

**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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HSING YUN’S HUMANISTIC BUDDHISM: AN ETHICS OF CARE IN THE VUCA WORLD

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Abstract

Hsing Yun (1927–2023), founder of Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Community and Buddha's Light International Association (BLIA), was one of the proponents of Humanistic Buddhism, a modern movement within the Mahāyāna tradition that emphasizes the practical application of Buddhist teachings in everyday life and social engagement. Although there is no one single founder of Humanistic Buddhism, it is believed to have stemmed from Taixu (1890–1947), who was a Buddhist modernist, making the teachings of Buddhism accessible to modern people. In a similar vein, throughout his life, Hsing Yun believed that for Buddhism to stay relevant, it must reinvent itself in a fast-paced world of change. Humanistic Buddhism aims to convey the original teachings of the Buddha through modern lenses. It is Buddhism as needed by humanity today. The objective of this research is to critically examine the key principles of Hsing Yun's Humanistic Buddhism in order to understand its ethical framework and its potential for addressing contemporary societal challenges of a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world. Finally, this research explores the practical applications of Hsing Yun's Humanistic Buddhism in promoting an ethics of care cultivating compassion, empathy, and social responsibility to uphold harmony and global peace.

Keywords: Compassion, Ethics of Care, Humanistic Buddhism, Virtues, VUCA World

I. Introduction

When one thinks of traditional Buddhism, it is often the case that it becomes closely associated with monastic ideals, doctrines, and rituals, all for the attainment of nirvana or enlightenment, that is liberated from the cycle of rebirth. While this might be true, there is still a facet within Buddhism that is concerned with issues in politics, economics, and in pursuing the good life within the lay community, issues that were not exclusively associated with the Buddha's teachings but could nonetheless be illuminated by his teaching. In other words, there is in Buddhism a message that rises above the individual's

religious practices, and, “concentrates on the human person as interwoven into the whole cosmic cycle.”¹ This emphasis on the human person is the thrust of Humanistic Buddhism as propagated by Venerable Master Hsing Yun.²

In his article “Blueprint for Buddhist Revolution,” Shields considers Buddhism as materialist to a certain extent, as it recognizes material suffering as opposed to world-denying idealism of Brahmanic asceticism. “Without a grounding in the material world, the Dharma would become a means of escape from existence, and thus an ‘opiate’ like any other religion.”³ To emphasize the relationship and interconnection between Buddhism and the world that we live in is to capitalize on the fact that the Buddhist ideal is concerned with our everyday affairs. The teachings may take root from the point of enlightenment of the Buddha two thousand six hundred years ago, but it is kept alive as an organic way of approaching life, our shared humanity. “These teachings are not to be simply *accepted*, though, but used, investigated and, as far as is possible for a particular individual, *confirmed* in experience.”⁴ That is, although we should learn the original teachings of the Buddha, it is also important to assess the adaptability and the soundness of the teachings of the past to our present existence. Thus, a revolution ensues where traditional Buddhist teachings are being recalibrated. Hsing Yun, founder of Fo Guang Shan Buddhist order, is one of those who revolutionized Chan Buddhism, to make the Dharma more practical in our daily lives. Lewis Lancaster claims that Venerable Master Hsing Yun was “part of the revolution as he used film, internet, radio, and television to reach out beyond the walls of the monasteries.”⁵

It is in this light that this article is focused on Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s theory and practice of Humanistic Buddhism. Humanistic Buddhism presents a modernization of Chan Buddhism that is creative, flexible, and adaptable in the hope to bring forth harmonious coexistence in our present world. Through this exploration of its theory and practice, this article aims to show how Humanistic Buddhism applies to a life plagued by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity, as captured by the concept of the VUCA world. VUCA world first appeared in 1987 by Bennis and Nanus to

describe the environment and conditions pertaining to volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. Thus, the new generation should be equipped with the necessary skills to address this VUCA world.⁶ It is hoped that the practical application of Venerable Master Hsing Yun's Humanistic Buddhism can promote an ethics of care, cultivating compassion, empathy, and social responsibility.

II. Humanistic Buddhism Theory

The term 'humanistic' pertains to "an emphasis on the uniqueness and unavoidability of being human"⁷ where we recognize the fact that we are equipped to become better versions of ourselves by living an ethical life. Buddhism tells us that there is within us the *bodhicitta* or the buddha nature that we can develop by awakening and cultivating the virtues within.⁸ Human beings have the most suitable capacity to contribute to the betterment of life through the application of the teachings of the Buddha. Humanistic, then, entails the well-being of individuals, families, societies, and the entire world. Venerable Master Hsing Yun invited us to highlight our best qualities as human beings and to perfect our character not for individual perfection but to radiate this goodness to our society and to the rest of the world. Thus, in the shaping of Humanistic Buddhism, Buddhism again became a religion for the living, not just one that people turn to to honor the dead. That is, Buddhism became a practice of living a morally good life instead of just about dying a good death. Buddhism focused on humanity and how we can live a better life in the here and now.

The founding masters of Humanistic Buddhism include Taixu (1890–1947), Yin Shun (1906–2005), Sheng Yen (1931–2009), and Hsing Yun (1927–2023) who pioneered movements that encouraged oneness among human beings, the altruistic bodhisattva practice to help better society and the world. These forward-thinking masters saw the urgency to reform Buddhist practices, monastic systems, and ways of teaching the Dharma. They proposed a journey to enlightenment rather than the resolution of karmic hindrances and accumulation of merits. Although the intention to reform was ideal, Buddhism

in the twenty-first century in Taiwan was largely still seen as a journey of awakening crudely interrupted by real life. This was because the identity of Buddhism within the modern context was starting to take form. There was hardly any room or space for awakening. There was also a pressing need for the monastics to survive. However, if meditation and withdrawal from society were the only focus of monastics, how would Buddhism flourish? It is here where Taixu⁹ felt the need to integrate Buddhism with everyday life. “Taixu sought to reconstruct the Buddhist clergy as an elite corps of men and women who would deeply engage with the world as it was encountered, and seek to change it.”¹⁰ Venerable Master Hsing Yun, a student of Taixu, followed the steps of his teacher and decided to revitalize Buddhism to fit the needs of our everyday lives.

Humanistic Buddhism is a basic philosophy of life that encourages us to integrate the Buddha's teachings of kindness, compassion, joyfulness, and equanimity into our daily lives for the benefit of ourselves as well as others. In addition, it teaches us the ways to cultivate a wisdom that clearly understands the true nature of all things.¹¹ The philosophy behind Humanistic Buddhism seems to be aligned with virtue ethics that ultimately focuses on character transformation. It is through this that Humanistic Buddhism focuses on the values of human beings, the virtues that allow the individual to live a morally meaningful life, something that the Buddha taught right from the very start through the vows of the bodhisattva.¹² Here, Venerable Master Hsing Yun made use of the *parāmitās*, the virtues of the bodhisattva that are generosity, patience, moral conduct, courage, meditative concentration, and wisdom. The four immeasurables (*brahmavihārās*) namely, loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity are also being utilized in order to effect compassionate living in our everyday lives.

Humanistic Buddhism aims to achieve a state of mind that is free from worries, fears, and delusions through the application of virtues such as loving-kindness, honesty, and compassion.¹³ It is also important to point out that in the application of the teachings of Humanistic Buddhism, there is no leaning on any supernatural being or deity; it only entails the ardent practice and

cultivation of the individual. Thus, we shall be able to “take life onto an even higher level that is free from doubts, fear of death, distress, and instead follow our faith and the natural process of life. Within this higher state, we are not at the mercy of divine entities; instead, we depend on ourselves to reach our destination.”¹⁴

Practice

So, how exactly do we propagate the Dharma? How do we put the teachings into practice? As mentioned above, the practice of Humanistic Buddhism involves the virtues that include generosity, moral discipline, and meditative concentration. This will guide us to a better and more ethical human life. “Giving fosters not only moral development, but also spiritual progress, because of its aspect of renunciation and non-attachment.”¹⁵ In terms of moral cultivation, “moral restraint and self-control are much emphasized as means of protecting others and purifying one’s own character.”¹⁶ Meditative concentration is a “state of keen awareness of mental and physical phenomena as they arise within and around one, and carefully bearing in mind the relationship between things.”¹⁷ Thus, giving allows us to move forward by enriching our lives through helping others, and it also enables us to move inward by knowing ourselves through non-attachment to all that which can hinder our practice. Moral discipline allows us to be steadfast in our cultivation and meditative concentration gives us the space we need in order to stay focused and at the same time be unperturbed by the coming and going of conditioned existence.

“Humanistic Buddhism is a contemporary movement within Buddhism that emphasizes the potential for individuals to generate positive change in their own lives and in society through practicing Buddhist teachings and values. This approach stresses the consequence of compassion, altruism, and personal responsibility, and encourages the incorporation of Buddhist practices into daily life.”¹⁸ Venerable Master Hsing Yun defined Humanistic Buddhism as what the Buddha taught, what human beings need, what purifies, what is virtuous and beautiful.¹⁹ This is a succinct elucidation of the vision of

Venerable Master Hsing Yun. He reiterated the intent of his teacher Taixu and sought for the propagation of Buddhism in a way that is befitting to the present, one that is flexible, creative, and readily applicable.

Reinke states that “Humanistic Buddhism is a dynamic phenomenon that is concerned with social engagement in the fields of culture, education, charity, and religious cultivation under global, multifaceted and pluralistic modernities.”²⁰ Here, the author seems to claim that Humanistic Buddhism promotes the exemplar of a global bodhisattva, one that is open, inclusive, and accepting of the diversity of modern Buddhist religiosity. In her article, Juewei Shih discusses Humanistic Buddhism’s recognition of the crises that have come upon human existence, especially emerging from the recent Covid-19 pandemic. She posits that the virtue of *mettā* or unconditional loving-kindness is key to develop wholeness in order to rise above the challenges of daily lives. She proposed the Communities of Practice (CoP) as a tool to help provide group support for the development of positive virtues. “MettāVerses is then the Humanistic Buddhist response to take this inner revolution into the public sphere with unconditional loving-kindness for all.”²¹

The five precepts of Buddhism should be considered the foundation of morality to be observed by everyone.²² All roots of virtue and merits arise from precepts of no killing, no stealing, no lying, no intoxicants, and no illicit sexual affairs.²³ Embedded within the precepts is the virtue of respect, to not trespass upon others and treat all sentient beings with care and consideration. The precepts can be translated as respect for life, respect for our person, and respect toward the other.

III. Humanistic Buddhism as Living Chan

In the last two sections the theory and practice of Humanistic Buddhism were fleshed out. We now turn our attention to the idea of Humanistic Buddhism as Humanistic Living Chan. In order to do this, let us first retrace concepts of Chan Buddhism. “Chan is an abbreviated transliteration of *dhyāna*, the Sanskrit term arguably closest to the modern English term

“meditative concentration.” It emerged in China in the early Tang dynasty (618–907), although Chan did not reach institutional maturity until the Song period (960–1279).”²⁴

The reception of Buddhism from India to China can be described as, “from an Indian religion of non-ego, it has become in China a humanistic religion”²⁵ Buddhism as propagated in India was entirely a mixture of Indian metaphysics and cosmology emerging from Vedic and Brahmanic origins. Philosophy for the Indians was the search for the *absolute truth* and this can only be known if “man is to consciously withdraw from the world of the senses, and methodically suspend the activity of his reasoning intellect in order to give way to the inner faculty of intuition.”²⁶ Meanwhile, Chinese philosophy attempts to come up with explanations for the knowledge of practical wisdom drawn out of man’s moral growth in life’s experience.²⁷ Thus, it is only fitting that when Indian Buddhism reached Chinese soil, the identity of Indian consciousness had to make way for the filial and social character of the Chinese. This was because of the influence of Confucian and Taoist doctrines that were prevalent in China. “Taoism is essentially humanistic, for, like Confucianism, its ideal person is the sage, who brings about social order and good government.”²⁸ Chan Buddhism became one of the foremost developments of Buddhism in China.²⁹ The development of Chan led to forgoing attachment to organizations, creeds, and literature and to reduce Buddhism to concern with man himself in the here and now.³⁰

“Chan does not teach knowledge, so it is not hindered by knowledge.”³¹ Knowledge can be too consuming like a trap that keeps you in the confines of logico-epistemic truths when reality, the absolute truth, is beyond conceptual knowledge. Perhaps this is also the reason why the Chan story of the Buddha raising a flower in silence in front of the congregation of monks is so popular. It goes to show that no amount of verbal transmission can actually grasp the real intent of the teachings. It was only when the Venerable Mahākāśyapa smiled in return that the nonverbal transmission of the Dharma began. From this we gain insight into the notion that silence speaks. Allan Watts described this particular transmission as an immediate awakening, the kind that does not

need further elaboration, and is strong enough to be passed down from one generation to another, particularly from master to pupil.³²

Central to Chan is seeing into one's own intrinsic nature, our Buddha nature. Chan's sixth patriarch, Hui-neng (638–713) claimed that, "all Dharmas are in one's own nature. When one sees his own nature, thusness or the true state, the Dharma-body, will be found there."³³ Seen in this light, our own nature is only accessible if we are coming from the human realm. "Only human beings can develop *bodhicitta* the *bodhi* mind of awakening."³⁴ This awakening leads us to the bodhisattva path. "The bodhisattva path begins with the arising of the *bodhicitta* or 'thought of enlightenment': the heart-felt aspiration to strive for Buddhahood, both for its own sake and for the sake of helping suffering beings."³⁵ Thus, the idea of our Buddha nature does not reside in metaphysics, but more on the ethics of living a morally meaningful life, that translates to compassion and loving-kindness to all sentient beings. "Buddhas and bodhisattvas are also said to use skillful means in the way that they manifest themselves on earth (in the flesh, or in visions) in ways which are ideally adapted to the needs of those who seek their help or teaching."³⁶ The development of our *bodhicitta* is the cultivation of our best qualities as humans, and these are the virtues that have been taught to us by the Buddha right from the very start. Seeing our Buddha nature is the realization of this moral exemplar from the Mahāyāna view, the same "ideal person seen by Chan not as some 'one' acting in the world, but as that unprecedented conduct by means of which entire worlds are healed: a bodhisattva, a Buddha."³⁷

IV. Buddhist Virtues

The Buddha attained enlightenment in India in the fifth century BCE. Since then, Buddhism has flourished with a key foundation grounded in ethics. This core is composed of principles and precepts, that is, the values and virtues which continue to guide the conduct of some 350 million Buddhists around the world.³⁸ Further, when Indian Buddhism reached China and developed into Chan Buddhism, this ethics became the Bodhisattva path, composed of virtues that are key components in Humanistic Buddhism. "Since the twentieth

century, Chinese Buddhism has entered a golden age of development and an opportune time for the development of Humanistic Buddhism.”³⁹

Hanner arranges Buddhist ethics to form a catalogue of virtues. The four immeasurables (*brahmavihārās*) are loving-kindness (*mettā* / *matrī*), compassion (*karunā*), empathetic joy (*mudītā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). Apart from this, the six *pāramitās* depict the qualities of the bodhisattva, a moral exemplar in the Mahāyāna tradition. The six *pāramitās* are generosity (*dāna*), morality (*śīla*), patience (*kṣānti*), courage (*vīrya*), meditative concentration (*dhyāna*), and wisdom (*prajñā*).⁴⁰ Aided by skillful means (*upāya*), a bodhisattva determines the best course of action and decision given a particular context.⁴¹ It is, therefore, the vow of the bodhisattva that oversees and helps others be freed from suffering.

This vow to help alleviate the suffering of others is seen as the foundation for the propagation of Humanistic Buddhism, that is, to make the teachings of the Buddha relevant in contemporary times. Lewis Lancaster states that Buddhism in our contemporary world is no longer paving the way that leads to monasteries, shrines, and temples, but most importantly, we see imprints in universities, public schools, hospitals, making waves in the corporate world as well as in film and literature.⁴² Venerable Master Hsing Yun claimed that, in order to stay relevant, we must keep up with the present time and confront the issues using current modes. He further added that the Buddha taught us to ardently practice virtuous deeds to eradicate transgressions. “It is all about diligently engaging in the acts of stopping evil and doing virtue without ever being lethargic or negligent.”⁴³ Humanistic Buddhism invites us to focus on our humanity, and bring out the human virtues found in the four immeasurables and the six *pāramitās* in our present society to effect change.

In an interview with Daniel Aitken, prominent philosopher and Buddhist scholar, Jay Garfield stated that Chan Buddhism may have the bodhisattva vows, which are great vows, but it just does not contain any systematic treatises that work out the content of ethics.⁴⁴ This statement is relevant because, although the bodhisattva vows have an impact on ethics, it is not

always clear how these vows are executed apart from the idea of cultivation and propagation. Still the question remains: how exactly are these vows executed?

Venerable Master Hsing Yun gave us the concept of karmic retribution, where karma denotes deeds or actions and where the practice of the Three Acts of Goodness and the Four Givings are fundamental.⁴⁵ In his tenets on Humanistic Buddhism, he advocated for the Three Acts of Goodness: do good deeds, speak good words, and think good thoughts, where our mind will be filled with integrity and we can be relieved from adversity and calamity through the shedding of unwholesome karma.⁴⁶ The Four Givings: give hope, confidence, convenience, and joy are positive responses and reactions that are freely given to anyone who needs it the most.

This aspect of Venerable Master Hsing Yun's Humanistic Buddhism portrays the humanization, modernization, and incorporation of its teachings to daily life.⁴⁷ He also taught harmony in various aspects of our human existence:

1. Individual harmony achieved through joy
2. Family harmony achieved through deference
3. Interpersonal harmony achieved through respect
4. Social harmony achieved through cooperation
5. World harmony achieved through peace⁴⁸

Thus, the "Buddhist view is our understanding of how the mainstream tradition and underlying principles respond to the challenges of modern life."⁴⁹ Buddhist virtues continue to stay relevant because they are at the same time universal principles of right conduct and good morals. Ethics, then, is the overarching theme of Humanistic Buddhism. This striving toward doing good is relational and directed toward both the self and others. In order to effect change, these virtues do not remain as a mere cultivation and transformation of character. Most importantly, they are practically being exemplified in our web of relations coming from the individual toward one's family and ultimately to

the society at large. And as we are grounded in reality, these virtues equip us and help us become better in spite of our existence in the VUCA world.

V. VUCA World

The acronym VUCA was coined in the late 1980s in an American war college to reflect ‘a new emerging type of warfare’ by referring to volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity of such an environment.⁵⁰ The term VUCA denotes an age of uncertainty in regard to both the macro and micro aspects of our world. In the bigger picture, VUCA is about the new reality the world has found itself in, and the smaller picture is contextual to each organization or individual facing different challenges.⁵¹

Further, this “age of uncertainty” is plagued by pluralism in the sense that there are more actors, more factors, and more vectors.⁵² This pluralism is evident in the growing range of security actors including informal combatants, mercenaries, terrorists, individual extremists, and cyber hackers and the presence of “non-traditional” security issues such as environmental degradation, migration, poverty, systematic social alienation, and pandemics.⁵³ During the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of social media had a negative impact on young people’s mental health, creating a vicious circle of social media fatigue through information overload on the one hand and fear of missing out (FOMO) on the other.⁵⁴

Thus, a clear and present danger haunts our existence, a hovering specter of rapid change, unpredictability, doubt, and confusion. This is the VUCA existence that permeates our current situation. Meg Hart presented an alternative VUCA, with one based on the wisdom of the Buddha. “Volatile-Uncertain-Complex-Ambiguous—VUCA—has become the catchphrase for a world in crisis, but Shakyamuni Buddha pointed out that the world has always been this way—impermanent and interdependent, ever-changing and intricately connected.”⁵⁵ In the recently published book *Cultivating Compassion*, Hart in her chapter discusses the VUCA world that seems to be the byword for our current existence, and at the same time points out that this kind of existence is

what Siddhartha was contending with and ultimately is the same existence that paved the way for his enlightenment as Buddha. “What he also pointed out is that we ourselves have the power to navigate this ever changing relational reality through our Buddha-nature, the innate awake consciousness that is the true nature of the mind.”⁵⁶ To address this, Hart changed the VUCA acronym to her own, Vision, Understanding, Compassion, Authenticity.⁵⁷ This renewed meaning to VUCA fits the Humanistic Buddhist ethos.

Now that we have established the relevance of the ancient wisdom of the Dharma to our current existence, let us look at a possible way Buddhism can be used as a framework to move forward given this fleeting and interconnected existence. The next section addresses the ethics of care and how the Buddhist teachings remain relevant.

VI. Ethics of Care

The ethic of care is widely associated with Carol Gilligan’s work.⁵⁸ This different voice, Gilligan maintains, represents a mode of moral thinking concerned with the “activity of care” by women who “judge themselves in terms of their ability to care.”⁵⁹ In a sense, she calls for a change in how morality is viewed, from a masculine-based morality that emphasizes justice and autonomy to feminine virtues such as caring for others, patience, the ability to nurture and self-sacrifice. Gilligan is basically saying that men and women think differently and because of this, men have a different way of approaching and interacting with certain things and that women in turn also have a distinct way of approach and interaction with the world.

Joan Tronto and Berenice Fisher see an ethic of care as, “a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible,” noting that this “world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.”⁶⁰ This sense of care emphasizes the interconnectedness of the act of caring, from the care-giver to the other, where otherness includes the web of relations and not a

mere linear projection. It is important to note at this juncture that to care is not just for another person, another species, but it also involves caring for ourselves, our bodies, and our relations with our society and the environment. This kind of inclusive caring is reminiscent of the bodhisattva vow, that is, to uphold the virtues and practice compassion and loving-kindness toward all. “Humanistic Buddhism is offering divergent formulas for adherents to realize the bodhisattva path right here and now by creating a better society for all.”⁶¹ Thus, care ethics holds that “all humans must be engaged in care activities, both as receivers of care and, in most cases, also as care-givers.”⁶²

Virginia Held argues that the ethics of care is extensive because it includes emotions and focuses on fulfilling the needs of specific individuals, such as children, parents, and relatives. The foundation of the ethics of care comes from compassionate motivation, emotional engagement, and involvement in moral decision-making.⁶³ Nel Noddings, meanwhile, informs us that “relation is ontologically basic, and the caring relation is morally basic.”⁶⁴ Thus, to show compassion to others, to help alleviate the pain of others, is our duty.

As a way to respond to this moral obligation, Venerable Juewei, director of the Humanistic Buddhism Centre at Nan Tien Institute, established the Communities of Practice (CoP).⁶⁵ The idea stems from Johnson, who talks about “groups of people with differing levels of expertise, coming together to attend to ill-structured problems through collaborative learning in an environment of safety and trust.”⁶⁶ Since the time of the pandemic, Nan Tien Institute’s CoP has held virtual gatherings every Sunday morning that are attended by people from different parts of the world. “We as humans have the duty to interrupt our lives, examine the causes of problems, and search for collective solutions if we are to solve the crises and mend this relationship.”⁶⁷ The conception and practice of CoP is an example of an ethics of care as it promotes a caring relationship that is beyond borders, guided by the bodhisattva ideal.

Another project led by Venerable Juewei is *MettāVerses*, which is the Humanistic Buddhist response to take this inner revolution into the public

sphere with unconditional loving-kindness for all.⁶⁸ *Mettā* means unconditional loving-kindness to help others be free from suffering without expecting anything in return. “If compassion is the removal of suffering, then loving kindness is the path that enables compassion.”⁶⁹ MettāVerses is an applied research hub dedicated to advancing loving kindness with the aim of helping people integrate loving kindness into research, teaching, and institutions.⁷⁰ MettāVerses provides resources for those interested in applying an ethics of care. Because human selfishness exists, programs such as Communities of Practice and MettāVerses help harness group and institutional support for developing virtue.

In this light, we link the ethics of care to the humanist virtues that are being cultivated in Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s Humanistic Buddhism. It is very important to realize that, just as the ethics of care capitalizes on caring relationships, so do the virtues of Humanistic Buddhism. The virtues are not a standalone ideal of filtering, perfecting, and cultivating the individual; rather, they are relational and entail the nurturing of the individual plus the web of relations. This web of relations goes back to Buddhist concept of interconnectedness⁷¹ and that presents itself as caring relations that we ought to have in our own lives and that of others. “Care ethic’s insistence on the sociality of human life and to its emphasis on the importance of certain types of relations such as those of friendship and family.”⁷² Thus, in this way Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s fundamental teachings of the Three Acts of Goodness and the Four Givings serve as an exemplar on how to practically apply the vows of the *bodhisattva*.

VII. Conclusion

This brings us nicely to Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s Humanistic Buddhism. The journey of awakening is to behold our *bodhicitta* and be on the way to the path of becoming a *bodhisattva*. It is also in this light that we capitalize on the fact that Humanistic Buddhism is the result of the ardent effort of Venerable Master Hsing Yun and his devout followers, who have made great strides in its cultivation and massive appeal. Humanistic Buddhism refers to

a Buddhist movement originated in China and accelerated from Taiwan.⁷³ Taiwan made the greatest contribution to modern Buddhism, promoting and catalyzing a model of social welfare of humanity.⁷⁴ Venerable Master Hsing Yun, together with Fo Guang Shan and Buddha's Light International (BLIA), the lay counterpart of the order, actively campaigned for the Three Acts of Goodness: do good deeds, speak good words, and think good thoughts. They also spearheaded the Four Givings: give others hope, convenience, confidence, and joy. These ideas are creative, relatable, adaptable, and flexible, and are a very current way of spreading the Dharma. They represent the skillful means that put Venerable Master Hsing Yun and Fo Guang Shan at the forefront of the modernization of Buddhism through the propagation of Humanistic Buddhism.

Venerable Master Hsing Yun's Humanistic Buddhism contains an ethics of care to respond to our VUCA world. It goes back to the original teachings of the Buddha, the wholesome virtues that ought to be cultivated for the benefit of all sentient beings. These virtues are not just for individual perfection, but take into account a web of relationships and promote wholesome relations with the self, family, and society. The Three Acts of Goodness and the Four Givings are fundamental applications of the teachings that are relatable, practical, and creative as they encourage skillful ways in employing the Dharma.

Notes

- 1 Alfredo Co, *Under the Bo-Tree on the Lotus Flower Philosophy of the Compassionate Buddha* (Manila: UST Publishing, 2002), 43.
- 2 Born on August 19, 1927 in Yangzhou China, Venerable Master Hsing Yun relocated to Taiwan in the spring of 1949. Coming from the Linji lineage, he founded Fo Guang Shan in 1967 and cultivated Humanistic Buddhism and committed himself to promoting Buddhist education, culture, charity, and propagation of the Dharma. He passed away February 5, 2023 aged 95. "Fundamental Tenets of Humanistic Buddhism," *Studies on Humanistic Buddhism* 1, (2018): 28. <https://journal.nantien.edu.au/>
- 3 James Shields, "A Blueprint for Buddhist Revolution: The Radical Buddhism of Seno'o Girō (1889-1961) and the Youth League for revitalizing Buddhism," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 39, (2000): 346.
- 4 Peter Harvey, *Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 10.

- 5 Lewis Lancaster, "Humanistic Buddhism: Responding to Contemporary Developments," *Studies on Humanistic Buddhism* 1, (2018): 298. <https://journal.nantien.edu.au/>
- 6 Kasia Lanucha and Alexander Bleistein, "Preparing Generation Z Students for a World of Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity (VUCA) through Language Learning," in Bavendiek, Mentchen, Mossmann, and Paulus eds., *Ab Initio Language Teaching in British Higher Education* (UCL Press, 2022), 34. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2m2fvc5.11>.
- 7 Miao Guang, "Interpreting the Humanistic in Renjian Fojiao as Advocated by Venerable Hsing Yun of Fo Guang Shan," *Studies on Humanistic Buddhism* 2, (2019): 53. <https://journal.nantien.edu.au/>
- 8 Ibid., 54.
- 9 His efforts included abolishing the arrangement in which monastics could possess private property, transforming the practice of conducting funeral services for the dead to place more emphasis on the living, providing service to the community, and establishing Buddhism for Human Life. "How to Establish Humanistic Buddhism," *Studies on Humanistic Buddhism* 1, (2018): 1. <https://journal.nantien.edu.au/>
- 10 Raoul Birnbaum, "Buddhist China at the Century's Turn," *The China Quarterly*, no. 174, (2003): 428-450.
- 11 Thapa Shanker, *Chinese Origin of Humanistic Buddhism and Master Hsing Yun's Contribution in the Contemporary Humanistic Buddhist Movement in Taiwan*, (2010): 4.
- 12 A Mahāyāna Buddhist exemplar that embodies the six parāmitās or the six perfections, namely, generosity, conduct, patience, vigor, meditation, and wisdom.
- 13 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, *Humanistic Buddhism: Holding True to the Original Intents of Buddha*, narration recorded by Venerable Miao Guang (Kaohsiung: Fo Guang Cultural Enterprise, 2016), xix.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Peter Harvey, *Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 63.
- 16 Ibid., 66.
- 17 Ibid., 38.
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