STUDIES ON HUMANISTIC BUDDHISM

Foundational Thoughts

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Professor Cheng’s monographs include: Research on Ouyang Jingwu Buddhist Thought, Between China and India, and Research on Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s Humanistic Buddhism. He was Chief Editor of A Collection of Contemporary Buddhist Works: Chinese Buddhist Academic Series and also edited Tianwen magazine. He was awarded the first prize in the 7th Beijing Outstanding Achievement Awards in Philosophy and Social Sciences, and received the State Council’s special expert grant in 2010.
Venerable Master Hsing Yun is the founder of Fo Guang Shan Monastery in Taiwan, and one of the distinguished advocator of modern Humanistic Buddhism. He was born in Jiangdu, Jiangsu Province, China, in 1927 and received ordination at the Qixia Temple at the age of 12. He graduated from Jiaoshan Buddhist College in 1947 and went to Taiwan in 1949 where he founded Fo Guang Shan Monastery in 1967. He has been propagating the Dharma for nearly 70 years.

Now, at nearly 90, he still calls himself a humble monk, who lives by the principle of “a day without work is a day without food.” He has never tired of learning and teaching, and out of compassion for all sentient beings he has taken it upon himself to propagate the Dharma.

Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s contribution and influence on Buddhism is not limited to Taiwan, but is worldwide. It is not restricted to Humanistic Buddhism, but relates to the whole of Buddhism, and I will attempt to list his major contributions that have had a profound influence on Buddhism.

1. Systemizing the Theoretical Structure of Humanistic Buddhism is Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s First Great Contribution to Buddhism

Since the nineteenth century, Humanistic Buddhism has been the most powerful school of thought in Chinese Buddhism. I recently proposed that while Taixu was distinguished as an advocate of modern Humanistic Buddhism, Venerable Master Hsing Yun, as the founder of modern Humanistic Buddhism, has been an exceptional proponent.

Venerable Master Hsing Yun proposed using the concept of the “three greatnesses” from the Treatise on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna as the basic principle of the Humanistic Buddhism: greatness of essence, greatness of attributes, and greatness of function. He profoundly influenced the essence, the attributes, and the function of Humanistic Buddhism.

The essence of Humanistic Buddhism is “what the Buddha taught” and “what is essential to humans.” “What purifies” and “what is virtuous and beautiful” are the functions of Humanistic Buddhism.

Using these concepts to expound and interpret Humanistic Buddhism has allowed its doctrine to emerge profoundly and systematically for the first time. Therefore, we say
that he is the systemizer of the theoretical structure of Humanistic Buddhism.

At every stage of his life, he has made observations on the specific characteristics of Humanistic Buddhism and made many contributions to its theory and doctrine, as well as thorough planning for the conceptual blueprint in the later stages of his life. All of these make up the attributes of Humanistic Buddhism.

Using the concepts of essence, attributes, and function to expound and interpret Humanistic Buddhism has allowed them, and its doctrine, to emerge profoundly and systematically for the first time. Therefore, we say Venerable Master Hsing Yun is the systemizer of the theoretical structure of Humanistic Buddhism.

The ideological blueprint comes from practice

Not only has he systematized and profoundly expounded the fundamentals of Humanistic Buddhism, he also mapped out its basic blueprint. Moreover, the blueprint of Humanistic Buddhism is not merely the result of scholarly research in Buddhism, and not purely an idealized utopia. It is closely related with his practice. His theory of Humanistic Buddhism is derived from his exploration and practice of Buddhism, which have undergone thorough testing in practice and proven to be effective.

Before Venerable Master Hsing Yun, ideas and theories related to Humanistic Buddhism were neither systematic, nor complete enough, or were presented as scholarly theories that were unrelated to, and untested in practice.

Since the 1940s, Venerable Master Hsing Yun has explored, promoted, and established Humanistic Buddhism with unparalleled enthusiasm and unexcelled perseverance. From his personal practice, he gradually built up effective operational guidelines to put the theory of Humanistic Buddhism into broad practice. Therefore, the establishment and systemization of the theoretical structure of Humanistic Buddhism is Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s first major contribution to Buddhism.

2. Extensive Promotion of the Practice of Humanistic Buddhism is the Second Major Contribution of Venerable Master Hsing Yun to Buddhism

If, as a result of the achievements of the past one hundred years of the Han Chinese Buddhism modernization movement, and if “Humanistic Buddhism” is indeed a type of “new Buddhism” able to bear the weight of Buddhist wisdom and mandate, then it should
not merely be a system of thoughts and ideas, but should also include all the elements required to implement it.

Modern Humanistic Buddhism, a beautiful and splendid flower of ancient Han Chinese Buddhism, is the most vital and influential new form of Buddhism in the contemporary world. It is the new medium that will sustain Buddhist teachings, the transformation of humanity, and the future of Buddhism from the present into the future. Thus, it must include in itself the two main elements of “theory” and “practice.”

The pragmatic aspect of practice is just as important to the development of Humanistic Buddhism as the theoretical aspect. Without the element of practice, Humanistic Buddhism will ultimately become merely an academic interest originating from philosophical debate. It would be subject to different interpretations, and not the result of the spiritual refinement of countless Buddhist practitioners, their beliefs or experiences; hence, without an element of practice, it would not be able to carry out the mandate of guiding modern human spiritual practice and liberation.

From this, we can understand the importance of the practice aspect of Humanistic Buddhism, and be able to appreciate the extremely clear and distinct features of Humanistic Buddhism as promoted by Venerable Master Hsing Yun. In the past, many of the scholars observing Venerable Master Hsing Yun and the Humanistic Buddhism of Fo Guang Shan often got the impression that Venerable Master Hsing Yun was merely a Buddhist practitioner. Indeed, the extremely large, all-encompassing Buddhist undertakings of Fo Guang Shan can easily leave people with such an impression.

If we are familiar with the Humanistic Buddhism of Venerable Master Hsing Yun, then we realize that it represents the perfect unity of systematized theory and practice, thereby revealing his second major contribution.

Venerable Master Hsing Yun successfully promoted various undertakings of Humanistic Buddhism, enabling the pragmatic aspect of Humanistic Buddhism to be realized in a tangible way. This will allow it to be felt and touched at this specific time and place, where it shows itself brilliantly.

3. Establishment of a Large, High-Quality Monastic Community is Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s Third Major Contribution to Buddhism

Since Śākyamuni Buddha’s first turning of the Dharma Wheel in Deer Park,
Varanasi, guiding the first five monastics to begin practice and forming the first Buddhist monastic community (Sāṅgha), which has continued to be the core of the Buddhist faith. Buddhists call the Sāṅgha a “gem.” The Sāṅgha, together with the other two “gems,” the Buddha and the Dharma, have formed the fundamental pillars of the Buddhist faith, the Triple Gem. Over the last 2,000 years, considering oneself as a “disciple of the Triple Gem” has become the most basic and important way for Han Chinese Buddhists to realize their own faith.

Precisely for this reason, other than the development and promotion of modern Humanistic Buddhism as mentioned above, there is yet a third major work, and that is the establishment of a modern Humanistic Buddhist Sāṅgha.

From this perspective, we can understand Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s third major contribution: he is one of the truly significant founders of the modern Humanistic Buddhist Sāṅgha.

Since the construction of Shoushan Temple in 1962, and the establishment of the Fo Guang Shan order in 1967, he has ordained more than 1,200 monastic disciples. In terms of size, the Fo Guang Shan Sāṅgha community is the largest in Han Chinese Buddhism, ranking among the largest of all the current Buddhist traditions.

**Global disciples**

Among the more than 1,200 disciples in the Fo Guang Shan Sāṅgha, some come from Taiwan, and the rest from all over the world, including Mainland China. Therefore, the Fo Guang Shan Sāṅgha is a modern, international Buddhist monastic community.

The majority of the Fo Guang Shan Sāṅgha are well-educated, with more than 200 holding masters degrees and PhDs. It is, therefore, a highly educated, modern Buddhist Sāṅgha.

Moreover, although the Fo Guang Shan Sāṅgha is spread throughout the world in different Dharma centers, they generally abide by the ethical rule of “one teacher, one path,” falling in line with Fo Guang Shan Headquarters. Thus, the Fo Guang monastic community is a large, well-organized institution.

Just as in history, the Sāṅgha is at the core of the Buddhist Faith, symbolizing the “abiding” of Buddhist monasteries. The modern Humanistic Buddhist Sāṅgha, founded by Venerable Master Hsing Yun, also plays a role in providing a foundation for ensuring
the implementation of contemporary Humanistic Buddhist thoughts and beliefs. Hence, the establishment of a large, high-quality, organized, and systemized modern Humanistic Buddhist Saṅgha is one of Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s major contributions to Buddhism.

4. Placing Greater Emphasis to, and Active Participation in, Bringing out the Important Role of the Lay Devotees in Promoting the Dharma is the Fourth Major Contribution of Venerable Master Hsing Yun to Buddhism

The question of the relationship between the Saṅgha and devotees has been a fundamental question in Buddhist history. The traditional role of the Saṅgha was administering Buddhism, and the role of the laity was to support Buddhism. However, specific historical facts about the spread of Buddhism have made it clear that the actual mechanism and form of operation behind the promotion of Dharma activities are sometimes far more complex, at least in comparison to the traditional model. Therefore, a rational reflection on the question of the relationship of the Saṅgha and the laity, paying more attention to the role of the Buddhist laity in promoting the Dharma, is needed.

For example, as we know, the rise and flourishing of Mahāyāna Buddhism, before and after the common era, was closely linked to the formation and efforts of lay devotee groups at that time. A significant implication related to this is: Mahāyāna Buddhism’s theory and practice do not actually require an insurmountable divide to be drawn between the Saṅgha and the lay devotees.

Looking at the modern history of Buddhism, the lay Dharma centers of modern Chinese Buddhism, e.g. the China Inner Studies Institute (Nanjing Zhina Neixue Yuan), led by Ouyang Jingwu in the first half of the 20th Century, and the Taichung Buddhist Lotus Society, led by Li Bingnan in the second half of the 20th Century, have often played a similar role to the Saṅgha.

Moreover, some Japanese Buddhist monks living at home display an entirely opposite trend; the coexistence of both trends in Buddhism demonstrates the necessity to reflect deeply on how to rebalance the relationship between the Saṅgha and the laity in modern Buddhism.

The Establishment of the Lay Dharma Lecturer System

The Fo Guang system, founded by Venerable Master Hsing Yun, inherited the
basic tradition of Han Chinese Buddhism, still placing the Saṅgha at the center of the Buddhist administration. However, in the structure of the Fo Guang Saṅgha community, the lay practitioners are also given a certain status.

In particular, Venerable Master Hsing Yun established the Lay Dharma Lecturer System, in which lay people who are equipped with a certain standard of Buddhist knowledge and experience in spiritual practice, can become “Lay Dharma Lecturer System.” These teachers are qualified to promote the Dharma in public.

This Lay Dharma Lecturer System can be considered a significantly innovative way of providing systematic and standardized accreditation for lay Buddhists to promote the Dharma. Valuing and upgrading the role and status of lay devotees has, in fact, been one of the fundamental areas emphasized by Venerable Master Hsing Yun.

**Buddha’s Light International Association: an organization for lay devotees**

Popularization and socialization are the basic orientations of Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s Dharma propagation. One of the main intentions of popularization and socialization is to attach importance and concern to the role and position of lay devotees and the general public. In 1991, he initiated the Chunhua Buddha’s Light Association, and in the following year established the Buddha’s Light International Association (BLIA). It has already developed into a global Buddha’s Light organization with three million members, and at present is one of the biggest international Buddhist organizations in terms of membership.

BLIA regularly organizes general and executive conferences to discuss educational administration and build consensus, such as the 15th World General Conference held at Fo Guang Shan in Taiwan in 2014.

Historically, the undisciplined and disorganized nature of lay devotees was one of the major reasons why the role of lay Buddhists diminished and why the social impact of Buddhism did not expand more. The BLIA with its mature organizational and operational structure has effectively resolved this difficult historical problem in Buddhism.

Without doubt, in today’s society, the promotion of Buddhism will need to increasingly bring out the participation of the laity and even the general public. In particular, with a growing civil and information society, especially as higher education becomes increasingly popular, and in the wake of the popularization of Buddhism,
questions about the dynamic roles of devotees and the general public are going to become progressively more conspicuous.

From this point of view, the establishment of systems that promote the status of devotees and highlight their active participation is one of the valuable endeavors and major contributions he has made toward the development of Buddhism.

5. Advocacy for the Integration of Buddhist Cultural Knowledge and Beliefs is the Fifth Contribution to Buddhism by Venerable Master Hsing Yun

Historically, Buddhism is well known for its division into various schools. For example, a hundred years after the Buddha’s nirvāṇa, Buddhism had split into Theravāda and Mahāsāṃghika, and within 300 years Buddhism had divided further into twenty schools of Hinayāna.

Within Mahāyāna Buddhism, which evolved from Mahāsāṃghika, there was discord among the Madhyamaka, Yogācāra, and Tathāgatagarbha schools. Among Han Chinese Buddhism, which inherited the ideology and culture of Mahāyāna Buddhism, there were also eight divisions of Mahāyāna, and each proclaimed its correctness, and disapproved of the others, resulting in division and confusion.

Looking globally at the distribution of the cultural influence by Buddhism, again, there exists an even greater division, namely, Chinese Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, and Theravāda Buddhism.

This historical schism of Buddhism is not only a cultural phenomenon that intrigues Buddhist historians and scholars, but is also the most important reason why Buddhism still has difficulty integrating into a unified world faith.

Nearly two centuries of modern Buddhist scholarly research has provided new opportunities and methods for reintegrating Buddhist culture and beliefs. At the same time, it has also triggered fresh splits, or intensified certain inherent divisions. For example, modern academic research on the question of Buddha-nature, regardless of whether it is within the Chinese or the Japanese Buddhist domain, has become one of the major events that has re-aggravated and led to a schism in Buddhist ideology and faith.

Emphasizing the original intent of the Buddha

In short, modern Buddhist culture is in need of a reintegration of knowledge and
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faith to construct a new theoretical structure. This has great significance for mending the long-term divisions in Buddhist culture, and healing the wounds of the past century. This is particularly urgent in regard to strengthening the global unity and communication among Buddhist communities.

Venerable Master Hsing Yun believes that Humanistic Buddhism is the correct path for Buddhism’s development in the twenty-first century and beyond. The Humanistic Buddhism that he expounds emphasizes the original intents of the Buddha, and also echoes the modern social emphasis of “focusing on humans” and “social participation.” He advocates to create the balanced and mutually agreeable standpoints among all traditions under Han Buddhism, with other schools of Buddhism, between Indian Buddhism, Chinese Buddhism, early Buddhism, and post-early Buddhism, without being limited to one school or faction. On the one hand, he wants to highlight the original intent of the Buddha, and on the other hand to open up to all the resources of Buddhist thought and culture. Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s concepts and methods break through the closed-minded thinking of traditional Chinese Buddhism and overcome the exclusive attempts to integrate Buddhist culture by some Buddhist scholars, thereby promoting the integration of the entire Buddhist culture with skillful wisdom based on openness, interdependence, and harmony. It sets a standard and provides an example of how to integrate Buddhist knowledge and faith now and in the future. This constitutes one of Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s important contributions to Buddhism.

6. Successfully Modernizing Buddhism is the Sixth Major Contribution of Venerable Master Hsing Yun

Since the nineteenth century, human society has progressively stepped into a new historical stage of modernization. Although there has been uneven development in different countries and regions, and the timing for each country’s modernization may differ, it is an inevitable stage in the development of human society. This has proven to be a historical fact. There are many aspects to modernization, such as industrialization, urbanization, great and rapid advancements in science and technology, a highly organized social structure, the digitalization of management, a strong emphasis on instrumental rationality, a high value on the present reality of life, and the admiration of political values, such as democracy and freedom. Although more and more problems have emerged
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along with modernization, the pursuit and completion of modernization is an unavoidable
destiny of self-transcendence in human society. The situation is the same for Buddhism.

**Confronting the great historical test**

As an ancient religion, Buddhism once fulfilled a long-term mission of atonement in Asia. However, as human society entered into the development stage of modernization, Buddhism has suddenly faced with a great historical test; will it keep up with the times, implement the historical transformation to modernization, and continue to provide a way of atonement and liberation for humanity? Or, will it reject the call of the times and lag behind, ultimately facing elimination? This is a serious issue that all Buddhist organizations, all serious Buddhist scholars, and all rational Buddhists need to consider earnestly. Modernizing Buddhism requires not only the promotion of basic Buddhist values in a way that connects to and echoes modern social values, but also a fundamental transformation of the mechanism by which Buddhism develops. It is, therefore, a huge and complex systems engineering project. In particular, Han Chinese Buddhism is dependent on, and restricted by, its own contradiction between “tradition” and “modernity,” and a social environment where its economic and social development severely lags behind others. This results in a particularly intense collision between new and old ideas as they confront modernization and transformation. The internal and external challenges are particularly serious.

In the nearly 70 years of Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s work in Dharma propagation, the task of how to respond to the issues of the modernization of human society, and how to go about implementing the modernization and transformation of Chinese Buddhism, can be regarded as the center of his efforts. In his experience in Yilan in the 1950s, he became widely known for his daring use of modern technology to propagate the Dharma. He was the first to explore the use of modern television and movies to promote the Dharma, and continues to maintain a great interest in such media. The series of masterpieces written in his youth explain and promote Buddhism in a literary form. Notable works such as *The Biography of Sakyamuni Buddha* and *National Master Yulin*, written in his youth, show him to be a great teacher and promoter of the modernization of Buddhism using arts and culture. With skill and acuity, he has responded to the universal value of gender equality in modern society. The active advocacy of Fo Guang Shan for equal rights between men and
women, the great respect for the value of women in Buddhism, as well as the remarkable promotion of the female Saṅgha, can be considered as some of the most commendable reforms in modern Buddhist history.

**The need to contribute to society**

Venerable Master Hsing Yun believes that Buddhism must contribute to modern society in order to continue its existence and influence. Therefore, the key to modernizing Buddhism is to change the traditional stereotype that it has no social value. Buddhism must redefine its social role and actively strive to prove to modern society its irreplaceable value. The huge cultural and educational undertakings of the Fo Guang Shan social enterprises represent its proactive reconstruction of the social role of Buddhism in a completely transformed modern social environment. The modernization of Buddhism does not imply an attitude towards breaking with tradition. To the contrary, in the view of Venerable Master Hsing Yun, a rational balance between modern and traditional values that attains an equilibrium between preserving tradition and realizing modern values ought to be the correct path for Buddhism’s modernization.

Fo Guang Shan, founded by Venerable Master Hsing Yun, is a modern Buddhist Dharma center with many humanistic undertakings, including culture, education, charity, and Dharma service. At the same time, it also preserves, inherits, develops, and upholds the traditional core values of Buddhism. The Fo Guang system is the most successful example of modernization and transformation promoted by various Buddhist traditions around the world. Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s profound experience and accomplishments in this respect deserve further in-depth research and evaluation.

**7. Substantially Expanding Buddhism into the International Domain is Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s Seventh Major Contribution to Buddhism**

According to the data produced by the American Pew Research Center, over 80% of the world’s population have a religious belief. Among them, there are 2.3 billion Christians, 1.8 billion Muslims, 1.1 billion Hindus, and close to 500 million Buddhists.

This data clearly shows that, although Buddhism is one of the oldest religions in the world, it is still a minority among the world’s religions. It does not occupy an illustrious position in the global religious domain, hence Buddhism’s relative influence on human
society and culture is still limited. This is particularly true in the more economically and socially developed areas of Europe and America, which lead in modernization. Buddhism, to a large degree, is still considered an “emerging religion.” For this reason, progressing on the path of Dharma propagation, and expanding the presence of Buddhism internationally, are the major tasks confronting Buddhist development. Since the 20th century, the various Buddhist lineages have significantly accelerated their international development. Among the most prominent and accomplished are the global expansion of Tibetan Buddhism, Theravāda Buddhism, Soka Gakkai as a representative of Japanese Buddhism, and Thich Nhat Hanh as the representative of the internationalization of Vietnamese Buddhism. In the case of Han Chinese Buddhism, the global Dharma promotion of the Fo Guang system, led by Venerable Master Hsing Yun, is the most prominent accomplishment.

**Hsi Lai Temple as a milestone**

Around 1976, the Fo Guang system began to promote the Dharma in the United States. In 1988, the Hsi Lai Temple in Los Angeles, California was completed, marking a significant breakthrough in the progress of the global Dharma propagation of the Fo Guang system. So far, Fo Guang Shan has already established more than 200 monasteries, Dharma centers, and cultural and educational centers worldwide. These are the first steps to realizing Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s great vow of “May the Buddha’s light shine universally on the three thousand realms, and let the Dharma stream flow across all five continents.” At present, the Fo Guang system not only actively promotes educational administration worldwide, it is also mapping out a progressive plan to implement the “localization” of global Buddhism in the next 30-50 years.

One can expect that under Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s powerful guidance and the dedication of the Fo Guang Shan disciples, the Fo Guang system’s global road of expansion will be better and stronger in the future. The vision of promoting Humanistic Buddhism through “humanizing Buddhism” has potential.

**8. A Sincere and Heartfelt Effort to Promote Bilateral Peace Across the Taiwan Strait is Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s Eighth Major Contribution to Buddhism**

Cross-Strait relations is both a political and historical issue. An appropriate resolution of the issue relates to the peace and tranquility of Cross-Strait relations, the
welfare of the people on both sides, and the revival of the Chinese people as a result. Therefore, it is a significant question of direct and vital interest to all Chinese people on both shores.

Venerable Master Hsing Yun devotes his efforts to promoting Humanistic Buddhism, which has compassion and altruism as its fundamental values, and the active participation in society and even in politics. Therefore, the peace between Taiwan and China, which relates to the basic welfare of the people on both shores, is naturally a task of the highest priority, into which Venerable Master Hsing Yun has thrown enormous mental and physical effort and energy.

At the end of 1999, I was entrusted by Venerable Master Hsing Yun to preside over the compilation of *A Collection of Contemporary Buddhist Works: Chinese Buddhist Academic Series (Fazang Wenku)*. At that time, it was a large-scale cultural project aimed at arranging, compiling, and collecting outstanding Master and PhD theses from both shores. It was published in order to benefit Buddhist culture, scholars, and the academic circles of both Taiwan and Mainland China. I remember consulting the Venerable Master at the time on the goal of the project. His reply was: “In order to benefit the cultures on both sides of the Taiwan Strait.” This instigated my understanding of Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s close attention to the relationship between Taiwan and Mainland China. It was also through his earnest and constant instruction that I was able to personally experience his sympathetic and profound intention to actively push forward peace between both sides.

**Exchanges far and wide, promoting harmony**

In 1988, Venerable Master Hsing Yun held the 16th General Conference of World Fellowship of Buddhists at Hsi Lai Temple, attended by Buddhist delegations from both shores. In March 1989, he led a group from Taiwan to Mainland China in the name of “promoting the Dharma and visiting family and friends,” setting a precedent for future exchanges between the Taiwanese and the Mainland Chinese Buddhist circles. In 2002, he made every effort to facilitate the coming of the Buddha’s tooth relic to Taiwan, which received strong approval from Buddhists on both shores. The effects were far reaching, profound and lasting. In 2004, Venerable Master Hsing Yun began construction of the Fo Guang ancestral temple, and the Dajue Temple, in Jiangsu, Yixing. Today, the Dajue Temple has not only become a sacred Buddhist place in Mainland China, but also an
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important platform for the exchange and interaction of the civil society and Buddhist culture between Taiwan and Mainland China. Whether it be the Dharma work in Mainland China under his guidance, the Cross-Strait social and cultural exchanges he promoted, or the cultural and educational undertaking he has worked hard to develop in Mainland China, all of his efforts amount to an outstanding contribution to the facilitation of cross-strait exchange, as well as increasing mutual understanding, gathering of public support for bilateral peace, and the accumulation of good will. Venerable Master Hsing Yun has been received by three generations of the highest leaders of Mainland China, and his efforts in this field have received high recognition on both shores.

The cross-strait peace is a crucial component to the revival of the Chinese people. With the wisdom and compassion of Buddhism, Venerable Master Hsing Yun spares no effort in promoting this cause. His distinctive contribution in this area will not only be written into the Buddhist annals, but also into the annals of the modern Chinese nation!

9. Finding an Essential Path and the Correct Direction for the Future of Buddhism in Modern Taiwan is the Ninth Major Contribution of Venerable Master Hsing Yun to Buddhism

Taiwanese Buddhism has already spanned 300 years, with its early phase tracing back to the Ming-Qing interlude. After the Sino-Japanese war, Taiwanese Buddhism was greatly influenced by the extensive transmission of Japanese Buddhism.

In 1945, Taiwan was returned to the Chinese people, and Taiwanese Buddhism was given a new birth. In particular, around 1949, the Nationalist government moved to Taiwan, bringing with it the arrival of a large number of Chinese Buddhist monks. Taiwanese Buddhism had entered into a new historical era.

These intricate historical and current factors have made modern Taiwanese Buddhism very complicated, rendering its modernization and development with a very distinctive regionality.

For example, Taiwanese Buddhism is steeped in folk religion and beliefs originating from the southeast coastal areas of China. The task of removing the superstitious elements of these folk religions and beliefs, and to establish the foundation for Buddhism while still being inclusive, is highly complex. Taiwanese Buddhism was previously subject to the influences of Japanese Buddhism and Japanese culture in both positive and negative
ways. The task of removing the negative influences of Japanese Buddhism and at the same time borrowing, absorbing or even studying the modernization experiences of Japanese Buddhism constitutes the second complicated issue in the development of modern Taiwanese Buddhism. Additionally, in regard to the relationship between Chinese and Taiwanese Buddhism, Taiwanese Buddhism was originally part of the Chinese Buddhist tradition. The task of absorbing and taking care of the unique history, regional and cultural factors of Taiwanese Buddhism, while making full use of and maintaining the fine traditions and universal values of the Buddhism of the homeland, is the third and more complicated task.

Finally, Taiwanese society is facing declining government capacity, heated disputes among ethnic groups, conspicuous contradictions between social classes, and intensified division in society, all of which are causing disheartened sentiment and difficulty in reaching social consensus. In a corresponding manner, this state of popular feeling naturally manifests itself in Buddhism. Therefore, the promotion of modern Taiwanese Buddhism must meet head on with these innate social contradictions and divisions by applying Buddhism’s clear reasoning and rationality toward harmonizing anger and reconciling disputes. This can be said to be the most pressing and difficult task of Taiwanese Buddhism’s development.

**Elevating the Vision to Overcome Conflicts**

As we can see, Venerable Master Hsing Yun is a modern humanistic teacher, with deep prajñā (wisdom) and skillful means. The Humanistic Buddhism he founded successfully resolves the difficulties in the development of Taiwanese Buddhism. Not only does it create faith in Buddhism, but is also inclusive and allows for the transformation of folk religions. It restores the tradition of monastic precepts as the backbone of, and the Saṅgha as the core of Chinese Buddhism, and also gives value to the lay devotees’ faith, and to the various modern Buddhist and cultural undertakings. At the same time, it restores the balance between elements of Chinese and Taiwanese Buddhism, and also between Chinese Buddhist culture and Taiwanese Buddhist culture. Moreover, by employing the transcendental concept of “global citizens,” it inspires Taiwanese Buddhism to avoid falling into exclusive regionalization. The Fo Guang system founded by Venerable Master Hsing Yun represents significant progress for Buddhism in Taiwan.
in the 20th century. The early exploration, and the following development and maturity of this system have paved the way for the modernization of Taiwanese Buddhism. They have guided the development of modern Taiwanese Buddhism, and have continued to guide and standardize it. Therefore, it has made an important contribution to the modernization of Taiwanese, Chinese, and even Han Chinese Buddhism.

10. Providing Significant Inspiration and a Point of Reference for the Reform and Development of Mainland Buddhism is the Tenth Major Contribution of Venerable Master Hsing Yun

Venerable Master Hsing Yun came to Taiwan at the age of 22 to realize his grand dream for Buddhism. In recent years, his efforts have turned toward bringing Humanistic Buddhism back into Mainland China. His efforts will not be futile, for the experiences he has created, the problems he has encountered, and the way he has responded to these difficulties and challenges will inevitably become a profound source of inspiration and an important point of references for modern Buddhism in Mainland China.

Beginning in the 20th century, Buddhism in Mainland China has undergone many twists and turns in terms of its survival and reformation. From the Ming and Qing dynasties, it fell into the predicament of being marginalized by the mainstream. In general, the level of knowledge among Buddhist monastics did not surpass that of the general public. Similarly, the current level of knowledge among devotees does not surpass that of the general public. So far, this situation has not fundamentally changed. As a result, Buddhism to date is still far from being a commonly respected faith by society as a whole.

Mainland Buddhism has long been interfered with by radical “leftist” religious policy, the impact and ramifications of which still persist today, and have fundamentally altered the perception of religion, including Buddhism. In particular, an understanding of the essence of religion, including Buddhism, is still not widespread among religious administrators or the public. Moreover, in the past 30 years, Buddhism has consciously or unconsciously become a source of income for the local economy. The stigma of commercialization and secularization has profoundly affected the Buddhist community and the general perception of Buddhism today.

Under Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s lead, the Fo Guang system has modernized Buddhism. In the process of doing so, it has accumulated ample experience on how to
preserve traditional Buddhism’s basic and core values, while also responding to the needs of modern people and their values. It has managed to engage and interact with society while still preserving its traditional role and responsibility of purifying and leading society, to transform society without being assimilated by society. The Humanistic Buddhism founded by Venerable Master Hsing Yun has not only been effectively practiced in Taiwan for a long time, it also has considerable tested and verified results globally. The universal values it possesses are self-evident.

Creating the Fo Guang model

A great many of the learned and informed have recognized the important significance of Humanistic Buddhism for the transformation and development of Mainland Chinese Buddhism, and have been active in Dharma centers throughout the country. For that reason, we believe in the theory and practice of Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s Humanistic Buddhism. The Fo Guang model he established continues to profoundly influence the world today, and will play a major role in setting an example, in leading and giving guidance to Mainland Chinese Buddhism in the future, helping to break through the bottleneck and positively influence its future development.

The ten points discussed above represent an overview of the contributions of Venerable Master Hsing Yun has made to Buddhism. There are still many aspects of his contributions that have not been covered in this short article. As all views expressed above are my own, the list is far from being complete, and your comments and feedback are appreciated.

Notes

1 《歐陽竟無佛學思想研究》-Ed.
2 《華梵之間》-Ed.
3 《星雲大師人間佛教思想研究》-Ed.
4 《法藏文庫・中國佛教學術論典》-Ed.
5 《天問》-Ed.
6 南京支那內學院 -Ed.
7 《法藏文庫・中國佛教學術論典》-Ed.