

**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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FILIAL PIETY AND COMPASSION: FAMILY ETHICS IN HUMANISTIC BUDDHISM AND THE PRACTICE OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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Liu Qinquan, “Filial Piety and Compassion: Family Ethics in Humanistic Buddhism and the Practice of Social Responsibility,” *Studies on Humanistic Buddhism*, no. 8 (August 2026): 147-172, <https://journal.nantien.edu.au>

Abstract

This article argues that Venerable Master Hsing Yun's Humanistic Buddhism transforms Confucian filial piety into social compassion through institutionalized family-based practice, and that this model differs from the Zhejiang Anfu Lisheng Charity's (An Foundation) more localized, community-based charitable approach. Venerable Master Hsing Yun's charitable model is based on the idea that "all sentient beings are one family." By analyzing the charitable initiatives of Fo Guang Shan and the An Foundation, this study explores how family-centered religious practices can institutionalize filial piety and extend it beyond the family into broader forms of social compassion. Existing research has paid insufficient attention to the comparative mechanisms underlying this ethical transformation. This article therefore highlights the similarities and differences between these two models in terms of ethical construction and charitable practice. The Hsing Yun model integrates Confucian filial piety with Buddhist practice, fostering collaboration between families and temples, whereas the An Foundation emphasizes community-based initiatives to promote social responsibility.

Preface

Contemporary society faces challenges such as changing family structures, an aging population, and the diversification of ethical values. These issues call for renewed engagement with traditional culture to find resources for addressing them. Venerable Master Hsing Yun's Humanistic Buddhism, an influential current within modern Chinese Buddhism, seeks to integrate Buddhist teachings into everyday life. Central to this philosophy is the concept that "all sentient beings are one family," which emphasizes the ethical and practical significance of the family as a foundation for spiritual cultivation and social development.

While much of the scholarship has focused on doctrinal interpretation or the broader social contributions of Humanistic Buddhism, there has been relatively little empirical analysis of how the Buddhist practice of "all sentient

beings are one family” transforms family ethics, particularly filial piety, into social ethics, especially compassion. This article examines the core principles of Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s Humanistic Buddhism and compares the charitable initiatives of Fo Guang Shan with those of the An Foundation. Both organizations take the family as a starting point for ethical cultivation, yet they differ in their methods. Fo Guang Shan emphasizes the integration of filial piety into an institutionalized family-temple system, while the An Foundation focuses more directly on community-based and localized welfare services and community care.

Fo Guang Shan’s Hsing Yun model of Humanistic Buddhism takes the family as the basic unit of spiritual practice, promoting institutionalized forms of practice such as home shrines and group meditation to encourage filial behavior in daily life. This transforms Confucian filial piety into Buddhist compassionate practice. The Hsing Yun approach reflects the Mahāyāna Buddhist emphasis on benefiting both oneself and others. It represents a modern adaptation that integrates Confucian and Buddhist ethics, systematizes spiritual practice, and expands charitable efforts on a worldwide scale. In contrast, the An Foundation focuses on regional and community-based initiatives, including elderly care and preserving cultural heritage. In both models, the family serves as the starting point for charitable practice, through which filial piety is extended into broader forms of compassion. Therefore, the Hsing Yun “all sentient beings are one family” model offers a practical way to mediate tensions between Confucian and Buddhist ethics while providing guidance for real-world application.

In Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s model, Buddhist ethics mediate traditional culture and modern society to serve public needs. Through institutionalized charity, Buddhist organizations undertake public welfare activities that address gaps in public services.

This article has four parts. First, it outlines the theoretical integration of Confucian and Buddhist ethics in Humanistic Buddhism. Second, it examines the practical implementation of the “all sentient beings are one family”

model. Third, it compares the charitable approaches of Fo Guang Shan and the An Foundation. Finally, it evaluates the broader theoretical and social implications of these models.

1. Theoretical Context: Integrating Confucian and Buddhist Ethics in Humanistic Buddhism’s “All Sentient Beings Are One Family”

Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s charitable model is rooted in the idea that “all sentient beings are one family.” This reflects a distinctly Buddhist understanding of the relationship between sentient beings and the family. According to Buddhist teachings, all sentient beings are equal in that they all share Buddha-nature.¹ The Hsing Yun model takes the family as the foundational unit of ethical transformation and extends the Confucian concept of filial piety into compassion for all sentient beings. It further emphasizes the reciprocal transformation in which temples become more family-like spaces and families become more temple-like environments, creating a practical framework for spiritual practice in daily life. As a result, Fo Guang Shan’s charitable efforts, grounded in the Hsing Yun model, align with the Buddhist principle of benefiting all living beings.

The concept of the nature of sentient beings (眾生性) underscores the unique role of human life in Buddhist practice. As the Tang Dynasty thinker Pei Xiu stated, “Only human beings are capable of this,”² highlighting humanity’s unique combination of sentience and rationality: the ability not only to perceive suffering, but also to develop the intention to transcend it. Building on this understanding, Venerable Master Hsing Yun identified the family as the starting point for engaging with the nature of sentient beings in everyday life. This theoretical framework integrates Confucian filial piety and Buddhist compassion, demonstrating how ethical practice can develop from the family into broader social forms.

Sentient beings are inseparable from worldly life, and humans and their families form the basis of ethical development. In this sense, the Hsing Yun model of “all sentient beings are one family” provides a central framework for

Buddhist charity. Its goal is to benefit all living beings in the human world, recognizing that these beings are inseparable from “family.” As Yin Shun observed, all living beings rely on both material and spiritual nourishment.³ The continuation of human life requires that basic physical, mental, and spiritual needs be met.

The Buddha taught benevolence and compassion,⁴ emphasizing the transformation of self-centered attachment into universal love. According to the *Ekottarikāgama*, the Buddha also taught the “two wonderful Dharmas” of conscience (*hrī*) and moral shame (*apatrāpya*). These ethical principles form the basis of moral life and distinguish human beings from animals.⁵

In Buddhist ethics, the cultivation of discipline aligns with Confucian emphasis on filial piety (孝), which serves as a pillar of human ethical values. When individuals cultivate filial piety within their families, they are able to extend that care outward to society, and ultimately to all living beings as one family. The Hsing Yun model integrates Confucian family ethics with Buddhist ideals by transforming filial piety into compassionate practice through institutionalized family-based activities.

1.1 Origins of Filial Piety

The Hsing Yun model⁶, which integrates Buddhist and Confucian ethics, places particular emphasis on filial piety.⁷ Its vision of “all sentient beings are one family” is guided by the ethical principles of conscience and moral shame. This perspective underscores the significance of filial piety in maintaining social harmony. Similarly, the An Foundation’s charitable activities also draw from these principles, extending filial piety into broader social care.

Venerable Master Hsing Yun interpreted the “two wonderful Dharmas” as ethical foundations for cultivating purity and goodness in the human world. This orientation is based on the Buddhist four means of embracing: giving, kind speech, beneficial action, and empathy. These are practical methods of the bodhisattva path in worldly life. In this framework, loyalty

and filial piety can be extended into modern civic virtues and as the basis of communal responsibility. However, it is crucial to be cautious of potential distortions to traditional ethics during this transformation, such as blind loyalty or unquestioning filial obedience. Without the guidance of wisdom and compassion, ethics might suppress individuality or be reduced to a rigid set of rules.

The true spirit of both Buddhism and Confucianism lies in taking righteousness as the guiding principle (以義爲綱).⁸ As stated by Xunzi, “Follow the Way, not the ruler; follow righteousness, not the father.”⁹ This means that filial piety must be based on justice, and loyalty must be grounded in truth. Confucius likewise taught that righteousness is the essence of a gentleman (君子義以爲質),¹⁰ identifying righteousness as the core of morality. He also advocated that restraining oneself and returning to propriety is benevolence¹¹ (克己復禮爲仁) and proposed the way of loyalty and forgiveness (忠恕之道)¹² as a guide for moral practice. Centered on benevolence (仁), Confucianism constructs a hierarchical ethical system extending from the family to the wider world, a system that shares significant similarities with the bodhisattva path in Buddhism.

1.2 The Core Concepts of Filial Piety

Venerable Master Hsing Yun advocated for purification and goodness in the human world and developed charitable activities based on these ideals. Building a good and beautiful society requires empathy and shared understanding (同事同理心) as its foundation, specifically the bodhisattva virtue of cooperating with others to lead them to the truth (同事摄).¹³ This form of empathy should not be limited to interpersonal relationships, but should extend to all living beings and the natural environment. In this respect, it parallels the Confucianism ideal of benevolence toward people and love for all things (仁民爱物).

In the Hsing Yun model where “all sentient beings are one family,” generating *bodhicitta* and practicing the bodhisattva path do not require

everyone to renounce worldly life. Rather, it encourages people to cultivate virtues such as generosity, patience, and diligence in their daily lives, thereby transforming families, workplaces, and communities into places of spiritual practice. This orientation emphasizes the morality of the “two wonderful Dharmas.” The Confucian concept of a relational chain linking the individual, the family, and the state (人家國關係鏈) represents a natural path for moral development. That is, individuals first cultivate filial piety and fraternal duty (孝悌) within the family, and from there extend empathy to society, the nation, and eventually all living beings. As Yin Shun pointed out, this process involves transforming defilement into purity (轉染成淨) and transforming consciousness into wisdom (轉識成智), neither of which can occur without wisdom guiding life.¹⁴

This approach to life emphasizes remaining grounded in reality while transcending utilitarianism, extending ethical cultivation from individuals to the nation, so that the human world can achieve lasting purity and beauty. Confucian thought holds that filial piety begins with serving one’s parents, then with serving one’s ruler, finally with settling down and establishing oneself.¹⁵ Traditional filial piety requires both material support and respectful obedience to parents and elders. It involves not only the continuation of the family lineage, but also the intergenerational transmission of ethical responsibility. Accordingly, Confucian family ethics begin with the cultivation of moral consciousness in the individual and extend outward through familial relationships.

The core purpose of the Hsing Yun model is to connect the ethical life of the family to the wider social order on the basis of the “two wonderful Dharmas.” In realizing Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s vision of purification in the human world, this model draws on the spiritual core of the traditional ethics of loyalty and filial piety, while also reinterpreting them through modern consciousness and Buddhist wisdom. In this way, it seeks to avoid dogmatism and to articulate a wholesome path of Dharma for life in the human world. Its ultimate aim is to guide emotion through wisdom and transform desire through compassion. The charitable practice of “all sentient beings are one

family” begins from human ethical life but extends beyond the individual toward care for all living beings. In this way, the ideal of a good and beautiful human world may gradually be realized in practice.

The transformation of Confucian filial piety into Buddhist compassionate practice through family-based collective practice is a distinctive feature of the Hsing Yun model. This model takes the family as its basic unit of practice and institutionalizes activities such as home shrines, Buddhist weddings, and other collective rituals, thereby promoting filial conduct in everyday life. Through such institutionalized practice, the Hsing Yun model embodies the Mahāyāna emphasis on benefiting both oneself and others. More broadly, it represents a modern adaptation of Confucian and Buddhist ethics that systematizes spiritual practice and extends practice-based charity on a global scale.

2. The Ethical Integration of Humanistic Buddhism: The Practice of “All Sentient Beings Are One Family” in the Hsing Yun Model

Venerable Master Hsing Yun proposed, among other ideas, that the five Buddhist precepts correspond to the five constant virtues of Confucianism, and that filial piety is closely related to compassion. In doing so, he inherited and further developed earlier efforts to integrate Confucian and Buddhist ethics. In response to practitioners’ concerns about violating the precepts, he offered targeted guidance and employed Confucian concepts as skillful means. This approach sought to build practitioners’ self-confidence and strengthen their commitment to the path. The model of “all sentient beings are one family” may thus be understood as a concrete expression of Humanistic Buddhist ethics in practice. The following discussion elaborates on three aspects of this model.

2.1 The Formative Background of “All Sentient Beings Are One Family”

In his commentary on the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, Sengzhao stated, “The straightforward mind is the place of practice because it is free from falsehood.”¹⁶ Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s view of the family as the basic site of practice

and the starting point of compassionate action draws on and further develops this idea. Sengzhao also stated, “A mind that cultivates itself and advances on the path without disturbance is the place of practice. If one can focus the mind as the master and make all actions the field, without straying from the inner mind while practicing the path—this is the true place of practice.”¹⁷ Sengzhao’s emphasis on the “true place of practice” highlights the importance of authenticity in spiritual practice. On this basis, Venerable Master Hsing Yun argued that the family is not the endpoint of Buddhist practice, but the starting point of the bodhisattva path.

Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s model of “all sentient beings are one family” aligns with the Confucian relational chain of relationships that link individuals, families, and the state. In this view, practice extends from the family to society and then to the wider human world, contributing to the nation by benefiting its people. The idea of loving both one’s country and one’s faith reflects this orientation. Venerable Master Hsing Yun structured the path of practice as an expansion from the family to society, the nation, and all sentient beings. In doing so, this model resonates with the Confucian logic of cultivating the self, regulating the family, governing the state, and bringing peace to the world, while simultaneously embodying the Mahāyāna spirit of compassion.

Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s charitable efforts and Buddhist thought were grounded in sustained study of the scriptures and constant reflection. For example, he drew from Nāgārjuna’s *Great Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom* (大智度論), which discusses three forms of patience: patience with sentient beings, patience with phenomena, and patient acceptance based on the non-arising of phenomena (眾生忍、法忍、無生法忍).¹⁸ Venerable Master Hsing Yun incorporated these ideas into his model, guiding practitioners to learn, internalize, and personally practice these three levels of bodhisattva cultivation.

Nāgārjuna elaborated on the perfection of patience (忍辱波羅蜜) by distinguishing patience toward sentient beings and patience toward

phenomena, thus outlining a path for practitioners to progress from worldly cultivation toward ultimate realization. Accordingly, Venerable Master Hsing Yun taught that practitioners must control their minds and emulate bodhisattvas who remain unaffected by praise or blame, and who are free from attachment to pleasure, aversion, and hardship. This process involves overcoming attachment to both the self and phenomena, while accumulating merit and wisdom through the challenges of life.

In the human world, with dualities such as hot and cold, hunger and thirst, wealth and poverty, one must learn to remain inwardly at peace amid the five desires: wealth, sensuality, fame, food, and sleep. Venerable Master Hsing Yun drew on the statement in the *Ekottara Āgama*, “All Buddhas and World-Honored Ones arise in the human world, not from the heavens.”¹⁹ Inspired by this teaching, he realized that “Humanistic Buddhism is the teaching of the Buddha,” and that Buddhism “emphasizes a shared faith.”²⁰ This conviction led him to advocate for engagement in worldly affairs while maintaining a transcendent spirit. Humanistic Buddhism therefore emphasizes making life Buddhist and making Buddhism practical. More broadly, Chinese Buddhism has long taught that practice lies in daily activities such as dressing, eating, walking, standing, sitting, and lying down.

The “all sentient beings are one family” model contributes to the practice of Humanistic Buddhism by taking the family as the basic unit and *bodhicitta* as the guiding orientation, effectively harmonizing Confucian and Buddhist ethics. As former president of the Buddhist Association of China Zhao Puchu stated, “I believe that within the teachings we uphold, we should promote the idea of Humanistic Buddhism.”²¹ This statement offers additional support for such an interpretation.

2.2 Implementation and Outcomes

Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s actions and words showed how he interpreted the Dharma in formulating the practice of “all sentient beings are one family.” Practitioners are encouraged to cultivate filial piety, loyalty, and

integrity within the family and then extend those values into society. This approach represents an adaptation of Buddhism to the needs of modern society on the basis of Venerable Master Hsing Yun's understanding of Humanistic Buddhism. Starting from the fundamental teachings of Buddhism, he pointed out that the Buddha's four noble truths and four great vows retain their relevance across time and space while also supporting a coherent framework of practice.²² On this basis, he proposed nineteen aspects of Humanistic Buddhist practice.²³

Among these nineteen aspects, those concerning family practice include household ethics and moral values, the management of livelihood and emotion, attention to health and security, and the cultivation of integrity, loyalty, and filial piety. Together, these elements underscore the importance of social harmony and compassionate relationships. With regard to the broader path of benefiting all living sentient beings, Venerable Master Hsing Yun taught that practice should develop an understanding of the perspective of others and the wider world. He stated, "Humanistic Buddhism focuses on educating the entire world."²⁴

Through the practice of "all sentient beings are one family," practitioners encounter the Dharma in daily life and gain a clearer understanding of life, death, and the meaning of existence. These teachings emphasize inner peace and mental stability, guiding practitioners to transform confusion into clarity and suffering into joy. By integrating Buddhist wisdom into life planning, individuals can pursue personal transcendence while contributing to the betterment of society. At the family level, Venerable Master Hsing Yun emphasized household ethics, moral values, and harmony in life, while advocating the cultivation of integrity through loyalty and filial piety. At the social and universal levels, he taught followers to understand dependent origination and cause and effect, to pursue continuous learning, protect the environment, and foster inclusivity with an international perspective.

2.3 Guiding Good Conduct and Life Planning

Venerable Master Hsing Yun employed Buddhist wisdom to teach the public, clarifying the true meaning of Humanistic Buddhism and helping people purify their minds and gain clear insight. Through the practice of “all sentient beings are one family,” he encouraged the cultivation of wholesome roots and wisdom. He guided people to plan their lives rationally, not calling on everyone to become monastics, but to focus on finding inner peace and living life based on a correct understanding of reality. As he suggested, “knowing suffering is like an elixir” and “only with ability can one keep moving forward,”²⁵ thus enabling continual progress toward liberation.

In Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s blueprint for Humanistic Buddhism, Buddhist understanding serves to guide and teach the public, clarify the true meaning of Buddhism, and help people understand the Dharma. Through the practice of “all sentient beings are one family,” the performance of good deeds, and diligent learning guided by wisdom, the faculty of discernment is developed. This enables people to form clear and meaningful goals in life, to understand Humanistic Buddhism as the teaching of the Buddha, and to appreciate the Buddha’s instruction to rely on the Dharma instead of being obedient to any particular individual.²⁶

Venerable Master Hsing Yun also advocated the idea of global citizenship through the practice of “all sentient beings are one family.”²⁷ This model seeks to enhance the quality of life for all while realizing the aims of Humanistic Buddhism, “reality over empty talk, the public over the individual, society over seclusion, and benefiting others over self-interest.”²⁸ Venerable Master Hsing Yun placed particular emphasis on the transformation of the mind, arguing that the mind governs the body and can turn confusion into wisdom, wrong views into right views, and ignorance into understanding. Through the continual practice of good deeds and rational life planning, practitioners can transform their mental states, settle body and mind, and ultimately move toward liberation.

Within this process, Venerable Master Hsing Yun provided guidance on mental transformation.²⁹ He advocated grounding life planning on good conduct and emphasized disciplined cultivation of the body and mind as the basis of mental stability. When the body is settled, the mind can remain unwavering despite external circumstances. Persistence in this practice enables one to pursue ultimate goals, deepen well-being, and transcend the cycle of birth and death.

Thus, the “all sentient beings are one family” model constitutes a concrete practice in Humanistic Buddhism that effectively resolves tensions between Confucian and Buddhist ethics. Through concepts such as the correspondence between the five precepts and the five constant virtues, as well as the relationship between filial piety and compassion, it creatively integrates Confucian family values with Buddhist ideals of equality. Under the Hsing Yun model, Buddhist ethics mediate between tradition and modernity, support public welfare and the institutionalization of charity, fill gaps in public services, and promote the shared development of Buddhism and society.

3. Comparing the Charitable Works of Fo Guang Shan and the An Foundation

This section compares Fo Guang Shan and the An Foundation as two distinct models of Buddhist charity, each of which extends family ethics into social responsibility in different ways. The Buddha’s Light International Association (BLIA) was established by Fo Guang Shan in 1991 as a forum for greater lay participation. Its primary objective is to serve society, with a particular emphasis on social services worldwide.³⁰ Although the Hsing Yun model of “all sentient beings are one family” is fundamentally a form of spiritual practice, the entire charitable system of Fo Guang Shan is built upon it. With more than a thousand monastic disciples and millions of lay followers worldwide, Venerable Master Hsing Yun has established a solid foundation for Fo Guang Shan’s charitable work. Without the support and participation of lay followers, Buddhist charity would struggle to maintain a suitable institutional environment. Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s promotion of charity was based

not only in the practice of “all sentient beings are one family,” but also aimed to enable people to “transform confusion into awareness, suffering into joy, and ordinary beings into sages.”³¹ His broader vision was to build Fo Guang Shan into a “pure land on earth,” where both the living and the deceased can be reborn, embodying the essence of Humanistic Buddhism.³²

The relationship between Fo Guang Shan’s charity and the model of “all sentient beings are one family” involves mutual interaction between theory and practice. This relationship can be understood through the framework of “nonduality of essence and function” (體用不二).³³ Originating in Chinese philosophy and developed across both Confucian and Buddhist thought, the concepts of essence and function refer to the dynamic relationship between underlying reality and its manifested expressions. In this context, essence refers to Buddha-nature or the nature of mind as foundational and enduring, while function refers to its concrete expressions in charity and spiritual practice. From the perspective of function, charitable action is a natural expression of inner cultivation; from the perspective of essence, a compassionate mind necessarily manifests itself in charitable deeds. The two are therefore complementary and inseparable.

At the same time, this charity is not merely material assistance, but also a manifestation of spiritual practice rooted in gratitude and reverence. Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s idea of “transforming confusion into enlightenment” can be realized through charitable action. The compassionate mind, as the enduring essence, provides the main driving force for the dynamic function of charity. This reflects the principle of the nonduality of essence and function: charity is the natural extension of practice, while practice is the inner foundation of charity.

In the “all sentient beings are one family” model, the institutionalization of family-based practice transforms filial piety into compassion and extends ethical concern from the individual to society. The support and participation of practitioners operate at the function level, but their root lies in the recognition of the underlying essence of practice. Thus, within Fo Guang Shan, charity

and spiritual cultivation are deeply intertwined, forming a distinctive philosophical and practical foundation.

3.1 Fo Guang Shan's Hsing Yun Model: Family Practice and Compassionate Public Welfare

Fo Guang Shan promotes the mutual integration of temple and family, embedding filial piety within its system of practice. Over time, this has become normalized as part of everyday religious life. Through the “all sentient beings are one family” model, Venerable Master Hsing Yun taught practitioners to take the family as the basic unit of practice. Followers have embraced this approach, and, in doing so, have contributed to Fo Guang Shan's Buddhist charitable efforts. This process depends on institutionalized structures such as family-based practice and the dedication of merits, which together integrate filial piety and spiritual cultivation. As Venerable Master Hsing Yun emphasized, religious and ethical education needs to become habitual. The success of the Hsing Yun model is the result of long-term cultivation and a broad acceptance among devotees worldwide.

Here institution refers to the establishment of operable mechanisms for group practice and public welfare under the framework of the Fo Guang Shan and BLIA constitutions and various regulations. Examples include the International Development Fund Committee, the biannual *Buddha's Light World*, and the implementation of a membership system that emphasizes four qualities: creativity, connection, inspiration, and inclusivity.³⁴ In addition, Fo Guang Shan places emphasis on lay teaching, encouraging followers to participate in Buddhist teaching through certified roles such as Dharma Teachers and Dharma Lecturers. Influenced by the traditions of Vimalakīrti and Fu Dashi, this approach reflects the idea of inspiring others to practice.

In the family context, the Hsing Yun model emphasizes the parallel cultivation of filial piety and group practice. First, it focuses not only on material support for parents and elders, but also on spiritual filial piety, such as dedicating merits to parents and all sentient beings through group

practice. Second, it promotes family practice through standardized rituals, activities, and teachings: establishing home shrines, maintaining morning and evening chanting, adopting vegetarianism, organizing Buddhist weddings and other activities to enhance the Buddhist education of family relationships, and encouraging group *sūtra* readings. Through these practices, the family becomes both a sacred space and a site of ethical formation.

Through the “all sentient beings are one family” model, Fo Guang Shan has developed a mechanism of social transformation that begins with family ethics and extends into compassionate public welfare. Drawing on its global institutional network, it systematically undertakes charitable activities such as disaster relief, medical care, and education, while advancing Humanistic Buddhism through its four major missions: culture, education, charity, and Dharma propagation. Whether establishing schools to inspire wisdom or building hospitals to save lives, all these efforts arise from the desire to alleviate the suffering of beings and embody the Buddhist ideal of a unified body with great compassion (同体大悲). In this way, the Hsing Yun model transforms filial piety into compassion through family-based collective practice, while also serving the larger goals of sustaining the Dharma in the world and realizing a pure land on earth.

3.2 The An Foundation: Family Culture and Public Welfare in Mainland China

In Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province, the An Foundation systematically carries out Buddhist-inspired public welfare based on the family-temple model, providing elderly care, support for orphans, and other charitable services. Relying on Anfu Temple, the foundation actively responds to the needs of an aging society through seven major projects, including Anfu Elderly Care and Hundred Families Care. Its services cover not only practical assistance, such as aid for isolated adults and companionship for the elderly, but also activities that deepen the integration of family ethics and Buddhist practice through activities like lectures on filial piety and intergenerational group practice. The An Foundation’s regional model, An Ren Fang, is particularly

distinctive. Through years of sustained implementation, it has taken root in local communities, offering cultural support and comprehensive welfare services for the elderly, including those in disadvantaged areas.

The An Foundation was initiated by Venerable Da Zhao and is deeply informed by his book *Conduct at Life's End: Buddhist Thought and Methods of Terminal Care*.³⁵ The book systematically explains a Buddhist framework for end of life care, especially the concept of “reverse care” proposed in chapter ten, which has become central to the An Foundation’s charitable practice. Reverse care emphasizes guiding Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike to recognize the true nature of life through bodily, verbal, and mental means, especially preparing the mind for death and rebirth. In practice, it involves generating the four great vows and practicing the four means of embracing: giving, loving speech, beneficial action, and cooperation. This approach embodies the Buddhist principle that “wisdom arises from practice.” It also helped to overcome the dualistic opposition between the caregiver and the cared-for, transforming charitable action into practice that benefits both self and others. In this way, reverse care emphasizes mutual benefit for caregivers and recipients while fostering compassion and spiritual growth.

On this basis, the An Foundation has developed a family-temple practice community grounded in the principle of the nonduality of self and others (自他不二). Within this system, the family serves as the fundamental site of practice, functioning as a field for the bodhisattva path and for the testing of practical outcomes, while the temple provides guidance in right view and method. This model is more than a mere combination of activities; it encourages Buddhist followers to participate in elderly care, supportive chanting, end-of-life care, and other forms of charitable practice. At the same time, by encouraging participants to reflect on their own minds and transform themselves through benefiting others, it turns secular family ethics into resources for spiritual awakening.

Compared with Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s model of “all sentient beings are one family,” which emphasizes the expansion of compassion,

the An Foundation's family-temple model places greater emphasis on the internalization of wisdom and the deepening of practice by integrating temple-based cultivation into daily life. This reflects the practical orientation of "truth within the conventional." Like the Hsing Yun model, the An Foundation represents an important form of contemporary Buddhist charity. Grounded in the concept of reverse care, Venerable Da Zhao has developed a practice system that gives Buddhist charity distinctive practical depth and clarity.

The An Foundation focuses on community-based and regional forms of elderly care and orphan support, reinforcing the family-based starting point of charity while relying on the temple system to extend filial piety and a compassionate spirit into broader social practice.³⁶ As a whole, the An Foundation integrates philosophical reflection, religious practice, and public welfare, highlighting the significance of family culture and forging a new path for the modern development of Buddhist charity.

4. Comparative Summary

This comparative study examines the unique contributions of the Fo Guang Shan charitable model and the practices of Zhejiang's An Foundation. It reveals the wisdom behind the ethical system of Venerable Master Hsing Yun's Humanistic Buddhism. Rather than sidestepping the ideological tensions between filial piety and transcendental ideals, the Hsing Yun model creatively integrates Confucian filial piety into Buddhist practice through family-based collective practice as the foundational unit of institutionalized Buddhist charity. Taking filial piety and "all sentient beings are one family" as psychological and ethical starting points, it leverages the organizational capacity of its renowned temples to transform bloodline-based filial piety into great compassion directed toward all living beings.

A question that has not yet been addressed here is: why is the integration of Buddhist and Confucian ideas necessary? The answer contains several aspects. First, there is a historical tradition of the overlapping ideas among Confucianism and Buddhism. Second, Chinese society has been deeply

influenced by Confucianism for millennia, and Confucian ethics have long structured social norms and patterns of conduct. Buddhism, meanwhile, emphasizes compassion, forgiveness, and the alleviation of suffering. Under Venerable Master Hsing Yun's advocacy of joy and harmony, Fo Guang Shan further calls for respect and inclusivity. More broadly, Chinese Buddhist ethics have historically developed in close interaction with Confucian norms, and can in this sense be understood as a Confucianized form of Buddhist ethics. This process can be viewed as part of a larger cultural exchange between the civilizations of China and India.³⁷

The Hsing Yun model of Fo Guang Shan follows a path that begins with the family yet extends outward into wider society, and has expanded internationally. This model both complements and contrasts with the more direct focus on compassion of the An Foundation, which focuses on more directly providing care. Both models are grounded in Mahāyāna Buddhism's spirit of compassionate relief for the world and enrich contemporary Buddhism. Both embody the four immeasurables of Buddhism—loving kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity.

From a vertical perspective, Fo Guang Shan's model based on "all sentient beings are one family" innovates traditional Buddhist practice by integrating Confucian filial ethics into the system of Humanistic Buddhism through family-based practice and integration of the temple and the family. This creates a path for ethical transformation that extends from the family to society. Scholars have examined both the practical innovations and ideological origins of Venerable Master Hsing Yun's Humanistic Buddhism theory. Some studies focus on how the Hsing Yun model incorporates elements of folk beliefs, embodies a Buddhist historical perspective, and has developed an extensive international presence.³⁸ Venerable Master Hsing Yun established a form of Humanistic Buddhism that adapts traditional Buddhism to contemporary settings through skillful means, combining the Mahāyāna bodhisattva spirit with Confucian worldly filial piety.³⁹

From a horizontal perspective, the model of the An Foundation more

directly inherits the Mahāyāna Buddhist spirit of compassionate relief, promoting public welfare through actions such as emotional support, elderly care, hospice care, and reverse care. Filial piety is less pronounced in its charitable approach. Its approach to creating connections through giving emphasizes compassion and the practice of the threefold purity in giving—giving without attachment to the giver, the receiver, or the gift. This corresponds to the Mahāyāna theory of the three wheels of emptiness and forms part of the An Foundation’s distinctive discourse, which addresses social suffering such as loneliness among elderly, serious illnesses, and disaster relief. By contrast, the Hsing Yun model of Fo Guang Shan places the family at the center through a family-temple form of charity, thereby sanctifying Confucian ethics within a Buddhist practice. It treats filial piety as the foundation of charity and extends this outward into Fo Guang Shan’s global charitable causes as a form of social compassion. The key difference, then, is that the family serves as the principle medium through which Fo Guang Shan transforms secular ethics, whereas the An Foundation’s charity focuses on directly benefiting beings by an emphasis on the individual rather than the family.

In terms of social adaptability, the Hsing Yun model of Fo Guang Shan is more compatible with lay family life, especially for householders who emphasize family values and do not rely on monastic leadership. Its emphasis on globalization and inclusivity also enables it to address diverse social issues on an international scale. By contrast, the An Foundation’s localized model relies more on monastic leadership. Fo Guang Shan’s practice-based support assists families in society by providing targeted charity with spiritual dimensions. The An Foundation focuses more on specific regional issues in China, offering supplementary responses to issues such as elderly care and support for orphans.⁴⁰

Despite these differences, both Fo Guang Shan and the An Foundation differ from secular charity in that they are explicitly grounded in the Buddhist faith and draw on Buddhist compassion in carrying out public welfare. Their compassion goes beyond a purely humanitarian framework, embodying unconditional great compassion (無緣大慈)⁴¹ and a unified body of great

compassion (同體大悲).⁴² In practical terms, both address issues such as aging, poverty, and education. With the family as the foundation of ethical practice, supported by the temple, they actively respond to social issues by integrating worldly and transcendental dimensions. Although Fo Guang Shan is more international and the An Foundation more regional, both have made significant contributions to the development of Buddhist charity.

Conclusion

Buddhism teaches unconditional great compassion and a unified body of great compassion, emphasizing universal care and the equality of all sentient beings. This philosophy is concretely manifested in both the Hsing Yun model and the welfare initiatives of the An Foundation, each of which extends care beyond the limits of family and region. The Hsing Yun model integrates Confucian filial piety with Buddhist ethics, institutionalizing family group practices in order to transform filial piety into social compassion. Through its global charitable network, Fo Guang Shan addresses diverse social challenges and fosters a vision of a pure land on earth. By contrast, the An Foundation focuses on localized solutions, using the family-temple model to address regional needs.

In terms of theoretical contribution, the Hsing Yun model offers an innovative contribution to Humanistic Buddhist ethics and to discussions of religion and social harmony. Through a blended family-temple model of charity, Humanistic Buddhism mediates traditional tensions between Confucian and Buddhist ethics, offering a practical path for the modernization of religious ethics. Buddhist organizations translate compassion into social action through institutionalized public welfare, thereby helping to fill gaps in public services. From a practical perspective, these religious groups provide support for addressing social issues in at least two ways. First, the tripartite collaboration among families, communities, and temples provides a model for Buddhist organizations to partner with local communities to build service systems integrating home-based elder care and spiritual support. Second, government support for Buddhist public welfare in rural areas and other

underserved settings might yield broad social benefits. Future research should include more fieldwork rather than relying on secondary data, comparative studies of Humanistic Buddhist charity beyond China and Taiwan, and greater attention to digital platforms that might support Buddhist public welfare activities.

Notes

- 1 Juewei Shi, “Buddhist Humanism in the *Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch*,” *Studies on Humanistic Buddhism*, no. 5 (September 2023): 211-230, <https://journal.nantien.edu.au>.
- 2 (Tang) Pei Xiu, “Preface to the Brief Commentary on the Sūtra of the Perfect Enlightenment,” in (Tang) Zongmi, *Brief Commentary on the Sūtra of the Perfect Enlightenment*, vol. 1, T. 1795, 39: 524a7.
- 3 Yin Shun, *The Buddha in the Human World*, “Human Nature” (Zhonghua Book Company, 2010), 53.
- 4 Translated by (Later Qin) Buddhayaśas and Zhu Fonian, *Long Āgama Sūtra*, vol. 1, T. 1, 1: 4b1.
- 5 “At that time, the World-Honored One said to the bhikkhus: ‘There are two wonderful Dharmas that protect the world. What are these two Dharmas? They are conscience (hrī) and moral shame (apatrāpya). O bhikkhus! Without these two Dharmas, the world would not distinguish between father, mother, elder brother, younger brother, wife, children, teachers, elders, or juniors—it would become no different from pigs, chickens, dogs, cattle, sheep...and such six kinds of domestic animals. It is because these two Dharmas protect the world that distinctions exist between parents, brothers, wives, children, elders, and juniors, and humans are not regarded as equal to these animals. Therefore, O bhikkhus, you should cultivate conscience and moral shame. Thus, O bhikkhus, you should learn accordingly.’” Translated by (Eastern Jin) Gautama Saṅghadeva: *Ekottara Āgama*, vol. 9, T. 2:125, 587b7–14.
- 6 The term Hsing Yun model summarizes the establishment and flourishing development of Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s Fo Guang Shan charitable efforts. “In 1991, the Buddha’s Light International Association was established, and [Venerable Master Hsing Yun] was elected as the President of the World Headquarters. Over 170 regional associations were established across five continents, making it the largest global Chinese organization, realizing the ideal of ‘Buddha’s light shining on the three thousand realms, Dharma water flowing through the five continents.’ In 2003, it passed the United Nations review and officially became a UN Non-Governmental Organization (NGO). Since his visit to mainland China in 1989, Venerable Master Hsing Yun was concerned with the unification of China and Taiwan. He revitalized the ancestral temple Dajue Temple in Yixing and donated funds to build the Yangzhou Jianzhen Library. He also accepted the bell gifted by the Hanshan Temple, hoping to promote unification and world peace.” See Venerable Master Hsing Yun, *Good Conduct: Life Planning*, “Biography of Venerable Master Hsing Yun,” p. 6.
- 7 In Confucianism, filial piety (孝) is often paired with loyalty (忠). Originally, loyalty meant “fulfilling one’s utmost” (尽己), not blind obedience to a ruler, while “reverence for roots” (敬本) is the core of filial piety. Both loyalty and filial piety reflect human nature—expressing gratitude, responsibility, and empathy as natural, instinctive behaviors. In a modern context, society seeks a sense of security and spiritual substance through loyalty and filial piety, providing attachment

- or aspiration. For example, the desire for sincere dedication to one's profession, community, or beliefs represents a practical adaptation of traditional Confucian loyalty in today's world. The importance of filial piety lies in cultural transmission and respect for elders and teachers.
- 8 The Chinese word 綱 (gang) refers to a moral principle; 義 (yi) means righteousness, justice, or what is fair and reasonable. The phrase emphasizes that the standard for action lies in righteousness, meaning behavior must follow principles of justice and reason.
 - 9 Xunzi, annotated by (Tang) Yang Liang, collated by Geng Yun, *Xunzi* chapter 29 "The Way of a Son," (Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 2014), 359.
 - 10 Yang Bojun, *Analects of Confucius: Translation and Annotation*, Book 15: "Wei Ling Gong" (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2009), 164.
 - 11 Yang Bojun, *Analects of Confucius: Translation and Annotation*, Book 12: "Yan Yuan" (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2009), 121.
 - 12 The systematic ethical framework of Confucianism, such as the explicit formulation "ruler as the guide for subjects" (君为臣綱), was developed later by Dong Zhongshu of the Western Han Dynasty. Based on Confucius's thoughts, Dong integrated the Yin-Yang theory and established the system of "Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues" (三綱五常). After combining righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness into the ethical framework, it became a complete feudal ethical system that formed the core of later Confucian thought.
 - 13 (Eastern Jin) Buddhahadra trans., *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, vol. 51, part 8: "O noble son! I have accomplished the practice of the light of the great compassion Dharma door, teaching and maturing all living beings. I always abide in the presence of all Buddhas, appearing before them according to what is needed. I embrace beings through giving, through loving speech, through beneficial actions, and through cooperation. I manifest wondrous bodies and inconceivable forms to embrace beings." T. 9, 278: 718b9–13.
 - 14 Yin Shun, *The Buddha in the Human World* (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2010), 66.
 - 15 "Following the way of heaven, utilizing the benefits of earth, being cautious in conduct and frugal in spending to support parents—this is the filial piety of common people. Thus, from the Son of Heaven down to the common people, there has never been anyone who practiced filial piety from beginning to end yet faced misfortune." See Hu Pingsheng and Chen Meilan trans. and annot., *Book of Rites: Classic of Filial Piety* (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2016), 274.
 - 16 (Later Qin) Sengzhao, *Commentary on the Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, vol. 4, T. 38, 1775: 363 c23.
 - 17 Ibid., 1775: 363 c23–25.
 - 18 (India) Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna, trans. by (Later Qin) Kumārajīva, *Great Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom*, vol. 5, T. 25, 1509: 97 a26. "There are two kinds of patience: patience toward beings and patience toward phenomena."
 - 19 (Eastern Jin) Gautama Saṅghadeva trans., *Ekottara Āgama*, T. vol.2, 125: 694 a4–5.
 - 20 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, "The Blueprint for Humanistic Buddhism (Part 1)," *Purification and Goodness in the Human World* (Lijiang Publishing House, 2016), 5–6.
 - 21 Edited by Yu Shumin, Manuscripts of Zhao Puchu, in *Thirty Years of the Buddhist Association of China*, compiled by the Zhao Puchu Historical Materials Committee of Taihu County, Anhui Province, November 2002, p. 31.
 - 22 Specifically, "From the Buddhist principles of the 'Four Noble Truths' to the actionable and experiential 'Four Great Vows,' it illustrates that the Buddha's teachings are particularly timely and coherent, even evolutionary. They can be systematically integrated, which is why the Dharma transcends historical time and space." See Venerable Master Hsing Yun, *Purification and Goodness in the Human World* (Lijiang Publishing House, 2016), 188.
 - 23 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, *Purification and Goodness in the Human World* (Lijiang Publish-

- ing House, 2016), 1, 65. The nineteen aspects are: 1. Ethical View (Way of Household Living). 2. Moral View (Way of Self-Cultivation). 3. Livelihood View (Way of Resource Management). 4. Emotional View (Way of Love and Affection). 5. Social View (Way of Community and Self). 6. Loyalty-Filial Piety View (Way of Personal Integrity). 7. Wealth View (Way of Financial Management). 8. Fortune-Longevity View (Way of Possession). 9. Health Care View (Way of Medical Treatment). 10. Compassion View (Way of Forming Connections). 11. Cause-Effect View (Way of Dependent Origination). 12. Religious View (Way of Faith). 13. Life View (Way of Life and Death). 14. Knowledge View (Way of Continuous Learning). 15. Education-Recreation View (Way of Right Livelihood). 16. Funeral-Celebration View (Way of Right View). 17. Natural View (Way of Environmental Protection). 18. International View (Way of Inclusivity). 19. Future View (Way of Development).
- 24 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, *The Purification and Beauty of the Human World* (Lijiang Publishing House, 2016), 5.
- 25 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, *Peaceful Abiding in Prajñā Heart* (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2016), 32–33.
- 26 (Later Qin) Kumārajīva trans., *Sūtra on the Concentration of All Merits*, vol. 2. “Nārāyaṇa said: ‘O noble son! As the Buddha said: Rely on the Dharma, not on persons. He also said: There are two conditions for arising right view. What are the two? External speech sounds and internal virtuous contemplation—such meanings are expressed through words.’” T. vol. 12, 382: 998 b29–c3.
- 27 As mentioned earlier, Venerable Master Hsing Yun listed nineteen aspects of humanistic practice for the public, which constitute his nineteen “views” in the blueprint for Humanistic Buddhism. Why did Venerable Master Hsing Yun emphasize “international view (way of inclusivity)?” Because he advocated the idea of “global citizenship” and promoted nine major concepts, including “joy and harmony, offering and coexistence” and “equality and peace,” further supported by the fact that “the teaching is vast, with over a thousand monastic disciples from around the world and millions of global followers.” See Venerable Master Hsing Yun, *Good Conduct: Life Planning*, “Biography of Venerable Master Hsing Yun” (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2010), 6. The nine major concepts are: “joy and harmony, offering and coexistence, respect and tolerance/inclusivity, equality and peace, nature and life, fulfillment and freedom, public right and wrong, generating bodhicitta and development, self-awareness and practicing as a Buddha.” Under this global perspective, Venerable Master Hsing Yun concluded that Humanistic Buddhism is Buddhism for the entire world, not limited to any single region. Buddhism, founded by Śākyamuni Buddha in India over 2,500 years ago, developed through early and sectarian Buddhism, spread north, south, east, and west, especially entering China via the northern transmission to become Han Buddhism, and later reaching Japan, Korea, and other regions. Buddhist evolution has always progressed within human contexts. Particularly in China, Buddhism flourished during the Northern-Southern Dynasties and Sui-Tang periods, each peak lasting two to three centuries, leading to highly developed translation of scriptures, elaboration of doctrines, and diverse sectarian formations. Thus, Venerable Master Hsing Yun stated, “Humanistic Buddhism prioritizes reality over empty talk, the public over the individual, society over seclusion, and benefiting others over self-interest.”
- 28 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, *Purification and Goodness in the Human World* (Lijiang Publishing House, 2016), 6.
- 29 Specifically, “The mind is the master of the body. A confused life can be transformed by the mind into a life of wisdom; wrong views can be transformed by the mind into correct views; foolish actions can be transformed by the mind into reasonable conduct; even deluded attach-

- ments can be instantly liberated by a shift in mental perspective, suddenly revealing a broad and bright world.” Venerable Master Hsing Yun, *Good Conduct: Life Planning*, “Biography of Venerable Master Hsing Yun” (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2010), 93.
- 30 Buddha’s Light International Association, “The Origin of BLIA,” <https://www.blia.org/%E9%97%9C%E6%96%BC%E4%BD%9B%E5%85%89%E6%9C%83/origin>. Accessed September 18, 2025.
- 31 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, “Between Ignorance and Enlightenment,” in *Purification and Goodness in the Human World* (Lijiang Publishing House, 2016), 3.
- 32 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, *Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s Diaries* (Kaohsiung: Fo Guang Cultural Enterprise, 1995).
- 33 (Sui) Zhiyi, *Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sūtra*, vol. 5: “From the perspective of function, the dynamic expression is the unchanging essence; from the perspective of essence, the unchanging essence is the dynamic expression. Essence and function are non-dual yet distinct.” T. vol. 33, 1716: 742 c27–29. (Tang) Huihai, *Recorded Dialogues from Various Gates*, “From the essence arises the function; from the function returns to the essence. Essence and function are non-dual; foundation and manifestation are not different.” Xuzangjing Vol. 63, CBETA 2025.R2, X63, no. 1224, p. 27 b11–12. (Ming) Wang Fuzhi, *External Commentary on the Zhouyi*, “Essence and function are non-dual: speaking of essence, function is within it; speaking of function, essence is within it.”
- 34 The BLIA verse states that “Compassion, joy, and giving pervade the Dharma realm; cherishing blessings and forming connections benefit humans and gods; meditation, purity, precepts, equality, and patience; shame, gratitude, and the great aspiring mind.” Buddha’s Light International Association, “About Us,” <https://www.blia.org.tw/about-us/>. Accessed September 18, 2025.
- 35 Da Zhao, *Conduct at Life’s End: Buddhist Thought and Methods of Terminal Care* (Hangzhou: Zhejiang University Press, 2005).
- 36 This deep understanding is reflected in three aspects. First, it aligns with the Hsing Yun model in viewing the family as a place of practice. Venerable Da Zhao extends traditional temple practice to the “family.” The family, with its fundamental intergenerational relationships, emphasis on filial piety, and daily life, serves as a testing ground for practice outcomes and evidence of the efficacy of reverse care. Second, the temple serves as a lighthouse providing direction. As the central pillar of this model, the temple offers right view, guidance, and methods, and also fosters group cohesion and group practice. With its prajñā wisdom, it illuminates the path of family practice, helping and benefiting others as a beacon of wisdom. Third, the essence of the An Foundation model lies in its aim to build a life practice community guided by the Buddhist idea of right view, based on family ethics, and using group practice as the method. The goal is not only integration, but also transformation: turning afflictions into the path of enlightenment, elevating filial culture to Buddhist Bodhisattva practice, namely “repaying the four great kindnesses.”
- 37 Fang Litan, *Chinese Buddhism and Traditional Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019).
- 38 Cheng Gongrang, *Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s Humanistic Buddhism* (Kaohsiung: Fo Guang Cultural Enterprise, 2015).
- 39 Lou Yulie, *Chinese Buddhism and Cultural Spirit* (Religious Culture Press, 2003).
- 40 An Foundation, www.anjijing.org.
- 41 “Unconditional great compassion and unhindered great pity.” (Tang) Prajñā trans., *Mahāyāna Sūtra of the Mind Ground Contemplation*, vol. 1, T. 3, 159: 293 a2.
- 42 (Tang) Prajñā trans., *Mahāyāna Sūtra of the Mind Ground Contemplation*, vol. 4: “After the

great Bodhisattva generated this unhindered vow of shared identity and great compassion, within a single thought, the evil winds ceased, and favorable winds arose, freeing them from all difficulties. They reached the treasure location and obtained various jewels.” T. 3, 159: 311 c17–20.