STUDIES ON
HUMANISTIC BUDDHISM

Foundational Thoughts

Fo Guang Shan Institute of Humanistic Buddhism, Taiwan
and
Nan Tien Institute, Australia
Born in the Jiangdu district of Jiangsu province, Venerable Master Hsing Yun studied with major monasteries of the Chan, Pure Land, and Vinaya traditions at locations such as Jinshan, Jiaoshan, and Qixia. Having relocated to Taiwan in the spring of 1949, the Venerable Master then founded the Yilan Buddhist Chanting Association in 1953, which formed the foundation of his Dharma propagation career. In 1967, Venerable Master Hsing Yun founded Fo Guang Shan in the spirit of Humanistic Buddhism and has since committed himself to promoting Buddhist education, culture, charity, and propagation of the Dharma. He has set up nearly 300 Fo Guang Shan branches worldwide. Furthermore, he also founded many art galleries, libraries, publishing houses, bookstores, Cloud and Water Mobile Clinics, Buddhist colleges, and established institutes of higher learning such as the University of the West (formerly Hsi Lai University), Fo Guang University, Nanhua University, Nan Tien Institute, and Guang Ming College. After 1970, the Venerable Master established Da Ci Children’s Home and Jen-Ai Senior Citizen’s Home to shelter needy children and the elderly, and also helped to provide emergency relief and other services to benefit society. In 1977, he established The Fo Guang Tripitaka Editorial Committee,¹ which compiled the Fo Guang Buddhist Canon² and the Fo Guang Dictionary of Buddhism.³ Venerable Master Hsing Yun has published voluminously throughout his Dharma propagation career. His disciples compiled the Venerable Master’s works up to 2016, and published the Complete Works of Venerable Master Hsing Yun⁴ in 2017, which has 365 volumes.
Editor’s Note: At 7:00 pm on December 13th 2014, the founder of Fo Guang Shan, Venerable Master Hsing Yun, by the invitation of the Institute of Humanistic Buddhism, joined scholars and Buddhist experts from all over the world, as well as the leaders of the Buddha’s Light International Association (BLIA) to speak on the tenets of Humanistic Buddhism. The talk was held at the Auditorium of the Tathāgata Building. In attendance were also some two thousand members of the BLIA and over a hundred students from the Fo Guang Shan Tsung-Lin University. It was a grand assembly, akin to the reappearance of the Sagely Assembly on Vulture’s Peak.

Cheng Gongrang (Director, Fo Guang Shan Institute of Humanistic Buddhism):

Greetings to respected Venerable Master Hsing Yun. We are holding the 2nd Symposium on Humanistic Buddhism at Fo Guang Shan today. The Institute of Humanistic Buddhism held its first meeting here in June, with thirty scholars in attendance. This time, we have sixty scholars from seven countries participating. The previous symposium was experimental in nature, having invited thirty scholars from both sides of the Cross-Strait. This symposium has emerged to become the international “Symposium on Humanistic Buddhism.”

As there are many scholars participating in this symposium, and we have already introduced them during the first and second sessions, I will not introduce them individually again. Apart from the sixty scholars who are participating in the symposium, today we are also joined by more than two thousand Buddha’s Light International Association (BLIA) committee members, and an international audience from all stratas of society who have enormous respect for the Venerable Master. Let us give a warm round of applause to respectfully invite Venerable Master Hsing Yun to enlighten us.

Venerable Master Hsing Yun:

Let’s start with introducing our distinguished guests.

MC:

Introducing distinguished guests on the right of the stage: President of BLIA Chunghua Secretariat Venerable Tzu Jung, President of BLIA Chunghua Chou Li-yun, Vice President of BLIA Chunghua Chen Chia-lung, President of the National Teachers Union
Wu Chin-shan, Director of BLIA Chunghua Pan Wei-kang, Director General of BLIA Chunghua Tseng Min-min, BLIA National Men’s Volunteers General Kuo Ming-chun, BLIA National Women’s Volunteers General Chu Tang-mei, BLIA Northern, Chunghua Chapter President Li Te-chuan, BLIA Taoyuan, Hsinchu, and Miaoli Chunghua Chapter President Chang Ching-chuan, BLIA Central, Chunghua Chapter President Tai Teng-chung, BLIA Southern, Chunghua Chapter President Yang Cheng-ta. We also have distinguished guests from the Beijing Sanzhi College.

**Chen Gongrang:**

Distinguished guests on the left of the stage include Professor Lewis Lancaster of the University of California, Berkeley, renowned Japanese Buddhist scholar Dr. Kimura Kiyotaka; Director of Nanjing University Chinese Culture Institute, Professor Lai Yong Hai; President of the Fo Guang Shan International University Consortium, Dr. Yung Chaur-shin; President of Nanhua University, Dr. Lin Tsong-ming; President of Guang Ming College, Dr. Helen Correa; renowned Taiwanese Buddhist scholar, Professor Wan Chin-chuan; renowned Hong Kong Buddhist scholar, Dr. Guang Xing; Taiwanese Pure Land research specialist, Dr. Chen Chien-huang; renowned Chinese Academy of Social Sciences scholar, Dr. Qiu Yonghui; renowned Taiwanese author, Mr. Lin Ching-hsuan, and 60 other participating scholars.

Although this is not the first time I am hosting a lecture for the Venerable Master, I am now afforded another opportunity to do this and learn from him. Thank you Venerable Master. We now respectfully invite Venerable Master to enlighten us.

**Venerable Master Hsing Yun:**

Auspicious blessings to all professors, scholars, friends, and BLIA members participating in the Symposium on Humanistic Buddhism!

As a disabled old man, I am unworthy of everyone’s kindness. I am deeply moved and my heart is full of feelings of regret. For all the scholars and professors who have come to Fo Guang Shan, I should be greeting and attending to each and every one of you, and to share meals with you. However, because of my lack of mobility I am unable to do this. And to the BLIA members, I am aware you always want to come and meet me, but I
cannot greet each one of you, and for this I apologize.

Before I speak, let me first invite Venerable Tzu Jung to sing the “Song of Ten Practices and Cultivations” as an offering to the audience.

**Venerable Tzu Jung:**

The lyrics of this “Song of Ten Practices and Cultivations” were written by the Venerable Master, and it can be sung using many different tunes. Let’s sing using the Huangmei tune:

- Practice One: Don’t be calculative.
- Practice Two: Don’t compare.
- Practice Three: Be polite.
- Practice Four: Always smile.
- Practice Five: Don’t worry about being disadvantaged.
- Practice Six: Be honest and kind.
- Practice Seven: Be carefree.
- Practice Eight: Speak good words.
- Practice Nine: Befriend honorable people.
- Practice Ten: Everyone be the Buddha.

If everyone tries these ten practices,

We shall live in the Buddha’s Pure Land of joy and carefreeness.

**Venerable Master Hsing Yun:**

Let us not allow people to say we only sing pop songs. We will now follow with the Sixth Patriarch Master Huineng’s “Formless Gatha.” Could Most Venerable Hsin Pei sing this to everyone to the tune of the Buddhist “Gatha of the Bell”:

**Most Venerable Hsin Pei:**

With an even mind, why bother upholding precepts?
With an upright practice, why meditate?
To have gratitude, be filial towards your parents.
To be just, have sympathy for others, whether high or low.
To yield to others, whether you are honorable or lowly, live in harmony.
To be tolerant, do not speak of the wrongdoing of others.

If fire can be produced by drilling wood,
Certainly the red lotus will emerge from the mud.
What tastes bitter is an effective cure.
What is grating to the ear is honest advice.

Mend your errors and give rise to wisdom,
Defend your shortcomings and you lack a sage’s mind.
Daily, constantly practicing to benefit others,
Attaining Buddhahood does not come from giving money.

Bodhi is found within the mind.
Why bother looking for the extraordinary outside?
Listen to what I have just said and apply it.
The West is before your eyes.

It was all bustling and lively just now, let’s calm our hearts before Venerable Master’s lecture. Please meditate for two minutes to observe your mind. See what your mind is; can you see what your mind is in the present moment?

Teaching by Venerable Master Hsing Yun:

At this Symposium on Humanistic Buddhism, I have been asked to speak on “Humanistic Buddhism.” I recall a particular spring festival when renowned scholar Professor Charles H.C. Kao came to the monastery to celebrate the Chinese New Year. The very first question he posed when he met me was: “What is Humanistic Buddhism?” I thought to myself: Humanistic Buddhism is simply Buddhism, and its scope is so broad, how could it be answered in just a few sentences? However, due to respect for Professor Kao, who is a Christian, I simply replied that Humanistic Buddhism is: “that which was
Fundamental Tenets of Humanistic Buddhism

taught by the Buddha himself, that which is needed by human beings, that which is pure, and that which is virtuous and beautiful.” On hearing this, he exclaimed “Oh!”, and seemed to have understood.

I recall that I was not aware what Humanistic Buddhism was, or even who the founder of Buddhism Śākyamuni Buddha was before I renounced. However, through my maternal grandmother’s teaching from word of mouth, I knew of Mother Guanyin (Guanyin Laomu, Avalokiteśvara). To this day, I still regard my grandmother as a Mother Guanyin because she was hardworking, willing to endure hardship, kind to people, and compassionate. Although elderly, she shouldered the responsibility of feeding approximately twenty people in the household, ploughing the fields herself to plant vegetables and selling its produce to sustain the entire family. I grew up by her side and felt she was like a loving, warm and kind-hearted bodhisattva. As she worshiped Mother Guanyin, I regarded her as a bodhisattva herself.

In China’s civil society, there are few who are aware of Śākyamuni Buddha. However, Amitābha Buddha and Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva are familiar to all. Because of the great loving kindness and great compassion of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, rescuing people from hardship and suffering, countless manifestations in the human realm, and communion with suffering beings, I feel that this is the Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva that people need.

In my education after my renunciation, I gradually came to know about and understand the fundamental personalities of Buddhism—the Buddha, the 1,250 Great Arhats, and the Four Great Bodhisattvas. I also reflected on my character. Having grown up with my maternal grandmother, I was influenced by her actions, and developed a hardworking character and taking pleasure in serving others, bringing them joy and happiness.

I was diligent in doing household chores in my childhood, took the initiative to complete them—whether it was sweeping the floor, cleaning the table, or doing the dishes. Parents who saw a six- or seven-year-old so willingly taking the initiative to do chores, they would also be delighted and praise: “This is a very good child.” Upon hearing their praise, I was even happier to serve; and this exchange made me feel that this world is beautiful. Therefore, building a world filled with truth, virtue, beauty, and faith
is especially important.

Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism are all part of Chinese traditional culture, and they each have their adherents, but there are few who truly understand Buddhism. In my opinion, for a person with the affinity to embrace Buddhism, to feel that faith is beneficial and helpful, Buddhist teachings must be understood.

But gradually I came to realize that the traditional way of discussing Buddhist teachings was lacking in vitality. It was often only the elderly reciting the Buddha’s name, hoping to end the problems of life and death. But what is the method of doing so? Similarly, if we teach people that they have to end their afflictions, what method do they use? Let’s take the example of sweeping the floor, for which we require brooms and mops—we need tools to clean. If you want to battle your afflictions, Māra and the demon army, what are your weapons and methods?

Before I renounced, I developed a good habit of reciting the names of Amitābha Buddha and Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva with my grandmother. After renunciation, I naturally also recited their names daily, but the Dharma also needs to be understood. The Four Noble Truths, Four Universal Vows, Four Immeasurables, all practices embodied within the Six Pāramitās, and Five Precepts and Ten Wholesome Actions are all the Dharma, but most people do not understand such terminology; and even if they did, they might not find it easy to identify with. Therefore, I thought about how to help them understand these teachings. As we say in Buddhism: “essence, characteristics, and function.” Only when people can apply what they learn is Buddhism beneficial to them.

**The Essence of the Dharma**

For instance, people often say that life is suffering, so we should leave this sea of suffering and quickly exit the world. Such a statement does not fit my understanding. Since I live in the world, I want to do so happily. I certainly do not want to leave the world while I am in the prime of my youth. In fact, suffering does not imply we have to leave this world.

Suffering is a teaching; suffering gives us strength; suffering is a positive condition. To live in this world, we must be able to endure suffering. As the saying goes, “one becomes the best of the best by enduring the worst of the worst.” We must learn to struggle against and be able to overcome all suffering. A person who can endure suffering will be
able to achieve success. I believe people should cultivate the fighting spirit of overcoming suffering and of endless diligence.

In addition, when I was studying at the Buddhist college, my teacher often taught me about life being empty; when children saw me on the road they would jokingly say, “Amitābha Buddha, the four elements are empty!” I heard about emptiness every day, but yet the reality of life was so important to me; so I wondered why should it be empty?

When the early Buddhist pioneers translated the scriptures, they translated this wonderful truth as “emptiness.” This word has led to a misunderstanding in Buddhism, causing those who do not truly understand Buddhism to think that the meaning of “emptiness” implies that the sky, earth, you, me and everyone are all empty, until nothing is left in the end.

As a matter of fact, emptiness does not mean nothingness, emptiness gives rise to existence. For example, where the Bamboo Garden Lodge in Dashu stands was once empty land. From that emptiness, I created a wonderful something by gradually building a monastery. In the universe, “existence” is built from “emptiness.” In this sense, “emptiness” is very good for us.

Your pockets have to be empty in order to fill it with things, with money. Whether at home or the office, we always want more space. Even our organs require space, if the nostril is not empty, how can we live? I think we should not talk about “emptiness,” instead it is better to speak of “existence.” This is what humanity needs.

Recently I have been writing, “The Empty Nature of the Four Elements Manifest in Existence.” The “Manifest in Existence” refers to bringing things into existence; the “Four Elements” are earth, water, fire, and wind. Earth carries us all; Earth allows all to grow. The great Earth is all-encompassing, containing all objects: treasures like gold, silver, copper, and iron are hidden within it. Water is vital in sustaining human life; a drop or glass of water can make everything grow. Fire is by nature warm; since the discovery of fire, it has changed human culture and civilization. The human body needs warmth to survive, and all life requires sunlight to grow. Wind refers to the air; life hangs on to thread of our breath, without air we cannot breathe; without air conditioners, people would feel uncomfortably cold or hot. Therefore, the four elements are the conditions for the harmony of the universe and are essential for us. There are also people who say: “Life
is impermanent!” This sounds as though the world is coming to an end. In fact, it is not. “Impermanence” is a wonderful word. For example, we may be impoverished now but we should not be overly concerned, because it is through impermanence we will go from rags to riches if we work hard. I might have a bad temper, but if I am willing to change, I can improve. Nothing is set in stone, everything is impermanent and can be changed. Impermanence represents hope that we can look forward to a better future.

These Buddhist doctrines are so wonderful, why do we make it sound so miserable and unpalatable to people?

**Buddhism is Fundamentally Humanistic Buddhism**

The Buddha was born in the human world, engaged in spiritual cultivation in the human world, and propagated the Dharma in the human world. He taught humans, not demons, hungry ghosts, or animals. Therefore, Buddhism is of the human realm. In addition to this, we often say that the Buddha was not a god; he was a human being and the Buddhism he founded is fundamentally Humanistic Buddhism.

These days, some argue that Humanistic Buddhism is yours, his, or someone else’s. However, it is not. What the Buddha of the human world was practicing is Humanistic Buddhism. For example, every day the Buddha went on his alms round, taught the Dharma to the public, and interacted with people in society. The Buddha did not live independently away from people. In the sūtras, the Buddha was constantly emphasizing that “I am among the multitude” and “I am one among the many.” I am one of the many. How could I survive without people? My daily needs of clothing, food, accommodation, and transportation are all dependent on people’s generosity. Therefore, without this provision from people, I could not survive.

The Buddha, who practiced within the multitude, also helped an old blind man thread a needle, served water, and prepared medicine for ill monastic disciples. When he learned that Cūḍapanthaka, who was jeered at for being unable to memorize even a single stanza, the Buddha comforted him thus: “It is alright, take your time. I will teach you. Can you sweep? When you sweep the floor, you repeat to yourself, ‘Whisk away the dust and impurities.’” The Buddha was very patient yet apt at applying skillful means when teaching. Therefore, we can say that Humanistic Buddhism began with the Buddha.
The Influence of Buddhism on Chinese Culture

After its spread to China, Buddhism played a very important role in its culture. As part of the 1963 Republic of China Buddhist Delegation, I visited India and had the opportunity to meet Prime Minister Nehru. He said, “People say both India and China are ancient cultures, but without Buddhism, what in our ancient cultures would be respected by the world?”

As Buddhism developed in China, so did respect for its art, such as the stone carvings at Dunhuang, Longmen, Yungang, Baoding, and Dazu. All these things are acclaimed—especially amongst Europeans, Americans, and other western countries. With regards to music, Buddhist chanting such as the “Voices of the Tidal Sea”9 and the “Gatha of the Bell” that was just performed, and even traditional opera like the Kunqu and Jingju, have been influenced by Buddhist chanting. The Mirror of Origin10 is a book that documents such influences.

This influence extends to Chinese martial arts and boxing. In the past, eminent monastics successfully mastered skills like “finger flicking” (彈指神功, tanzhi shengong), “shadowless boxing” (無影神拳, wuying shenquan), and “plucking leaves flying flowers” (摘葉飛花, zhaiye feihua). I once saw an eminent monk leap to the height of two stories by using his internal qi. At that time, I thought to myself that he would certainly win a gold medal if he participated in the Olympics. However, to be frank, at his level he had gone way beyond mere external martial arts and boxing, and had little care for a gold medal. Although we still have Shaolin kungfu of the Shaolin Temple, it is no longer the same as it was in years gone by.

Furthermore, there are many Buddhist phrases in the language we speak, such as “Do you have ‘mental afflictions’ (i.e. worries)?”; “Do not do something bad, otherwise you will suffer ‘karmic consequences’” ; “We meet because we have ‘affinity’ (i.e. causes and conditions)”; “Do not be deluded”; “Do not be full of yourself (i.e. a filled or soiled vessel)”; and “Be compassionate”—these are all part of Buddhist parlance. Idioms such as “Holding a flower with a subtle smile” (拈花微笑, nianhua weixiao), “able to speak eloquently” (辯才無礙, biancai wuai), much poetry and many ancient sayings are also related to Buddhism.

Many vegetables and fruits that we consume, such as pepper, walnuts, zucchini, and carrot were all brought to China by monastics from the western regions. Without the
spread of Buddhism, it might be difficult to be a vegetarian nowadays.

Don’t we often use the idiom “Uttering nonsense (胡說八道, hushuo badao, lit. foreigners speaking of the Eightfold Path)”? The Eightfold Path originate from Buddhism, referring to its eight thoughts or views, which are excellent principles. However, because these words were spoken by foreigners in a language we could not understand, it evolved into modern usage as a way to abuse and humiliate others. Other aspects such as architecture, literature, and calligraphy were all influenced by Buddhism. Buddhism can be said to be a type of culture and education. It is my wish to revive Chinese culture. Buddhism is essential to this revival and should be taken seriously.

In conclusion, after Buddhism spread into China, most Chan masters lived by the principle of “a day without work is a day without food.” In the Sui Dynasty, there emerged the “Three Stages School.” During this period the monasteries operated pawn shops, oil-presses, and rice mills—the primary aim being to serve the public and relieve their suffering instead of as a business for profit.

Therefore, Humanistic Buddhism was not developed or advocated by any particular eminent monastic. Its lineage can be traced directly to the Buddha, and what Fo Guang Shan is doing is merely to respect the Buddhist traditions. Since it has been passed down to this age, we too propagate it in accordance with modern methods. Humanistic Buddhism is basically Buddhism.

I would like to suggest the “fundamental tenets” of Humanistic Buddhism to all of you. I think all adherents of Humanistic Buddhism should have some experience and understanding of the following four tenets.

**Fundamental Tenets of Humanistic Buddhism**

**Honor One’s Family and Country**

Firstly, Humanistic Buddhism believes in “honoring one’s family and country.” Everyone in the audience has a family. I advocate that individuals should not renounce casually. For example, it is not permissible for a married man to seek renunciation—how could they abandon their familial responsibilities? Neither is it permissible for married women to renounce because they feel that their duties of cooking, doing the laundry, and bringing up children are too much work. One renounces in order to deliver all sentient beings from suffering; if one could not shoulder familial responsibilities, how could he
be able to propagate the teachings and deliver all sentient beings from suffering after renunciation? Buddhism strongly emphasizes familial harmony, and thus I promote the Three Acts of Goodness (Do Good Deeds, Speak Good Words, and Think Good Thoughts), Four Givings (Give Others Faith, Give Others Joy, Give Others Hope, and Give Others Convenience), and Five Harmonies (Individual harmony achieved through joy, Interpersonal harmony achieved through respect, Family harmony achieved through deference, Social harmony achieved through cooperation, World harmony achieved through peace).

Of which, as highlighted among the five harmonies: Individual harmony achieved through joy, and Interpersonal harmony achieved through respect—everyone in the household has the responsibility to build a better family. If family life is lacking in happiness, then life would become meaningless. In particular, there are men who go out to work and provide for the family, and upon reaching home become male chauvinists; believing that because they worked hard to provide food, clothing, and consumables for the family, they then have the right to be arrogant—worshipped like a hero or as someone who is high and mighty. On the contrary, men at home should be more jovial and humorous—letting their wives and children feel that, under their leadership, they live in familial ambience of joy and happiness.

There is a further saying that “everyone bears responsibility for the prosperity of the nation.” Historically, Buddhism and politics have not been in opposing camps. Although it can be said that Buddhism does not intervene in politics and supports whichever party is in power, we too hope that political power can protect and support Buddhism. As it is said: “without relying on the head of the nation, it is difficult to establish Dharma,” thus Śākyamuni Buddha also entrusted the responsibility of protecting the Dharma to the kings, nobility, and ministers.

When a country is strong and powerful, the people will live in peace and security. I frequently travel all over the world and can strongly relate to the saying of “where can fur adhere if skin does not exist?” An individual without the backing of a country would not be able to go anywhere in the world. With the rise of China, foreigners now treat us more favorably—in the past, China was branded the “Sick Man of East Asia” and was despised. Taiwan is another case in point. As one of the four dragons (or tigers) of Asia, one can
easily obtain visas for wherever one may wish to travel.

We hope Taiwan and the Mainland can be peaceful, united, and prosperous. Mainland Secretary General Xi Jinping advocates the Chinese Dream. What is that dream? I am of the opinion this dream is a united country, the people happy and joyful, and not divided—this dream is very important.

To live in this world, we depend on our families and countries. As such, Humanistic Buddhism affirms the tenet of “Honor One’s Family and Country”—emphasizing both “country” and “family”—unity for the family and prosperity for the country. Venerable Tzu Hang (慈航, Tzu Hang) once said, “even if a single person is yet to be delivered from suffering, you must not escape.” Adherents of Humanistic Buddhism should be responsible towards family and country.

**Lead a Moderate Lifestyle**

The second fundamental tenet of Humanistic Buddhism is to “lead a moderate lifestyle.” Humanistic Buddhism emphasizes life in the human realm. There are four great mountains in China: Avalokiteśvara’s Mount Putuo in the South China Sea; Mañjuśrī’s Mount Wutai in Shanxi; Kṣitigarbha’s Mount Jiuhua in Anhui; and Samantabhadra’s Mount Emei in Sichuan. They respectively represent great compassion, great wisdom, great vows, and great practices—evidence that these four great bodhisattvas possess a humanistic character.

Such as: Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva providing sentient beings with skillful means and service through her great compassion; Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva guiding sentient beings out of their confusion and onto a bright path through his great wisdom; Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva causing the Dharma to pervade every household and corner of the world through his great vows; and Samantabhadra Bodhisattva practicing according to both truth and capabilities—obliging sentient beings and accomplishing that which is difficult through his great practices. Compassion, wisdom, vow, and practice are all part of the humanistic spirit.

Living in the world, humans should not waste, or use in excess, food or clothing. It is sufficient to rid oneself of the cold and hunger. This is because all our daily needs are provided by the nation, society, and the public; hence, I too want to contribute to all in return. I recall that in my younger days, my elders often reminded me us not to waste
water, telling me us that even a single droplet of water contains life. Also, an individual was only allowed seven catties and four liang of water every day—of course, no one would measure it exactly, but the point is to remind us to save and treasure every drop of water.

Human desires are unlimited, therefore we should be moderate in our way of life whether in terms of money, affection, material items, or interpersonal matters—we should live reasonably.

Confucian ethics, known to us as the Four Social Bonds and Eight Virtues—propriety, justice, integrity, honor; and, loyalty, filial piety, benevolence, love, trustworthiness, righteousness, harmony, peace—are the basis of a family’s ethical values; and the Five Constant Virtues of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faithfulness are equivalent to the Buddhist Five Precepts of not killing, not stealing, not engaging in sexual misconduct, not engaging in false speech, and not consuming intoxicants. Not killing is called benevolence; not stealing is called righteousness; not violating other’s body and reputation, (i.e. not engaging in sexual misconduct) is called propriety; not unreasonably criticizing others or speaking deceptively is called faithfulness; and not consuming intoxicants is called wisdom.

By not violating the freedom you have over your life, that is respecting your life. By not violating the freedom you have over your property, that is respecting your property. By not violating the freedom you have over your body, that is respecting your body. By not damaging your character or violating your reputation, that is respecting your speech. By not consuming intoxicants, that is to not violating the freedom you have over your health. When one is able to exercise self-restraint, keep to laws and discipline, interact harmoniously with others, and follow the Five Virtues and Five Precepts—then one can enjoy freedom at home, in society, and in the nation.

Besides living reasonably, we should also be reasonable in terms of our affection. People humorously say that courtship and marriage differs across the world: in France, a romantic comedy; in Italy, an opera; in England, a tragedy; in America, a farce; but in China, a drama that ends terribly. Why is that? When love turns sour—knives, guns, and domestic conflict surface. If the relationship worsens after being in love for some time, we abandon it irresponsibly. If all of us can uphold the ethical values of Humanistic Buddhism: the Five Precepts, Ten Virtues, Three Acts of Goodness, Four Givings, Five
Harmonies, and Six Perfections—we can then live reasonably.

**Value Worldly Interconnectedness**

Thirdly, Humanistic Buddhism should emphasize “worldly interconnectedness.” Buddhism’s founder Śākyamuni Buddha was enlightened as he sat under the Bodhi Tree and gazed upon luminous stars in the night. What is it he realized? He realized the truth of causes and conditions (i.e. dependent origination). As we say, “causes arise and cease” and “all phenomena arise from causes and conditions; all phenomena cease by causes and conditions.” Causes and conditions refers to the mutual relationships between humans, humans and affairs, and humans and objects.

In this world, what can exist without causes and conditions? We similarly are mutually dependent. Without scholars, farmers, artisans, and merchants, how would we obtain our food and clothes? Without drivers and transportation, how could we travel far? Without the guidance of teachers in school, how would we obtain knowledge? Without television stations and newspapers, how would we know what was happening in the world? It is often said that “we meet when we have affinity (i.e. causes and conditions for the meeting).” All that we have was formed from conditions coming together and disappears when conditions do not. As such, to live in this world we need to rely upon causes and conditions—we cannot establish anything without them.

The Buddhist discussion on causes and conditions can be summarized in the word “emptiness.” As we say, “emptiness embraces all that exists”—causes and conditions is everything that exists. Of course, it is not simply referring to the superficial aspect of causes and conditions. Questions like: “How are causes and conditions established?”; “How do you link past and present lives?”; “How are principles and phenomena integrated?”; and “How are emptiness and existence harmonized?”—these are not simple to describe, nor are they easy to profoundly understand. Buddhism sees “emptiness and existence” as two sides of a coin, similar to both palms and backs of our hand. Both mutually require and depend on each other, and mutually arise and form. Through “existence” we can realize the profound truth of “emptiness,” and through “emptiness” we can recognize the implications of “existence.”

Living in this world, we must develop broad and good affinities with others. If one develops affinities with others regularly, when one is met with problems or is
in need, there will be no need to seek help, as the causes and conditions for help will inexplicably and naturally arise. If one does not do so, one’s experiences with people will be difficult, whether in business, employment, or getting a loan. In Buddhism, we speak of “developing affinities with people before accomplishing the path of a Buddha.” In summary, developing affinities means to build harmonious relationships and effective communication with others.

**Maintain a Peaceful and Joyful Mind**

The fourth tenet of Humanistic Buddhism is to “maintain a peaceful and joyful mind.” We live in this world not for the sake of suffering, nor for struggle and worry. As a human in the world, we hope we can avoid fear and not suffer from oppression or bullying, but instead wish to feel peaceful, safe, and that life is full of happiness and joy. As earlier mentioned, we speak of suffering so that through suffering we can obtain joy and a future. Because we understand impermanence, we thus know we should strive to improve ourselves.

If we speak more deeply about Humanistic Buddhism, the twelve divisions of sūtras in the tripiṭaka, as well as precepts, morality, and wisdom are all Humanistic Buddhism. If we speak simply, it would be the four tenets of Humanistic Buddhism I mentioned earlier: first, honor one’s family and country; second, have a moderate lifestyle; third, develop worldly interconnectedness; and fourth, maintain a peaceful and joyful mind. These four tenets expressed in sixteen Chinese characters certainly do not fully encompass and explain all aspects of Humanistic Buddhism.

Thank you, everyone.

**Responses from the Floor and Questions & Answers**

**Cheng Gongrang:**

Today the Venerable Master has once again given us a brilliant lecture.

In 2002, Venerable Master explained Humanistic Buddhism in four phrases: “that which was taught by the Buddha; that which is essential to humans; that which purifies; and that which is virtuous and beautiful.” Today Venerable Master explained to us the Four Tenets of Humanistic Buddhism: honor one’s family and country; lead a moderate
lifestyle; value worldly interconnectedness; and, maintain a peaceful and joyful mind.

I feel that through the tenet of “honoring one’s family and country,” Venerable Master is emphasizing to us, as always, that Humanistic Buddhism involves societal participation. Venerable Master’s message in the tenet of “leading a moderate lifestyle” is that Humanistic Buddhism is in fact Buddhism for human lives. What about “worldly interconnectedness”? Venerable Master is teaching us that Humanistic Buddhism is actually based on wisdom and the view of causes and conditions. And finally, I think there is deep meaning in “maintaining a peaceful and joyful mind.” We scholars often say that we worry that Humanistic Buddhism is not transcendent, but in today’s lecture Venerable Master has resolved this issue. I therefore am very grateful to Venerable Master, and the audience are also all very happy.

I think these Four Tenets of Humanistic Buddhism do not in fact deviate from the doctrines—doctrines of Buddhism, society, and virtue. They are also doctrines underpinned by the fundamental spirit of Humanistic Buddhism, with which it is then possible to nurture a person who lives in accordance with honoring one’s family and country, a moderate lifestyle, worldly interconnectedness, and maintaining a peaceful and joyful mind.

Most among the scholars on stage are educators, such as Dr. Lancaster, who I know is also a university President. Since President of the Fo Guang Shan International University Consortium Dr. Yung Chaur-shin is also present, I would like to invite President Yang to represent us today in responding to Venerable Master’s lecture.

Yung Chaur-shin (President of Fo Guang University):

I could not come yesterday because of other events on my schedule and so Professor Cheng is asking me to present my thoughts. I feel more nervous about such a presentation than at my doctoral dissertation defence.

I was trained in education. With regard to the Dharma, although I have listened to many of the Venerable Master’s lectures and received much guidance from other Dharma masters, I still know and can say very little, and actually find it very difficult to present my thoughts. Many venerables often tell me: “President Yang, you have an affinity with Buddhism, but are lacking in wisdom because you have not properly studied the Dharma.” Since Professor Cheng has asked me to speak, I can only try my very best to share some
Fundamental Tenets of Humanistic Buddhism

of my thoughts.

Let’s start with the Venerable Master’s lecture. It was a very special one. As you might know, these phrases have recently appeared within educational circles: “flipped classroom,” “flipped education,” and “flipped teaching.” “Flip” here is to turn the classroom on its head, though not in practical terms, instead it is flipping the “modus operandi of the classroom” so as to get students interested and engaged.

At the beginning, the Venerable Master asked Venerable Tzu Jung and Most Venerable Hsin Pei to sing. From the perspective of education, this was to pique everyone’s motivation to learn. Subsequently, the Venerable Master asked us to meditate for two minutes and focus on our heart so that we could build up our energy in preparation to carefully listen to his lecture.

Besides, Humanistic Buddhism is the theme of Venerable Master’s talk, for which I have another simile. I have worked in the field of education all these years. As you know, those in academia endlessly pursue their research with the hope that their work would find its way into internationally recognized journals and become acknowledged as a significant academic achievement. However, can these achievements really be applied to our daily lives? Can they truly be used to run our enterprises and bring positive results? Can they occupy an important position in the development of technology? No, they are all academic research and cannot be directly applied or utilized. In the past we listened to many Dharma talks, and when propagating the Dharma some spoke of many doctrines, which sounded very distant from us. At the very beginning, the Venerable Master pointed out that Humanistic Buddhism is what is essential to human beings, what purifies, and what is virtuous and beautiful. In other words, the Dharma is not only for learning and studying, but also for practicing. Each of us needs to apply Humanistic Buddhism in our daily lives, and to do so fully. It is only such a Buddhism which can purify human minds and eventually guide our society onto the right track.

The Dharma taught by the Venerable Master has also clarified many misunderstandings we held in the past. For example, when it comes to suffering, everyone wants to escape it. But the Venerable Master has said that suffering is a kind of teaching and training that prepares one for great responsibility in the future. Did Mencius not say when heaven is about to confer a great office on any man, what does heaven first do?
Audience’s response: “It first exercises his mind with suffering, his sinews and bones with toil, and exposes his body to hunger.”

In addition, when we mention “emptiness,” we often relate it to giving up and seeing beyond. But in fact existence comes from emptiness, and the former cannot exist without the latter. Another example is “impermanence.” I often say, “Only change is unchanging, and only uncertainty is certain.” This is impermanence, isn’t it?

But we do not understand “impermanence,” and we think of giving up upon hearing this word. In fact, the real meaning of “impermanence” is: a current state of want does not imply that we will be destitute all our lives. With effort, there is still hope; therefore, impermanence brings us hope.

Although I do not have wisdom, listening to the Venerable Master’s lecture today may bring me some in future. Thank you to one and all.

Cheng Gongrang:

President Yang, thank you for the brilliant response. As we can tell, he paid much attention to Venerable Master’s lecture.

Humanistic Buddhism as advocated by Venerable Master Hsing Yun has greatly contributed to both general and Buddhist education. As far as China is concerned, it was inconceivable two or three decades ago that Buddhist organizations could start universities, but thus far Fo Guang Shan has established five universities throughout the world. Therefore, my inviting President Yang to respond is not to give him a hard time, but because the four tenets that Venerable Master spoke of today are indeed related to education.

From this year onwards, we will invite the Venerable Master to interact with scholars and the public at our Symposium on Humanistic Buddhism. Frankly, Venerable Master is advanced in age and his body tires easily, but he still accepted our request, both in June and now. I think this is a very precious opportunity, so if anyone has questions, whether scholars or the public audience, please use the remaining time and ask the Venerable Master now.

Venerable Master Hsing Yun: Priority is given to the scholars.
Fundamental Tenets of Humanistic Buddhism

Li Li’an (Northwest University):

In traditional Buddhism, belief in Avalokiteśvara (also known as Guanyin in Chinese Buddhism) is very popular. To devotees, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva who has great loving kindness and great compassion, is infinitely resourceful, has boundless power, is able to deliver people from suffering and disaster, and has the most devotees. Many people now posit the criticism, “Can Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva really solve all these problems?” To which devotees would highlight positive examples. However, folk religion says that “Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva has no power” which means that there are problems even Avalokiteśvara is powerless to resolve. There are yet other devotees who argue that Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva gives them strength, confidence, and helps them explore the origin of life. This reminds me of Venerable Master Yinguang’s address to Avalokiteśvara devotees: I hope you devotees can follow the examples of the virtuous when you see them, emulate the mind of Guanyin as your mind, and her deeds as your deeds. Could I invite Venerable Master to also say a few words to Avalokiteśvara devotees?

Venerable Master Hsing Yun:

Professor Li, you came from Northwest University, and you know that there is more suffering and disaster in northern China and this really needs to be delivered by Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. In religion we speak of experiences, so I shall mention one of my own.

I was not a very smart child, having never studied or been to school. When I took the precepts at fifteen, because the precept master burnt the precept marks too deeply into my skull, my cranial nerves were damaged. Subsequently, I became clumsy, stupid, and was often chided and beaten by my masters. I felt ashamed and wondered why I was so stupid. Once, while a teacher was hitting me, he said, “You need to pay homage to Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. Paying homage to Avalokiteśvara will give you wisdom.” There and then, a ray of light and hope suddenly flashed across my mind. I then followed his instruction and paid homage to Avalokiteśvara.

Paying homage to Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva in a big monastery was quite difficult. The doors to the shrines were closed in the evening and no one was permitted to enter casually during the day, so I could only secretly find a small shrine with an Avalokiteśvara statue in the middle of the night to pay homage. While doing so, I recited, “May all
develop the bodhi mind, may lotus flowers bloom throughout. My mind is deluded, I pay homage to Avalokiteśvara, seeking intelligence, and praying for wisdom. I take refuge in Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, who has great mercy and great compassion, and who relieves all suffering and disaster.”

In Buddhism there are many such accounts of spiritual responses. People who sincerely pay homage to Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva receive a prediction of Buddhahood from her or a showering of Dharma nectar. I experienced neither of these, but I felt different a few months later. While I dare not say that I could remember all taught by my teachers, I was no longer confused and could understand their lessons easily.

I remember when I first arrived in Taiwan, there were over 400 legislators in the Legislative Yuan, and I could recall everyone’s name, as well as those of the 21 county mayors and provincial representatives just by going through them once without any deliberate effort. No one told me the names of the commanders of the armed forces and the various ministers, but I remembered them when I happened to come across newspaper reports of their successful elections. Where did my good memory come from? I have no way to explain this and have only Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva to thank.

Of course, we cannot rely solely on Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. If everyone asks the buddhas and bodhisattvas for help and if they do respond to our requests, how will they be able to do this for so many people? However, there is a Dharma saying: “The moon is reflected in a thousand rivers”; although there is but one moon, it appears wherever there is water.

The bodhisattva is like a clear cool moon,
that constantly courses in the great emptiness;

Once the minds of sentient beings become purified,
the silhouette of bodhi shall manifest.

When our minds are purified, the wisdom of our bodhi mind will naturally arise. Therefore, we still should depend on ourselves. There is a short story:

What do we chant when we hold prayer beads? We chant the name of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. Thus, one may ask: What does Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva chant holding prayer beads? She
is chanting her own name. Why does Avalokiteśvara chant her own name? Well, it is better to rely on oneself than others.

It is my opinion that we should ourselves become Avalokiteśvara rather than seek help from and pray to an external Avalokiteśvara.

Buddhism often speaks of “mutual interaction between those cultivating on the path and the Buddha.” Response comes only after interaction. Just like when you strike a bell, it will go dong; when you hit a drum, it will go boom. So, in striking a bell and a drum, dong and boom will sound respectively—these are responses. If you have an impeded circuit, there will be no mutual electrical exchange. Therefore, reception and flow are essential in mutual relationships.

Gong Jun (Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou):

Recently, in relation to the Institute of Humanistic Buddhism, I researched some of the teachings of Venerable Master Taixu and found that many of his ideals could not be practiced during his time. Now, in both the Mainland and in Taiwan, many of these ideas have been realized through Venerable Master Hsing Yun. Venerable Master often travels between the Strait, and according to my observation, Humanistic Buddhism as advocated by Venerable Master will also become an important direction for the future development of Mainland Chinese Buddhism. Venerable Master also has a deep understanding of Mainland Chinese Buddhism, and so I would like to know very much Venerable Master’s perspective. What should Mainland Chinese Buddhism primarily pay attention to, or in what direction should it move towards in its further development?

Venerable Master Hsing Yun:

Here I am going to mention a rather inappropriate dialogue. When the students of National Taiwan University were hosting exchange students from Peking University, they said, “We welcome the students from China.” If we do not scrutinize it, this sentence is alright—after all, the students were from China. However, after hearing this, a young and impetuous Mainland Chinese student angrily refuted, “What are you talking about? We are from China? Don’t tell me we are foreigners!” Fo Guang Shan disciples often go to the mainland and I always tell them that Taiwan and China are not two but one. We should say we Mainland Chinese, not you Mainland Chinese and we Taiwanese. Otherwise, we
will be in opposing positions and there will be no peace. We are one family on both sides of the straits. We are Taiwanese, we are Mainland Chinese, and we are even people of the whole world. From the Buddhist perspective, the world is one which exists in the mind, and sentient beings are those which exist in the mind.

The following is a controversy reported in the newspaper. I just came back from Mainland China that day, and being touched by a moment of emotion, I asked Venerable Miao Kuang to record it for me.

This is what I heard: Mainland China is very big and your Taiwan is pretty small. The Mainland China is like a big man and Taiwan is like a young lady. Some people say that if this young lady were to marry Mainland China, the dowry would include: the Taiwanese archipelago—including the islands of Kinmen, Mazu and the Penghu (Pescadores)—her 23 million citizens, many cultures, and buildings. In addition to this there is yet another very valuable dowry, and that is Humanistic Buddhism.

If Humanistic Buddhism is brought along as part of the marriage to Mainland China, it will certainly help China to become a beacon of shining light for the future, fulfilling the saying: “Politics led by the party, the country governed by virtue, the world benefiting from religion, and minds eased by the Dharma.”

What kind of betrothal gift does Mainland China provide then? Taiwan’s reply to this is: as in the past we spoke of liberty, democracy, and openness; you must recognize Taiwan and admit we are one family on both sides of the straits, not declare that Taiwan is a not part of the country; you must accept Humanistic Buddhism. Professor Gong, if Humanistic Buddhism can be implemented in China, it will definitely be beneficial to all, whether we are discussing the future of Mainland China’s politics, religion, or society.

Cheng Gongrang:

Thank you, Venerable Master. In order to marry the bride, Taiwan, all of us must promote Venerable Master’s Humanistic Buddhism in Mainland China. Of the over 60 scholars at this symposium, more than 30 are from Mainland China, and you too need to shoulder this solemn responsibility.

Shang Rong (Nanjing University):

Greetings to you, Venerable Master Hsing Yun. I am a student of Professor Lai
Yonghai, and I am very pleased to attend the Symposium on Humanistic Buddhism for the second time. Your presentation today mentioned Buddhist art, such as that at Yungang… which is admirable. But I am especially interested in your calligraphy. May I ask how you have guided the public with your calligraphy over the past several decades, and how does calligraphic art embody Humanistic Buddhism?

Venerable Master Hsing Yun:

In the past, Xu Beihong painted horses, and a painting of his is priced many times higher than that of a real horse; a dragonfly or a butterfly painted by Qi Baishi initially sold for a few hundreds of thousands each, but now costs about a million. A painting by Zhang Daqian is also quite valuable.

When I founded Fo Guang University two decades ago, I donated a painting by Zhang Daqian for auction, which was closed at 120 million dollars. I obtained that painting because earlier on when I first established Fo Guang Shan, some paintings and books were generously donated by Zhang Daqian, Wang Yun-wu, and others for a charitable auction. However, I was reluctant to sell them. I felt that even if we completed the building of the monastery, without art in it, it would have neither culture nor substance, so I kept them all for a while. Later, with more means available, I gradually started to collect some calligraphy and paintings. If Fo Guang Yuan Art Gallery wanted to display a hundred paintings at a time, it would not be a problem, even to have exhibits that changed twenty times. What I mean to say is that I pay great importance to Chinese culture and art.

Recently, a remarkable devotee from the USA donated to Fo Guang Shan the head of a Buddha statue. It was sawed off from a temple in China some 20 to 30 years ago, sold abroad, and purchased back by this devotee. However, it is a pity that Fo Guang Shan has only the head, and so I asked people to inquire and see whether the body of the Buddha statue could still be found. It so happened that the body was found in Shanxi Province. Mainland China is now planning to send the body to Taiwan for it to be reunited with the head. After which, the intact statue will return to the Mainland. This shows that there are also some interesting stories in cultural and artistic exchanges.

Regarding One-Stroke Calligraphy, Professor Shang, you have said that my calligraphy is art. To tell the truth, I did not practice any calligraphy until the age of seventy. When I first came to Taiwan, I was just a poor monk, and could not even afford
pen and paper, let alone practice calligraphy. Later, I went to Yilan and lived in a poor, tiny temple. Every year, we held an Amitābha Chanting Retreat there. The walls of the temple were quite dilapidated, but we had no money to refurbish them, so I thought of decorating them with calligraphy.

At that time, there were not many people who did calligraphy in Taiwan. I did not write well either, but in order to save money, I wrote anyway on red paper and pasted them on the walls. They did look rather nice; however, because the color faded away over time, I had to replace them once a year, having to write about a hundred new phrases each time. In total I wrote for twenty-six years. Given such a weak foundation, I dare not say that I am a calligrapher. Now that I have an undeserved reputation, people ask for my writings. Therefore, I often tell them not to look at my words, which are not well written, but look at my heart, which, I know, does have some compassion.

Why is it called One-Stroke Calligraphy? It is because my vision is poor now, and if I cannot complete the character in one stroke, then I cannot see where to start the next stroke. Therefore, no matter how many words I write, I must complete it in one stroke. Thanks to Mainland China, a great country, whenever one-stroke calligraphy is exhibited there, not only are there many visitors, but there are also many sponsors who donate to the Venerable Master Hsing Yun Public Education Trust Fund, which is touching.

I presented to the owner of the Shanghai Sheraton Hotel a calligraphic rendition of a verse from the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* (*Flower Adornment Sūtra*)\(^1\): “Never forget your initial resolve.” It means that we should not forget the earliest resolve we made. Why do I want to be a professor? Do not forget your initial resolve; do not be afraid of hardship; and be perfectly willing to properly educate. After marriage, a husband and wife should live together in harmony, and not forget that they married for mutual love at the beginning. “Never forget your initial resolve” is quite an apt encouragement for people nowadays.

Recently, that owner donated the piece of calligraphy for charitable auction and I heard that it was sold for RMB 5 million. Art really is priceless. Our Chinese culture is very rich in content and worthy of propagation. My trifling skill is far from the standard of being called art. I am not sure if this is what Professor Shang was asking, but I shall take your words as encouragement and will diligently practice and improve my calligraphy as long as I can write.
Qiu Gaoxing (China Jiliang University):

I come from China Jiliang University in Hangzhou, and have met you twice before. The first time was twenty-five years ago. In March 1989, you conducted your first public speech at the Peking University Library. I was then doing my postgraduate studies at the Beijing Academy of Social Science and had the great fortune of listening to your teachings. The second time we connected was in 2009 when Venerable Master went for the first time to the Mainland’s northeast to propagate the Dharma. At that time, Jilin University had the great fortune of inviting Venerable Master to speak on campus and I happened to be working there. From 1989 onwards, Humanistic Buddhism in the Mainland has undergone a meandering process, and some Mainland Buddhist circles have encountered many worrisome problems. For example, in the process of conducting Buddhist charity, we ask the question: How do we integrate the spirit of Buddhism with charity? May I ask Venerable Master for guidance? Thank you.

Venerable Master Hsing Yun:

Philanthropy is relatively easy, while missionary work is relatively difficult. I recall Venerable Tzu Jung giving the following example: A family has a guest visiting them, and the child throws a tantrum. The mother then gives the child $10 and asks him to go buy chocolate or biscuits. This does not resolve the problem as the child thinks that he will get money whenever he throws a tantrum. This is the same as charity or philanthropy, giving to relieve poverty. However, this cannot solve the root cause of the problem.

However, missionary work is different. If a child throws a tantrum, his father or mother will say, “Child, we have a guest here, you should behave yourself, not throw tantrums, run around or do this or do that...” We must let the child understand so that he will be polite for the rest of his life. This is called educative transformation, and is relatively more difficult. I hope that those who engage in charitable activities can also propagate Buddhism. Educative transformation is not easy if we propagate Buddhism without doing charity; education preceded by charity will be much more rewarding. Speaking of Mainland Chinese Buddhism, this is not to say that only Humanistic Buddhism should be propagated—we are not that attached to it. Any religion will work as long as it can change social order and better the minds of people. Humanistic Buddhism does not belong to me. As I repeatedly emphasized earlier, Buddhist teaching has always been humanistic from
the time it was taught by the Buddha for the benefit and wellbeing of humans.

I think that, firstly, Mainland monastics should take precepts as the foundation—everyone should uphold them. Abstinence from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and intoxication are the fundamental major precepts in Buddhism and should be upheld. Secondly, monasteries must be systematized, and not depend on tourism and commercial activities such as selling admission tickets. In Taiwan, monasteries do not charge for admission and no one dares to do it here. Why is that so? Because religion cannot have dealings with money. Devotees who come to the monastery can make donations but commercial transactions are illegal; there cannot be prices or receipts.

Furthermore, Mainland Chinese Buddhism needs education. When late president of the Buddhist Association of China, Zhao Puchu, was alive, he said, “Buddhism firstly needs education, secondly education, and thirdly still more education.” This is indeed true; Mainland China has to nurture talent through education. Although there are Buddhist colleges in Mainland China, they have not kept up with this new era in which education is making rapid progress every day. There must be set standards for teaching materials and equipment.

Honestly speaking, Chinese Buddhism, after more than two thousand years, does have a lot of problems and flaws that will not be easily or quickly repaired. For this too I lament and wonder whether we have to wait until the current generation, who have scant confidence in Buddhism, and who make a living from it, passes away before the new generation arises. Perhaps we should pay more attention to the youth.

Dear professors, if under your encouragement there will be young people willing to contribute to Buddhism, and build a future for Buddhism, then Buddhism can expect a better situation, and for that I must thank you. Let’s have our last question.

He Yansheng (Koriyama Women’s University and College, Japan):

Greetings to you, Venerable Master. I come from Japan. Professor Cheng has just said that there are scholars from seven different countries and regions here at this symposium. The questions asked so far are all from Mainland Chinese scholars, none from abroad. I would like to ask Venerable Master a few questions.

I am He Yansheng from Koriyama University in Japan, where I have resided for
nearly thirty years. My earliest contact with Venerable Master was in 1989 when you first went to the Mainland to visit family. Thereafter, I saw Venerable Master a few times during meetings at Fo Guang Shan. In the context of propagating Humanistic Buddhism in East Asia, what are Venerable Master’s thoughts on promoting it to academic circles where the Chinese Language is not mainstream, and instead use languages such as English, Japanese, and Korean?

**Venerable Master Hsing Yun:**

Professor He from Japan, you mentioned Japanese Buddhism, which since the Meiji Restoration has had many outstanding scholars, such as Professors Zenryu Tsukamoto, Hajime Nakamura, Akira Hirakawa, and Kogen Mizuno. However, they all studied early Buddhism or Indian Buddhism. Buddhism in China has been studied in conjunction with Confucianism and Daoism, while in Taiwan it has been studied in juxtaposition with modern science, all of which I believe are not without results.

Similarly, Japanese research in early Buddhism has been fruitful, but there is slowly emerging a crisis in Japanese Buddhism. Many scholars have gradually walked into the past, leaving Buddhism with a ritualistic undertone, similar to the repentance rituals in Chinese Buddhism. Especially where monasteries have turned into family-run organizations with no monastics. In such cases, believers may wonder why they should offer help or seek Dharma instruction when those who run the monasteries are not monastics, but married and have children. As a result, they lose faith in Buddhism. That is why Japan needs Humanistic Buddhism too.

Despite Japanese Buddhism being of a social nature, and having a system of preaching the Dharma, eventually, “Dharma that has been around for long will lead to corrupt practices.” No matter how good the Dharma is, when it has been around for a long period of time, defects will develop. Professor He, you teach in Japan, I hope you will bring Humanistic Buddhism to Japan so as to revitalize Japanese Buddhism. That is my greatest wish.

**Cheng Gongrang:**

Thank you, Venerable Master. I think from the Venerable Master’s teaching and the responses of the scholars from the floor, we have a very moving and ongoing topic
for discussion here. From our scholars’ questions and the views expressed by Venerable Master, we are concerned about education in Mainland Chinese Buddhism, and its present and future situation.

We can see from Venerable Master’s response to Professor He Yansheng’s question that there exist many problems in the development of Buddhism throughout East Asia, for example, in Japan. From a global perspective, according to the statistical findings of a 2010 Pew Research Center study on religion, a mere 500 million people are Buddhists among all those in the world population who have a religion. In comparison, there are about 2 billion Christians and 1.7 billion Muslims. Therefore, compared to Christianity and Islam, the distribution of the Buddhist population in terms of numbers and geographical areas is still very limited, even though they are all global religions.

From a historical perspective, we know that during the era of Śākyamuni Buddha and his disciples, Buddhism was spread throughout India. Since then, and until around two hundred years ago, Buddhism was generally spread within the Asian regions. It was not until the most recent century or two that Buddhism began to enter the western world.

This summer, I had the good fortune to make a field trip to Hsi Lai Temple. From that trip I feel that perhaps Buddhism is considered a new religious movement in the eyes of western mainstream society. So from this angle, for Buddhism to survive it is very important to spread and develop globally. That is why Professor Lancaster told us during the opening ceremony yesterday that this is an era of globalization. How Buddhism will continue to develop is in fact a major issue.

Under the leadership of Venerable Master Hsing Yun, the Fo Guang community has achieved outstanding achievements in promoting the globalization of Buddhism in a short span of less than thirty years. We also see the skillful means the Venerable Master has employed to that end. I feel that the crux of promoting Buddhism globally, the depth of the teachings, and how firmly rooted Buddhism becomes in the world, is what Venerable Master just said— it lies in Humanistic Buddhism. The course of development of Humanistic Buddhism will influence the direction of Buddhism’s worldwide spread.
Fundamental Tenets of Humanistic Buddhism

Notes

1. 佛光大藏經編修委員會 - Ed.
2. 《佛光大藏經》 - Ed.
3. 《佛光大辭典》 - Ed.
4. 《星雲大師全集》 - Ed.
5. 第二屆人間佛教座談會 - Ed.
6. 〈十修歌〉 - Ed.
7. 〈無相頌〉 - Ed.
8. 〈鐘聲偈〉 - Ed.
9. 海潮音 - Ed.
10. 《歸元鏡》 - Ed.
11. 「三階教」 - Ed.
12. Equivalent to 50 grams. - Ed.
13. 《華嚴經》 - Ed.