humanistic Buddhist context.

3.1 The Cultural Creativity Market

The theme of the market was designated as 'cultural creativity.' With the prosperity of tourism, this notion has been popularized, especially in the cultural and creative sectors whereby localized cultural motifs are integrated into novel artistic products. Entrenched in Buddhist teachings, the market brought the Buddhist philosophy of generosity to the fore as its cultural bedrock. It also embraced creativity in terms of innovative activity format and management style. Economic trade between the seller and the buyer did exist. Based on my observations, however, the market was infused with a Buddhist spirit because many noncommercial gifts were transferred between market participants, thereby intentionally breaking from the stereotypical view of profit-oriented commercial activities.

The market opened from 9.00 am to 9.00 pm, welcoming a steady flow of visitors. It comprised thirty tents that were provided to exhibitors at no cost. Only two stalls were operated by the temple itself: one was affiliated to the souvenir shop and the other was managed by the temple's academy. The rest of the stalls were lent to artists, craftspeople, and other exhibitors. Some of them were devotees or frequent visitors who had established connections with Fo Guang Shan, although most exhibitors were non-Buddhist making their first visits to the temple. No matter how adept or amateur they were in the field of art, or level of knowledge about Buddhism, all exhibitors were welcomed

to the event. They exhibited works of art, displayed specialist skills, ran workshops, sold products, and facilitated relations with new customers. Each stall also functioned as a classroom, imparting knowledge and craftsmanship in calligraphy, embroidery, candle making, jewelry design, incense making, souvenir design, tea tasting, crystal carving, and flower arrangement.

Between the market square and the junction, there was a vacant space used for performances. Singing, dancing, music, and poetry were performed by temple volunteers, stall owners, and some tourists who gave improvisation on the spur of the moment. The market brimmed with a festive atmosphere as music sounded. Along the main road, a line of street food carts selling vegetarian snacks and drinks attracted many visitors. These food stalls were overseen by the temple's catering group with assistance provided by volunteers who were provisionally dispatched from other temple divisions or other Fo Guang Shan branches. The market was always a bustling place, whether bathing in the rising sun or decorated by flickering lights when night came.



Figure 1. The Market at night. (Photo by the author.)

3.2 Generous Giving, Intangible Support

It was the last day of the market. After finishing breakfast, I headed to the square with some volunteers. We arrived one hour early, but we were not the earliest. Youth volunteers of the event planning team had already assembled at the service center. Circling around the reception desk, they were assigning the tasks of the day, scheduling performances, and confirming the number of bento boxes (free lunch for stall owners and market volunteers). During the morning break, I had a chance to conduct a group interview with them. Lu-Lu, a lively volunteer who was in charge of performances, hospitably found a seat for me. Some volunteers stopped their chatting, rearranged their seats into a big circle, and warmly welcomed me.

Most volunteers were in their early twenties, living in neighboring counties, and had frequented the temple with their parents. They had been helping with various voluntary services since childhood. Advancing from program participants to temple volunteers, assisting weekend classes or occasional events, they were proud of contributing to the temple with what they had learned. In these days, apart from the daily routines of market management, they were responsible for performances to bring others joy. Teacher Zhang, a senior devotee, joined our chat as well. She praised this group of young people as the temple's 'name card.' From her perspective, they are role models of 'Buddhist youth'—hospitable, polite, optimistic, patient, hardworking, and cooperative. She told me that these young volunteers looked different from the pessimistic 'Buddha-like youth,'²¹ "Their eyes are shining because they have 'light' in their hearts!"

Following Teacher Zhang's comments, Lin-Lin, the team leader, humbly told us they still grumbled from fatigue after performing under the scorching sun, but they knew that they should give the best performance to audiences once the music started. They sang and danced to Buddhist-themed music written by Venerable Master Hsing Yun. Although the modern lyrics and melodies sounded different from Buddhist chanting, modern Buddhist music and dance share the same function of Dharma propagation.²² Hence, it was

imperative to maintain a meticulous and respectful attitude. Lin-Lin continued, “Whenever the temple is in need, they will prioritize temple services as a way of reciprocity.” He eloquently shared with us how he had benefited from the weekend class, holiday camps, and volunteer work organized by the temple since his childhood. In his words, the Dajue Temple was not only a ‘school’ that provided him with knowledge of life and Buddhist wisdom, but also his ‘second home’ where he could find friendship and a sense of belonging after his parents migrated to big cities for doing business. Lin-Lin also transformed from a timid boy into a competent university society leader and a facilitator of the temple's youth activities. All his skills had been accumulating through years of volunteering.

During the lunch break, I hurried to the calligraphy stall where Yu was waiting for my questions. It was difficult to arrange a time slot with him because his stall was always encircled by crowds of visitors. Yu, a calligraphy amateur, had grown accustomed to the bustling crowds of tourists, calmly holding the brush, and skillfully working on a folding fan with the prayer requested by the visitor. As a local university student, he used to spend his weekend selling calligraphy on a busy commercial street. Recommended by a friend, he joined the market and decided to sell folding fans at cost and write calligraphy for free. He slowly narrated his story:

Inside and outside the temple are two different worlds. Outside the temple, people only care about money. Customers on the street treat me as a street performer and are impatient. “Hey! Write something for me!” Calligraphy, in their eyes, is a commodity, rather than art. But people in the temple are polite. They would say, “May I have this or that? Would you please help me write something?” People respect me, and we are all equal [...] My family specializes in hand-making folding fans, so I only sell them at cost here. We do not have deep faith in Buddhism, but the venerables told us that writing calligraphy

is a way of making good connections. I agree! The temple is not a place for making money. They invite me to use the stall for free and provide me with free lunch. You see, the venerables in the nearby stall care about my study and business, send water to me in the sweltering afternoon, and help to look after my belongings if I need a break.

Yu was not the only one who experienced the ‘two worlds.’ In theory, the temple could invite famous artists for prestige, and market exhibitors could make a profit if they charged more outside the temple during the peak tourist season. In practice, the temple decided to give opportunities to artists living nearby, especially the younger generations, to exhibit their skills and works of art. Part of the invitation was due to the convenient commute for the artists during the pandemic. For educational purposes, the temple aimed at inspiring these artists to expand the meaning of art beyond commodity, and guide them to make connections with more people through sharing knowledge and techniques. In the late afternoon, the five-day market came to an end. When we were busy tidying up, Yu hastened to a temple-owned stall and slipped a banknote (100 RMB) into a merit-making box, then left quickly without saying a word or waiting for any gratitude in return. Later, another volunteer informed me that Yu and some other young artists agreed to maintain contact with the temple and use their expertise to support the temple’s educational programs in the future.

The discussion about the temple market has so far demonstrated what is genuinely distinctive about giving in Fo Guang Shan Humanistic Buddhism: the dissolution of conventional monastic-lay performative divide and its replacement with a way of giving premised on ontological equality and mutual cultivation. In most Buddhist traditions, the roles of giver and recipient are institutionally fixed. The laity sustain the monastic community materially, while monastics provide spiritual teaching in return. What the holiday market made visible, however, is a different configuration. Young volunteers like Lu-Lu and Lin-Lin, who had themselves been nurtured by the temple’s educational

programs, returned not as donors offering material gifts, but as practitioners offering expertise, joy, and service. When artists like Yu were in need of help, monastics and volunteers willingly provided: free lunch and drinks, free stalls, care for their health under the intense heat of summer, generous support by purchasing their works of art or promoting their businesses, as well as advice in the course of conversation for dealing with life's questions. In return, they made quiet donations, or remembered to support the temple's future development, without announcement, without waiting for gratitude, enacting precisely the spirit of giving without recognition but with the belief in positive karmic deeds. The significance of this is not merely theological but social. Humanistic Buddhist giving, as practiced at the market, functions as an education in the self-other relation, drawing practitioners and non-Buddhists alike into an ethic of giving that connects individual cultivation to the broader aspiration of benefiting others. It is the integration of selfless giving with expansive social engagement, rather than the maintenance of ritual hierarchy, that constitutes the specific ethical contribution of Fo Guang Shan Humanistic Buddhism to the broader field of Buddhist giving.



Figure 2. A flash mob of the “Three Goods Song” performed by youth volunteers, market exhibitors, and tourists as a way of “giving others joy”. (Photo by the author.)

3.3 Making Offerings to the Triple Gem

Making offerings to the Triple Gem is another way to perform Buddhist giving. The concept of Triple Gem is composed of the Buddha (the founder), the Dharma (Buddhist teachings), and the *Saṅgha* (monastic order). At the heart of Buddhist faith, all three resemble spiritual wealth for practitioners to attain liberation. The Buddha is often compared to the light that nurtures all beings and illuminates the mind; the Dharma is depicted as the water that can cleanse all defilements and karmic hindrances; and the *Saṅgha* is well-known as a field that enables the planting of seeds of merit.²³ Therefore, making offerings is significant for practitioners to accrue merit. Offerings can be dedicated to the statues, pagodas, stupas, or temples of buddhas and bodhisattvas, the Buddhist teachings, and monastics in both material and immaterial ways. For immaterial offerings, good intention and diligent cultivation are essential. Practitioners can work on Buddhist classics to propagate the Dharma through copying, listening, learning, reading, chanting, memorizing, practicing, teaching, and annotating. Making offerings to monastics in terms of food, clothes, and other necessities regularly, or giving a vegetarian banquet during an occasional event, is a practicable way to actualize generosity.

Apart from customary offerings in daily cultivation, making universal offerings was also integrated into various public activities that guided temple visitors to have a sense of Buddhist cultivation. The Main Shrine is another popular spot. Climbing up the broadest avenue until its summit, visitors arrive at a glorious building. Worshippers are guided to collect a free flower tray or a prepaid candle from the reception desk near the right side of the entrance. There are several volunteers who teach how to hold the flower with the correct posture, or to write down a name and an accompanying wish—either for themselves or for loved ones—on a small card and attach it to a candle. Following the one way route, worshippers enter the shrine with the flower tray or candle, walk solemnly toward the front of the statue, raise the offering to their brows reverently, pray to the Buddha silently, place the offering tidily on the altar, and finally give a deep half bow or prostrate to the Buddha thrice. Some devotees who wish to pray longer, do repentance, or recite a short piece

of *sūtra* can move to the corner and accomplish incorporeal offerings in their own ways. Some worshippers prefer to stand with palms up together, gazing up at the Buddha with reverence for a while, and immersing themselves in the tranquillity as if they were in the Pure Land.

After praying, they step out of the shrine from the left side of the entrance where a large enquiry desk is positioned. Unlike other Chinese Buddhist temples that place a huge bronze incense burner in the middle of the courtyard and a large donation box in the most conspicuous place, the Dajue Temple only allows monastic or laypeople to offer incense, with the donation box placed at an out of the way corner. Putting less emphasis on material offerings, Humanistic Buddhism puts weight on light and flower offerings with virtuous intention, as the Buddhist metaphor goes, “offering a petal of heartfelt fragrance” (*xin xiang yiban*, 心香一瓣). Most worshippers queue in front of the enquiry desk, waiting to pay for a candle for specific wishes such as safety, health, academic progress, promotion, or a good marriage. They can also pay for offerings to the Buddha or write a memorial tablet for the deceased, which will be used in the upcoming Dharma services. Additionally, people can make donations for food offerings or temple construction. Venerables help to write down the donor’s name, item, amount, and other requirements, and then give the donor a “gift of affinity” (*jieyuanpin*, 結緣品, usually sweets, a string of beads, or other souvenirs) with gratitude and blessings.

During large Dharma Assemblies, food offering is the optimal way to offer the *Sanḡha* and sow the seeds of good connections with more people. During the holiday, I remember there was one hearty lunch followed by a grand Dharma Assembly. After the meal had been dedicated to the Triple Gem through the chanting of *Offering Mantra*, all the benefactors were called to the front one after another, prostrating collectively to express gratitude toward everyone for coming and giving them the chance to make an offering. Then, mutual gratitude was given by the seated diners who joined palms and replied, “*Amitufo*.”²⁴ During the holiday, intangible offering to the Triple Gem was thoroughly reified by the collective pilgrimage. Devotees from other branches converged at the Dajue Temple, assembling at a square near the main entrance,

putting on Dharma attire and a rucksack, and lining up into a pilgrimage procession. Punctuated by the chanting of the Buddha's name, pilgrims followed the array of monastics, marching to the Main Shrine by taking three steps followed by a prostration all along the way. Under the scorching sun, they endured the scalding heat of the ground, and clothes drenched with sweat, and strove to accomplish the two hour dedication, thereby offering their faithful hearts to the Triple Gem.

3.4 Giving to Develop Affinities

The third type of Buddhist giving is based on developing affinities, namely giving with conditions, which aims at creating positive karmic bonds. The Chinese term 結緣 (*jieyuan*) has been translated in different ways such as “creating links of affinity,”²⁵ “creating bonds,”²⁶ or “sowing seeds of affinity.”²⁷ Here, the Fo Guang Shan standard translation of “developing affinities” is used.²⁸ Venerable Master Hsing Yun explained, “generosity is the best way to form good affinities with others, as well as an important expedient means that inspires people to learn Buddhism.”²⁹ He further elaborated that it is not only about giving, “affinities represent reciprocal relationships.”³⁰ Building affinities also involves receiving and accepting the generosity of others. The act of giving shows generosity; receiving demonstrates gratitude.

Developing affinities usually relies on the giving of a small gift to create or increase Dharma-based relationships. For example, free admission and a cup of tea with warm greetings are foundational ways of developing affinities in Fo Guang Shan. Monastics are accustomed to carrying some gifts of affinity. Lay practitioners can also bring small gifts to share with other practitioners (usually those new to Buddhism) if they feel some affinity with the person. Venerable Master Hsing Yun also proposed extensive ways of developing affinities through virtuous actions: encouraging others with positive words, warm greetings, voluntary help, and good intentions.³¹ Compared with making offerings to the Triple Gem and practicing generosity, giving to develop affinities connotes a specific direction of the gift that always flows from those who have higher proficiency in Buddhism (senior monastics or

lay practitioners) to those who have not progressed as far (junior monastics or Buddhist beginners) or non-Buddhists, thereby encouraging the recipient to learn more about Buddhism and cultivate themselves diligently.

Until now, we have witnessed that all the benefits provided by the temple to market exhibitors can be understood as a way of developing affinities because these artists could become art teachers or followers when the time is ripe. The concept of developing affinities can also explain why Fo Guang Shan branches around the world are always fully packed with diverse activities and events for devotees and the general populace. Sowing the seeds of Buddhism through practice-based, cultural, educational, and charitable programs presents participants with a wealth of diverse teachings that can meet the needs of as many audiences as possible.³² In this section, I will shed light on the temple's educational activities during the market, thereby exploring how the temple plants seeds for positive connections with wider audiences.

In daily interaction between monastics and the laity, it is common to see small gifts and benedictions flowing from the former to the latter. Performing rituals for the deceased, purifying a new home, advising on life's questions, and assisting in handling a layperson's life crises are important to the further development of the monastic-laity connection. In addition, teaching the Dharma expediently as a paramount way of generating affinities is seen in Humanistic Buddhist education in everyday settings. In the Dajue Temple, the Yunhu Academy (雲湖書院) is the foremost division in charge of the activities related to culture, education, and the arts. As a former monastic retreat participant, I was assigned to look after the stall owned by the Academy during the market opening days. Our stall was the only one focused on educational programs. Positioned in the first row, with a conspicuous cartoon figure of Venerable Master Hsing Yun, the stall appealed to visitors from all directions. It contained two compartments: a showroom related to the monastic retreat program, and a consulting room where monastics provided Buddhist advice to visitors. With three other full-time volunteers, we took turns in monitoring the showroom: we introduced the retreat to visitors based on photos on the wall, played a film of highlights of each retreat class,

shared our own experiences of monastic life, explained the parts visitors were interested in, and recorded the contact details of potential participants. Doing voluntary work under the scorching sun challenged our endurance. Yet our guiding venerable sincerely reminded us to treat each visitor warmly because our introduction could be a valuable “gift of Dharma” that might provide visitors the “causes and conditions” for a connection with Buddhism, even if we could not foresee whether the visitor would participate in the educational programs in the future.

If visitors had life problems, they were guided to select a card at random, and then queued outside the consulting room. To each in turn, the monastic gave suggestions for their enquiries, combining their questions and the Dharma sentence on the card drawn by the visitor. Stick or card-drawing is a popular form of divination in Chinese folk religions. Fo Guang Shan has updated this traditional practice by having people drawing Dharma cards from a deck called Positive Forecasts for Life (*rensheng bu shi*, 人生卜事). This is a set of cards with enlightening sentences written by Venerable Master Hsing Yun.

Unlike the traditional divination, which often contains abstruse and esoteric words or symbols that require further explanation, each Dharma card corresponds to one specific Buddhist teaching and provides practicable information. Therefore, asking guidance in the Humanistic Buddhist context cannot be conflated with divination. Participants seek answers to mundane questions about studies, jobs, relations, marriage, child raising, health, and other topics, as well as attempting to perceive one or more teachings that can instruct their daily life. During the market event, the Buddhist consultancy attracted crowds of people, and the card drawn by visitors as a gift of affinity connected them with Buddhist teachings and practices.

4. The Expansive Understanding of Buddhist Giving

4.1 Rethinking the Giver, the Recipient, and the Gift

Above I described the various actors involved in Buddhist giving and

the plentiful affinities that were created. Monastics, lay devotees, youth volunteers, market exhibitors, worshippers, and general visitors are all involved in the process of giving and receiving. I therefore claim there is no limitation for the giver or the recipient: no matter whether one is a monastic or a layperson, a Buddhist or a non-Buddhist, everyone can play the double role of giver and recipient in Humanistic Buddhism. As far as what can be given, the traditional topology of threefold Buddhist giving has been expanded in the Humanistic Buddhist context. The idea of the gift in Buddhist giving includes both the material and the intangible, both the sacred and the mundane. As I depicted in previous sections, both monastics and lay Buddhists can offer candles, flowers, and incense for buddhas and bodhisattvas, and make offerings to Buddhist teachings by various ways of propagating the Dharma and cultivating toward enlightenment. The laity can make offerings to monastics by donating food and other necessities.

Of the three types of giving, the giving of wealth is mainly performed by lay practitioners. Various forms of material wealth are given by people who wish to make donations for temple construction, education, charity, and maintenance. The giving of immaterial or inner wealth such as ideas, plans, or expertise is also encouraged as a way of supporting the temple. While the giving of immaterial wealth can be found across Buddhist traditions, a distinctive feature of Fo Guang Shan is the institutional emphasis placed on it as a mode of practice for both monastics and the laity. Rather than treating immaterial giving as a supplementary contribution, Fo Guang Shan actively integrates it into educational programs and structured volunteerism. It is also noteworthy that volunteerism does not mean unilateral contribution from the laity to the monastic community. On the contrary, “reciprocal donation” (*hu tian youxiang*, 互添油香) is accorded great importance in Fo Guang Shan, particularly the gift from the monastic side to the laity. Venerable Master Hsing Yun explained, “Devotees donate their money to the temple, while monastics gift their services to devotees. I believe that this form of reciprocal donation is a beautiful practice of mutual offering of causes and conditions.”³³ Specifically, the concept of “being the volunteers’ volunteer” (*zuo yigong de yigong*, 做義工的義工; Hsing Yun 2011) was frequently mentioned during

my fieldwork.³⁴ Monastics keep this concept in mind to remind themselves that Venerable Master Hsing Yun encouraged them to think about what they, as monastics, can give to devotees in return. Chinese Buddhist monasteries have a long history of giving to devotees: providing Dharma talks and courses, arranging food and accommodation, conducting blessing sessions, performing rituals and purification ceremonies, as well as sharing congee and rhyming couplets for New Year. Fo Guang Shan places Dharma propagation through education at the heart of their practice of generosity, together with providing ethical teachings and Buddhist consultancy. Monastics also remind themselves to express gratitude to the laity. They remember to make tea or prepare snacks for volunteers at the end of chores, invite them to fellowship dinner, or organize an end-of-year celebration. The giving of Buddhist teachings and fearlessness excel other forms of Buddhist giving. A word or two can inspire faith in Buddhism. Just as the Buddhist consultancy broadened people's vision when they were enmeshed in life's struggles, the giving of fearlessness takes effect when self-empowering teachings dispel the fear from peoples' minds. Monastics, usually symbolizing a form of refuge, provide protection for people from all manner of misfortune.

4.2 Rethinking the Giver—Recipient Relation

Regarding the giver—recipient relationship, the equality in giving and receiving is a prominent part of Buddhist teachings.³⁵ Here, equality contains a threefold meaning: (1) giving and receiving can alternatively happen in one person; (2) giving and receiving share the same importance; (3) the giver is the true recipient. The common understanding of Buddhist giving values the specific institutionalized relationship between monastics and the laity—the practical support given by the laity is essential to the survival of the monastic order. However, Fo Guang Shan takes a different approach. Everyone can become a giver or a recipient. Not restricted to the fixed role of recipient, monastics are encouraged to think about how to give to the layperson, no matter whether he or she is a devotee or a visitor. The layperson is not always the giver, but can also receive gifts from the temple, monastics, or another layperson.

The motivation behind the interchangeability of giving and receiving is the equal benefit resulting from both actions. Lacking either party, the whole process would not be accomplished. Completing the process of Buddhist giving, the giver and the recipient are equally meritorious because it is imperative for practitioners to cultivate equality between giving and receiving. In other words, any arrogance caused by the misunderstanding of superiority of giving or receiving should be discouraged. This has been manifested in the collective prostration performed by benefactors before the formal meal. Even if they make offerings to monastics and create bonds with all diners, givers should be humble and bear gratitude in their minds. For recipients, they should maintain joyfulness without any preference with regard to what has been offered.

The last dimension focuses on the ontological equality between the giver and the recipient. Both sides are heterogenous but unified in a sense of merit accumulation. According to the diverse forms of giving during the temple's event, we saw that the actions of giving and receiving formed a positive feedback circuit that influenced each actor. When the temple provides opportunities for young volunteers and market exhibitors, it can foster relationships with them and entail their willing support when the temple is in need. When devotees and volunteers volunteer their time and expertise to temple services, they receive opportunities for self-development in a sense of practicing Buddhism and improving mundane skills. Rooted in Buddhist teachings and ethical education, when the temple provides various activities and events to different audiences, it plants numerous seeds of potential devotees. When the Triple Gem receives a wide range of offerings, monastics simultaneously offer spiritual refuge to the giver and strengthen the bond between the giver and Buddhism. Gratitude, blessings, teachings, or even giving a gift of affinity can happen at any moment, but these are the by-products of the whole process, which cannot be considered as true reciprocity. This is because the real reciprocal gift exists in the form of merit and will ultimately be ripe in the future, even if its time and manner of arrival are veritably unpredictable. As one of the central concepts in Buddhism, merit is intimately bound up with the law of cause and effect, namely karma. In every

situation, one finds oneself in the result of one's own behavioral, verbal, and intentional karma produced as a result of actions in this or previous lifetimes. Similarly, every action, word, and thought will eventually bear its own fruit—wholesome or unwholesome—in this or in future lifetimes. At the moment of performing Buddhist giving, the giver is concomitantly sowing a meritorious seed that will return to him or her in the future. Therefore, Buddhist reciprocity is always rewarded through karma, rather than simply between monastics and devotees.

4.3 Perfect Giving in Theory and Giving to Develop Affinities in Action

Perfect giving has been crystallized into the Buddhist idea of the emptiness of the three aspects of giving (*sanlun ti kong*, 三輪體空). Expounded in the *Diamond Sūtra*, the prerequisites for Buddhist giving are the giver, the recipient, and the gift. For the giver, pure intention, which means no expectation of any reciprocity, is encouraged. Giving should be conducted in accordance with one's ability and willingness, following conditions, and bringing joy to both the donor and the recipient. During the process of giving, a respectful mind without any sign of arrogance should be cultivated. For the recipient, acceptance without any judgement, differentiation, or desire over the gift is also an object of cultivation. The action of acceptance may be accompanied by joyfulness, willingness, and gratitude, but it should not generate any sign of attachment. Detached from both the giver and the recipient, the gift itself seems not to exist and the act of giving seems not to be perceived. Therefore, the ultimate practice of Buddhist giving should be called 'formless giving' in which emptiness pervades all three aspects.³⁶ Therefore, there is no *self* which makes the giving because the benefactor should not be recognized; there is no *other* to accept the gift because the beneficiary should not be recognized; and the form of *gift* should be undermined as well.

The emptiness of the three aspects of giving is the most profound explanation of Buddhist giving. For Humanistic Buddhist practitioners, selfless giving is manifested in the four givings (*si gei*, 四給): give others confidence, give others joy, give others hope, and give others convenience.

These four aspects are integrated as a unified concept that endows generosity with modern interpretations, thereby inspiring practitioners to take *others* into consideration. One act of giving may take effect in one or more of the four aspects. In Fo Guang Shan, ‘giving others conditions’ (*gei ren yinyuan*, 給人因緣) stands in the middle of giving to develop affinities, in terms of making connections between monastics and the laity, between Buddhists and non-Buddhists, with its final goal of further development as a way of reaping positive karmic reward.

The Buddha taught the principle of the natural order: the law of causes and conditions, or dependent origination. This principle, possibly the most fundamental teaching of all schools in Buddhism, is basically understood as an explanation of all that exists and ceases, everything that exists, has come into being dependent on particular causes and conditions, and when these causes and conditions cease, the thing that depends on them will also cease. The cause of a phenomenon can be understood as what is immediately responsible for its occurrence, whereas conditions refer to any supporting factors.³⁷ Early meanings of dependent origination may have applied mainly to processes of mental conditioning.³⁸ The common understanding of this concept today, however, focuses on the interconnectedness of both mental and physical phenomena that depend on something else for their current existence. Everything affects everything else; everything is related to everything else. Only when causes and conditions are ripe, the thing will happen, and the relation will appear.

Humanistic Buddhism emphasizes the importance of networking, namely interpersonal relationships, as one form of cause and condition.³⁹ Its advocacy focuses on actively creating wholesome conditions through building harmonious relationships and establishing good communication with others, such as donating money, giving kind encouragement, making small kind gestures, a simple kind thought, educating others, lending a helping hand, making warm gestures such as smiling, nodding, shaking hands, and so forth.⁴⁰ These wholesome deeds overlap with the ways of practicing Buddhist giving. Being generous to those in need is helpful in fostering good interpersonal

relationships. Making offerings creates positive connections with the Triple Gem, thereby disposing the giver toward diligence in Buddhist cultivation. In the process of developing affinities, positive bonds are created in a karmic sense. Rooted in the law of dependent origination, giving in Humanistic Buddhism therefore can be perceived as an engaged way of creating good causes and conditions, deeply embedded in the initiative of the subject, as well as the goal of good future effect.

Practitioners of Humanistic Buddhism actively develop affinities with others, not only within the same Buddhist community, but also with others in wider society. Venerable Master Hsing Yun's view on the interdependence of everything is characterized by the concept of 'oneness and co-existence' (*tongti gongsheng*, 同體共生), which means that everything in the universe is part of a greater self.⁴¹ The self and others are systematically and equally related to each other. Driven by the goal of creating a Pure Land in the present, building social harmony cannot be separated from individuals' efforts. Giving to develop affinities, therefore, focuses on self-improvement by getting rid of attachments on the way toward enlightenment. More importantly, it links the individual self with others in the broadest sense, thereby creating positive conditions for the blossoming of Dharma in the heart of the recipient.

Actively creating conditions for positive bonds through developing affinities should not be on a par with developing *guanxi* (關係), a social concept based on gift-giving and other reciprocal exchanges for interpersonal relationships in the Chinese context. *Guanxi* in a close-knit village reflects a 'local moral world' based on familial, kinship, or communal relationships, in which stable reciprocity is usually produced due to moral obligations and affectionate feelings, not only for an instrumental power game, but also as an ethics about subject-making.⁴² *Guanxi* in urban settings focuses on personal networks and utilitarian purposes based on instrumental exchanges of gifts and favors (Yang 1994).⁴³ In contrast to *panyuan* (making relations for climbing the social ladder, 攀緣), a popular *guanxi*-based philosophy, creation of affinities in the Buddhist context does not encourage any expectations of reciprocity, particular ties, and secular purposes that might lead practitioners

off the track of perfect giving.

Although direct exchanges of favors for teleological goals are discouraged in Humanistic Buddhism, giving to develop affinities does not completely diverge from Chinese cultural values and norms. Crucially, Humanistic Buddhist giving finds its root in the ethics of human feelings or affectionate feelings, the intrinsic nature of human beings who show their feelings toward other human beings ethically and emotionally, which constructs a moral framework of a good person who can interact with others in a reciprocal way. Seen in this light, reciprocity is understood as a tacit moral obligation of the recipient, rather than a desire of the giver. As we have seen, in the various forms of Buddhist giving in Humanistic Buddhism, there is no expectation of immediate reciprocity on the part of Fo Guang Shan members when they help young volunteers, artists, and visitors. Yet Fo Guang Shan firmly believes that the wholesome deeds can create positive causes and conditions for its future development when the beneficiaries hold affectionate feelings, revisit Fo Guang Shan branches, generate an interest in Buddhism, and make a return in individual ways.

Therefore, I propose a twofold understanding of Fo Guang Shan Humanistic Buddhist giving. On the one hand, rooted in the orthodox explanation of perfect giving, it highlights selflessness with a spirit of non-attachment, as well as interdependence between the giver and the recipient, thereby encouraging practitioners to create positive conditions through active giving. On the other hand, the Chinese cultural discourse in which it is embedded strengthens the enthusiasm of Fo Guang Shan members and its followers in developing affinities, since they believe in the cycle of planting and harvesting out of affective nature, which is ideally distinguished from the anticipation of being paid back within the secular framework of *guanxi*.

5. Conclusion

This article examined how monastics and lay practitioners at Fo Guang Shan perform diverse modes of Buddhist giving in accordance with Venerable

Master Hsing Yun's teachings. It has also situated the practice of giving within the broader anthropological discourse on gift giving and the comparative study of giving in many Buddhist traditions. Drawing on the ethnographic case study of the Cultural Creativity Market at the Dajue Temple, the article has traced three distinct but interrelated modes of giving in Fo Guang Shan Humanistic Buddhism: the provision of material and immaterial support to those in need; offerings to the Triple Gem; and giving oriented toward developing affinities and the cultivation of positive karmic bonds and social connections.

Returning to the research question posed at the outset, I argue that the ethics of giving in Fo Guang Shan Humanistic Buddhism is culturally and structurally different from the alms-based model that predominates in Theravādin and Tibetan contexts. Those traditions institutionalize a performative divide between the monastics and the laity, while Fo Guang Shan departs from this premise. The holiday market makes this departure visible: monastics carried water to non-Buddhist exhibitors under the scorching heat; youth volunteers gave performances and joy to festival crowds; exhibitors donated spontaneously to the temple, not out of obligation, but out of affective connection cultivated through the event itself. Neither the giver nor the recipient was fixed by an institutional role.

This ontological equality between giver and recipient is the most distinctive feature of Humanistic Buddhist giving, and it is grounded not in a rejection of hierarchy for its own sake but in the shared logic of merit accumulation. Both parties, monastic or lay, Buddhist or non-Buddhist, are equally implicated in the karmic consequences of the exchange. This is where the Fo Guang Shan framework most decisively parts ways with Maussian analysis of reciprocity that has shaped anthropological debates on gift-giving for long. In Maussian terms, the gift creates obligation and engenders a social bond through the expectation of return. In Fo Guang Shan Humanistic Buddhism, by contrast, the "return" is neither interpersonal nor immediate. It takes the form of karmic merit that will ripen in future lifetimes, rendering the anticipation of direct reciprocity not only unnecessary but antithetical to the spirit of giving.

Giving based on creating affinities represents the fullest expression of this logic. By actively creating positive causes and conditions with wider audiences, Fo Guang Shan enacts what Venerable Master Hsing Yun called “oneness and co-existence”: the understanding that the self and others are systematically interdependent, and that to benefit others is, simultaneously, to benefit the self. This is not *guanxi*-building in the sociological sense, nor an instrumental cultivation of social networks. Rather, it is an ethics of the self-other relation anchored in the principle of dependent origination, in which every act of generosity plants a seed whose fruit is certain in karmic principle.

What this article has argued, on the basis of its ethnographic evidence, is that Humanistic Buddhist giving should be understood not merely as a set of charitable or ritual practices, but as a mode of cultivation that trains practitioners to move beyond attachment to the giver—recipient distinction, to expand their understanding of wealth beyond the material, and to recognize in every act of giving a moment of social interaction between the self and the broadest possible community of others. In this sense, the ethics of giving in Fo Guang Shan Humanistic Buddhism does not simply enrich existing anthropological and Buddhist scholarship on generosity. It challenges both fields to think more *carefully* about what it means to give when the ultimate beneficiary is understood, from the very beginning, to be oneself.

Notes

- 1 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, *Ten Vows of Samantabhadra in the Avatamsaka Sūtra* (Kaohsiung: Foguang Cultural Enterprise, 2018), 114.
- 2 Richard B. Mather, “The Bonze’s Begging Bowl: Eating Practices in Buddhist Monasteries of Medieval India and China,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 101 (1981): 417–424.
- 3 In Chinese Buddhism, alms collection is usually practiced in ritualized form at the end of formal events such as ordinations or key Dharma Assemblies. Ester Bianchi, Yi Jie Wei Shi 以戒爲師: Theory and Practice of Monastic Discipline in Modern and Contemporary Chinese Buddhism, *Studies in Chinese Religions* 3 (2017): 111–141.
- 4 Dale S. Wright, *The Six Perfections: Buddhism and the Cultivation of Character* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 18.
- 5 The Four Embracing Virtues include generosity, kind words, altruism, and empathy.
- 6 The Six Perfections include generosity, upholding precepts, forbearance, diligence, meditative concentration, and wisdom.
- 7 Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London:

- Routledge, 1990 [1925]), 14.
- 8 Jonathan Parry, "The Gift, the Indian Gift, and the 'Indian Gift'," *Man* 21 (1986): 466-469.
 - 9 Joanna Cook, "Alms, Money and Reciprocity: Buddhist Nuns as Mediators of Generalized Exchange in Thailand," *Anthropology in Action* 15 (2008): 8-21; Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière, "Religious Donations, Ritual Offerings, and Humanitarian Aid: Fields of Practice According to Forms of Giving in Burma," *Religion Compass* 9 (November 2015): 386-403; Ivan Strenski, "On Generalized Exchange and the Domestication of the Sangha," *Man* 18 (September 1983): 463-477.
 - 10 Ivan Strenski, "On Generalized Exchange and the Domestication of the Sangha," *Man* 18 (September 1983): 473
 - 11 Joanna Cook, "Alms, Money and Reciprocity: Buddhist Nuns as Mediators of Generalized Exchange in Thailand," *Anthropology in Action* 15 (2008): 12.
 - 12 Michael Carrithers, *The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka: An Anthropological and Historical Study* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), 322.
 - 13 Hiroko Kawanami, *The Culture of Giving in Myanmar: Buddhist Offerings, Reciprocity and Interdependence* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020).
 - 14 Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière, "Religious Donations, Ritual Offerings, and Humanitarian Aid: Fields of Practice According to Forms of Giving in Burma," *Religion Compass* 9 (November 2015): 391; Gérard Toffin, "Donations and Gift-Giving among Newar Buddhists, Nepal," *Religion Compass* 9 (November 2015): 423-442.
 - 15 Hiroko Kawanami, *The Culture of Giving in Myanmar: Buddhist Offerings, Reciprocity and Interdependence* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), chapter 3.
 - 16 Joanna Cook, "Alms, Money and Reciprocity: Buddhist Nuns as Mediators of Generalized Exchange in Thailand," *Anthropology in Action* 15 (2008); Monica Falk, *Making Fields of Merit: Buddhist Female Ascetics and Gendered Orders in Thailand* (Copenhagen: NIAS, 2008); Hiroko Kawanami, *The Culture of Giving in Myanmar: Buddhist Offerings, Reciprocity and Interdependence* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), chapter 4.
 - 17 Jane Caple, "Faith, Generosity, Knowledge and the Buddhist Gift: Moral Discourses on Chinese Patronage of Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries," *Religion Compass* 9 (November 2015): 462-482; Nicolas Sihlé, "Towards a Comparative Anthropology of the Buddhist Gift (and Other Transfers)," *Religion Compass* 9 (November 2015): 352-385; Gérard Toffin, "Donations and Gift-Giving among Newar Buddhists, Nepal," *Religion Compass* 9 (November 2015): 423-442.
 - 18 Nicolas Sihlé, "Towards a Comparative Anthropology of the Buddhist Gift (and Other Transfers)," *Religion Compass* 9 (November 2015): 358.
 - 19 Nicolas Sihlé, "Towards a Comparative Anthropology of the Buddhist Gift (and Other Transfers)," *Religion Compass* 9 (November 2015): 364-366.
 - 20 Stuart Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth: The Foguang Buddhist Perspective on Modernization and Globalization* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 28-32; Gareth Fisher, *From Comrades to Bodhisattvas: Moral Dimensions of Lay Buddhist Practice in Contemporary China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014); Jonathan Mair, *Fo Guang Shan Buddhism and Ethical Conversations across Borders: "Sowing Seeds of Affinity," Collegium: Studies Across Disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences* 15 (2014): 66-89.
 - 21 The 'Buddha-like' (佛系) mindset has been popularized on the internet since 2017. It refers to biased and distorted interpretations of Buddhism, indicating an apathetic life attitude and shirking the responsibilities that individuals are supposed to undertake during adulthood.
 - 22 Pi-yen Chen, "Buddhist Chant, Devotional Song, and Commercial Popular Music: From Ritual to Rock Mantra," *Ethnomusicology* 49 (Spring/Summer 2005): 266-286.

- 23 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, "Taking Refuge in the Triple Gem," in *Buddha-Dharma: Pure and Simple*, vol. 1 (Kaohsiung: Fo Guang Shan Institute of Humanistic Buddhism, 2019), 13-16.
- 24 Amitufo (阿彌陀佛) refers to Amitābha Buddha in Chinese Buddhism, and it is also the most common greeting or blessing in a Buddhist context.
- 25 Stuart Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth: The Foguang Buddhist Perspective on Modernization and Globalization* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 28.
- 26 Gareth Fisher, *From Comrades to Bodhisattvas: Moral Dimensions of Lay Buddhist Practice in Contemporary China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014), 138.
- 27 Jonathan Mair, Fo Guang Shan Buddhism and Ethical Conversations across Borders: "Sowing Seeds of Affinity," *Collegium: Studies Across Disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences* 15 (2014).
- 28 *The Glossary of Humanistic Buddhism* (Kaohsiung: Fo Guang Cultural Enterprise, 2018), 93.
- 29 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, "Equality in Giving and Receiving," in *Buddha-Dharma: Pure and Simple*, vol. 2 (Kaohsiung: Fo Guang Shan Institute of Humanistic Buddhism, 2022), 45.
- 30 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, "Building Affinities," in *Buddha-Dharma: Pure and Simple*, vol. 6 (Kaohsiung: Fo Guang Shan Institute of Humanistic Buddhism, 2023), 130.
- 31 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, "Giving and Forming Connections," in *One Hundred Lessons on Monastery Languages and Affairs 6: Propagation of Buddhism* (Kaohsiung: Foguang Cultural Enterprise, 2012), 198; Venerable Master Hsing Yun, "How BLIA Members Should Broadly Develop Good Affinities," in *The Complete Works of Venerable Master Hsing Yun: A Collection of Dharma Talks* 10 (Kaohsiung: Foguang Cultural Enterprise, 2023), 326.
- 32 Jonathan Mair, Fo Guang Shan Buddhism and Ethical Conversations across Borders: "Sowing Seeds of Affinity," *Collegium: Studies Across Disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences* 15 (2014).
- 33 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, *Buddha-Dharma: Pure and Simple*, vol. 4 (Kaohsiung: Fo Guang Shan Institute of Humanistic Buddhism, 2021), 17.
- 34 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, "We Want to be Volunteers for Volunteers," *Hundred Sayings 2: The Philosophy of Being Second* (Taipei: Gandha Samudra Culture Co., 1992), 178.
- 35 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, "Equality in Giving and Receiving," in *Buddha-Dharma: Pure and Simple*, vol. 2 (Kaohsiung: Fo Guang Shan Institute of Humanistic Buddhism, 2022).
- 36 Emptiness refers that all things are karmically composed. Rather than a negation, it implies an expansion, transcending the boundaries of the individual to understand we have infinitely complex interconnections.
- 37 Dhivan Thomas Jones, *This Being, That Becomes: The Buddha's Teaching on Conditionality* (Cambridge: Windhorse, 2011), 30.
- 38 Eviatar Shulman, "Early Meanings of Dependent-Origination," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* vol. 36, no. 2 (April 2008): 297-317.
- 39 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, *Buddhism in Every Step A10: Cause and Condition*, trans. Amy Lam and Jeanne Tsai (Taiwan: Fo Guang Shan International Translation Center, 2014), 9, <https://www.fgsite.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/A10-Cause-and-Condition-2025.pdf>.
- 40 Ibid., 18, 28-32.
- 41 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, "Oneness and Coexistence," in *Buddha-Dharma: Pure and Simple*, vol. 4 (Kaohsiung: Fo Guang Shan Institute of Humanistic Buddhism, 2021), 5.
- 42 Andrew B. Kipnis, *Producing Guanxi: Sentiment, Self, and Subculture in a North China Village* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Yan Yunxiang, *The Flow of Gifts: Reciprocity and Social Networks in a Chinese Village* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).
- 43 Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang, *Gifts, Favors, and Banquets: The Art of Social Relationships in China* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).