

# HUMANISTIC FEATURES IN CONTEMPORARY CHAN PRACTICES: USING FO GUANG CHAN AS AN EXAMPLE

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## **Abstract**

From the transmission and lineage of the Chinese Chan School, the Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Order founded by Venerable Master Hsing Yun derives from the Linji School. The “Fo Guang Chan” initiated by Venerable Master Hsing Yun, emphasizes equal attention to faith and practice, the development of meditation and wisdom, and the practice of compassion and wisdom. This is evident in its method of teaching, curriculum design, setting, and delivery. It fully integrates with modern society, contemporary knowledge and conditions, and has started a new practice of Chan. Not only does Fo Guang Chan bring modern content to the traditional Chan method, for which it has received much attention within the Buddhist communities and academia, it has also made the humanistic features of Buddhism more evident through the widespread of Chan and its techniques of practice. This paper combines the philosophical development of “Fo Guang Humanistic Living Chan” and its relevant progress over several decades, and outlines how it integrated the traditional Chan method into daily life. Through the combination of daily life and the Chan method, the essence of Humanistic Buddhism, Buddhism for Daily Life, and Buddhism for Life can be better uncovered.

**Keywords:** Fo Guang Shan in Taiwan, Venerable Master Hsing Yun, Humanistic Buddhism, Fo Guang Chan, humanistic features

## **1. Introduction**

Venerable Master Hsing Yun (1927-) is the founder of the Fo Guang Shan Buddhist monastic order in Taiwan. His accomplishments are remarkable, greatly influential, and attract global attention due to his lifetime commitment to the promotion, practice, and development of Humanistic Buddhism. In explaining the characteristics of Humanistic

Buddhism as promoted by Fo Guang Shan, he describes its alignment with humanism, emphasis on daily life, altruism, joyfulness, timeliness, and universality. These are also the innate characteristics shared by Fo Guang Chan. It is therefore evident that from the perspective of Fo Guang Shan's Humanistic Buddhism, daily living and Chan are mutually and simultaneously essence and influence.<sup>1</sup> An intrinsic requirement of contemporary Chan practice is the integration of daily life and Buddhism that results in a unification of life and Chan. As such, Venerable Master Hsing Yun previously pointed out, "Once Buddhism deviates from daily life, it is no longer the Dharma we need, nor the compass that guides our direction in life...the Buddha's teachings are originally intended to improve our life, purify our minds, improve our quality of living...my lifelong goal is to promote Humanistic Buddhism, Buddhism for Daily Life."<sup>2,3</sup> If Chan is not put into practice in our daily life and if it cannot be a guide to how we should live, then it is not what people need. As such, the way to integrate daily life and Chan is, inevitably, through the proactive integration of Chan practice and the humanistic elements and tradition of Buddhism. Similarly, the Japanese Zen scholar Yanagida Seizan remarked in *Philosophy of Zazen*,<sup>4</sup> "Zen can be said to be the most carefree and most creative human thought."<sup>5</sup> It is timely to discuss how we can maintain Chan's humanistic philosophy and innate pursuit of freedom, ease, and creativity.

From the transmission and lineage of the Chinese Chan school, the Fo Guang Shan Buddhist order founded by Venerable Master Hsing Yun derives from the Linji School. The "Fo Guang Chan" initiated by Venerable Master Hsing Yun, emphasizes equal attention to faith and practice, simultaneous development of meditation and wisdom, and simultaneous practice of compassion and wisdom. This is evident in its method of teaching, curriculum design and setting, and delivery. It fully integrates with modern society, contemporary knowledge and conditions, and has started a new practice of Chan. Not only does Fo Guang Chan bring modern content to the traditional Chan method, for which it has received much attention within the Buddhist communities and academia, it has also made the humanistic features of Buddhism more evident through the widespread propagation of Chan and its techniques of practice.

This paper combines the philosophical development of Fo Guang Humanistic Living Chan and its relevant progress over several decades, and outlines how it integrated the traditional Chan method into daily life. Through the combination of daily life and the Chan method, the essence of Humanistic Buddhism, Buddhism for Daily Life, and

Buddhism for Life can be better uncovered.

## **2. Understanding Fo Guang Chan's Humanistic Tradition from the Perspective of its Ideological Source**

As a method shared across the Buddhist system of cultivation and realization, the practice of meditation is universal to all traditions of Buddhism. The Chan School is one of the sinicized schools of Buddhism, with many lineages, and has undergone many adjustments such as the Tathāgata Chan, Chan of Dividing Lamps, and Patriarchal Chan. In terms of how Chan corresponds to doctrinal schools, there are also practices such as *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*, Huayan Chan, meditation by chanting the name of the Buddha, and others. In recent times, accompanying the revival of Buddhism as a whole, the various Chan practices of different schools have also been given a fresh breath of life.

There are two major ideological sources for Fo Guang Humanistic Living Chan. One is from the ideology of Venerable Master Hsing Yun's Humanistic Buddhism—that Humanistic Buddhism holds true to the original intent of Buddha. The second, from the Chinese Southern School's Chan approach of application to daily life, as encapsulated in the saying, "Dharma has to be realized in the world."<sup>6</sup>

The Dharma lineage of Fo Guang Chan undoubtedly originated from the traditional Chinese Chan School, which can be traced back to Śākyamuni Buddha's transmission of Dharma to Mahākāśyapa, and continued in an unbroken tradition through the ages until it reached Bodhidharma, the twenty-eighth patriarch. After Bodhidharma's arrival in China, he became the First Patriarch of Chan school in China, and was succeeded in turn by Huike, Sengcan, Daoxin, and Hongren. A rift between Hongren's disciples Shenxiu and Huineng led to the sectarian split into the Northern and Southern traditions, which denoted the separate transmissions of gradual and sudden approaches to enlightenment. Following Master Huineng, the Southern School further propagated Chan Buddhism, and with the efforts of many generations of patriarchs, it finally evolved into the five houses and seven schools. Subsequently, Chan successively spread to Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and in recent times to other parts of the world such as Europe and America. However, by the time of the Ming and Qing dynasties, only two of the five houses and seven schools were in existence—the Linji and Caodong. In particular, the Linji School, widely known for its unrestrained customs and traditions, was the mainstream Chan

school by the Qing dynasty. As for Fo Guang Shan, it is a recipient of the Linji lineage.

Venerable Master Hsing Yun, the founder of Fo Guang Shan, is among the forty-eighth generation of disciples of the Linji School. However, he is also the first generation of the Fo Guang Shan, which currently has been transmitted to the third generation, with disciples all over the world, including Europe, Asia, America, Africa, and Oceania. He has about one million lay followers and around one thousand three hundred monastic disciples. Since Fo Guang Shan's founding in 1967, Venerable Master Hsing Yun has followed the cultivation and vows of the bodhisattva path, upheld the ideal and spirit of Humanistic Buddhism, continually worked to promote the Dharma through education, culture, charity, and spiritual cultivation. He has ceaselessly engaged in Buddhist undertakings to benefit all living beings.

Although Fo Guang Shan does not exclusively promote Chan, its meditation hall, customs, traditions, conduct, and rules, are tantamount to the glory of Chan monasteries a millennium ago. Not only does the main temple at Kaohsiung and the worldwide branch temples have meditation halls for lay practitioners to meditate, the main temple also has a meditation hall exclusively used by the monastic community for their long-term meditative cultivations. Moreover, at the beginning and end of the year, Fo Guang Shan accepts applications for retreat sessions from the monastics. Generally, the traditional Chan monasterial regulations focused mainly on the practices and daily activities of the monastics. However, Fo Guang Shan is accessible to both the fourfold Buddhist community and the general public to learn and practice cultivation.

As described above, the most direct ideological source of Fo Guang Chan is the philosophy and practice of Humanistic Buddhism promoted by Venerable Master Hsing Yun. At the same time, the establishment of Fo Guang Chan reflects the adaptability of Fo Guang Shan towards modern human psychological needs. As the *Fo Guang Shan Meditation Hall Rules and Regulations*<sup>7</sup> states:

In order to promote Chan practice, advance spiritual environmentalism, and allow practitioners to experience the Chan practice of Humanistic Buddhism, so that they may initiate the bodhi mind and practice the bodhisattva path, and recreate the golden age of the Chan School. This meditation

hall (Fo Guang Shan Meditation Hall), in accordance with the philosophy of the Buddha and the bodhisattva path, and upholding the principles and spirit of Humanistic Buddhism as proposed by Venerable Master Hsing Yun, hereby proposes a Chan practice which can heal the modern illnesses...of utilitarianism, greed, indulgence, values, is suitable for all to practice, and addresses the biological and psychological needs of humans. It is thus named Fo Guang Humanistic Living Chan, or simply Fo Guang Chan.<sup>8,9</sup>

Fo Guang Chan follows the path of the Buddha and bodhisattvas, upholding the philosophy and spirit of Venerable Master Hsing Yun's Humanistic Buddhism. It integrates collective and individual spiritual cultivation, having many aspects of traditional Chan practice while displaying the characteristics of modern lifestyles through its emphasis on daily living and action-based approaches. This integration of traditional Chan practice (including Buddhist teachings) into real life undoubtedly reflects the modern and humanistic nature of Fo Guang Chan.

It is due to the active propagation of Venerable Master Hsing Yun, the virtuous and influential Buddhist advocates, and enthusiastic young practitioners that Fo Guang Chan has become popular in Taiwan, and is gradually spreading its influence overseas.

### **3. Understanding Fo Guang Chan's Humanistic Spirit from the Perspective of its Ideological Essence**

The fundamental essence of Fo Guang Humanistic Living Chan includes the following aspects:

1. In terms of Chan practice ideology, Fo Guang Chan gives prominence to a mindset of ordinary, simple, and balanced. To explain, "ordinary" refers to common things, which contain the truth. "Simple" means practicing sincerely, which is the fundamentals of awakening. "Balanced" is the mental state of the middle way, which is revealing the intrinsic nature of the self. In short, these three refer to the mental state of the middle way with firm-based, and to experience the way of Chan from the common daily things. That is the

fundamental ideology in daily living applications and transforming the world for the better, which can be summarized as: “Do the best you can. There are no sacred solutions.”

2. Fo Guang Chan advocates the aspirations for faith, spiritual mind, and compassion that always strive to be better. In explanation, “faith” means to cultivate the faith of fulfilling the humanistic daily practice of Chan. “Spiritual Mind” means to cultivate the spiritual mind of transcending the five desires and afflictions. “Compassion” means to cultivate the compassion of a bodhisattva. Cultivating the faith of fulfilling the humanistic daily practice of Chan, aspiring the spiritual mind of transcending the five desires and afflictions, and having the compassion of a bodhisattva are the main components of practice to transform the world. In short, “Remain unchanging, yet adaptable to circumstances, with a mind of loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity.”
3. The meditation practice in daily life of Fo Guang Chan involves discipline, frugality, and gratitude. “Discipline” means observance of the pure precepts and routine life. “Simplicity” means to live a simple and plain life. “Gratitude” means to cherish the blessings in this life and cultivate merits for future lives. By observance of the pure precepts, disciplined routine, simplicity, gratitude, being content, and living a simple life are the fundamental requirements of practice to transform the world. It can be summarized as, “Abide by the precepts in daily life, be content and live a simple life.”
4. The meditation application of Fo Guang Chan is about implementing expedient and skillful means of living Chan, interests, and liveliness. The application refers to, be flexible in all aspects as practicing the living Chan, skillfulness in transforming the world as the liveliness of Chan, and respond to conditions with a non-abiding mind as interests of Chan. The practice of Fo Guang Chan should follow the principle of observing one’s aptitudes and teaching the Dharma accordingly. These meditation application of Chan which is demonstrated in daily living, interests, and liveliness of Chan, are the concrete embodiments of the adaptability of Fo Guang Chan to one’s aptitudes. That is by being flexible in dealing with natural life circumstances, responding to interests non-abidingly, as well as developing skillful and lively wit of Chan

are the fundamental concepts of Chan practice and of transforming the world. In summary, “Everything in life is *the way* and full of flavor.”

5. The meditative spirit of Fo Guang Chan lies in committed, fearless, and diligent practice. “Committed” means vowing to be a person who dares to assume responsibilities. “Fearless” means a person vows to practice without fear. “Diligent” means vowing to be a bodhisattva who never rests. By vowing to be a bodhisattva who dares to take responsibilities, who fears nothing, and who does not rest is the fundamental spirit of practice and will transform the world. In other words, “Carry out duties with faith in one’s own Buddha nature.”
6. The meditation intent of Fo Guang Chan is to find the inspiration of *prajñā* (wisdom), live at ease, and achieve bodhi (enlightenment). “*Prajñā*” means to discover intrinsic wisdom. “Ease” means to practice non-abiding ways. “Bodhi” means achieving *samyaksambodhi* (unsurpassed, complete, perfect enlightenment). By achieving *samyaksambodhi*, discovering the intrinsic *prajñā*, and practicing non-abiding ways are the ideal purposes of practice and help to transform the world. This can be summarized as, “Live with *prajñā*—live a carefree life.”

As discussed above, Fo Guang Chan is a comprehensive meditation system that adapts traditional Buddhist meditation techniques suitable for the modern public. To be more precise, Fo Guang Chan, based on the Dharma of the middle way and dependent origination, assimilates meditation and study into the rapid changes of contemporary life and culture. Fo Guang Chan is indeed a practice of Humanistic Buddhism advocated by Fo Guang Shan in Taiwan. This has objectively refuted the bias against Fo Guang Shan that Humanistic Buddhism is lacking the teaching of traditional meditation.

#### **4. Understanding Fo Guang Chan’s Humanistic Features from the Perspective of its Stages of Learning and Cultivating**

The best way to learn Buddhism is through practice. When it comes to studying Chan’s meditation, a solid practice is even more important. In general, there are sequential paths in meditation practices. The practice of Fo Guang Chan has the following eight sequential paths.

1. The path of preparation: to establish a sound character, take things philosophically, forge ahead, and be a humble, easy-going person. The objective of study is to nurture a grateful heart with filial piety. The study of morality or self-cultivation includes four items: (a) read books that encourage and inspire cultivation; (b) live a simple life with regular routines of work, rest, and exercise to maintain health; (c) honor your parents, revere your teachers, love your siblings; and (d) have gratitude in your heart and be kind to others.
  
2. The path of accumulation: take refuge in the Triple Gem wholeheartedly. Work to refrain from unwholesome conduct and practice wholesome acts. The objective is to cultivate a kind and helping heart. This path includes four items: (a) research into the foundational texts of Buddhism, listen and contemplate the meaning of the Dharma, so as to cultivate the right view of the Dharma; (b) to cultivate the right mindfulness on the Dharma by daily practices of prostration to the Buddha, repentance, and chanting the sutras; (c) practice generosity, volunteer, practice wholesome acts; and (d) uphold the five precepts, protect the Triple Gem.
  
3. The path of morality: cultivate right understanding and right view. Help sentient beings following causes and conditions. The goal is to strengthen vows and act with *bodhicitta*—an awakening mind. The subjects of study include five items: (a) listen and contemplate the meaning of *bodhicitta*, solidify the right view of *bodhicitta*; (b) practice the *paramita* of morality (*Śīla pāramitā*—the three cumulative commandments) diligently in life; (c) practice the *paramita* of tolerance (*Kṣānti pāramitā*—ordinary tolerance, dharma tolerance) diligently in life; (d) practice *paramita* of diligence (*Vīrya pāramitā*—recite, protect and uphold vows and act with *bodhicitta*) diligently in life; and (e) learn the intermediate level of contemplative meditation (loving-kindness and compassion meditation) and implement living Chan.
  
4. The path of concentration: eliminate the five desires and five hindrances, with every thought being clear and well aware. The goal is to achieve vows and act with *bodhicitta*. The subjects and methods include: (a) practice contemplative meditation in retreat (seven-day meditation retreat, meditation retreat), and (b) practice living Chan in every move (always be in the moment).



5. The path of wisdom: examine the law of dependent origination with right observation. Purify deluded karmic habits. The goal is to develop supreme *bodhicitta*. The method of learning is to: Focus only on a high level of contemplative meditation (contemplative meditation on the *prajñā*—the true reality) to attain a result (seeing *the way* bodhisattva) in a short amount of time.
6. The path of insight: cut off the two discriminating attachments to self and dharma. Stay away from greed, anger, and ignorance. The goal of study is to become enlightened with the supreme bodhi mind. The subjects and methods of study are cutting off the two discriminating attachments to self and dharma and staying away from greed, anger, and ignorance.
7. The path of cultivation: cut off further the two innate attachments to self and dharma. Help people with great compassion. The objective is to attain enlightenment with the supreme bodhi mind. The subjects of study and methods are pointed toward further cutting off the two innate attachments and helping people with great compassion.
8. The path of ‘no-more-learning’ (*asaiksa-marga*): perfect supreme bodhi. There will be no more seeing, cultivation, or realization. The goal is to perfect the supreme bodhi mind. The subjects and methods are pointed toward seeing nothing but seeing everything, cultivating nothing but cultivating everything, and realizing nothing but realizing everything.

What Fo Guang Chan has included above, however, the sequence for practice or the content structure, is already different from any traditional Chan practice. Besides, Fo Guang Chan has offered a great deal of contemporary Buddhist studies material. Without a doubt, the content still consists of canonical references of the traditional Buddhism and its Chan practices.

A further explanation of Fo Guang Chan’s method of cultivation involves a clear sequence of spiritual cultivation, which has two basic stages, “preliminary practice” and “core practice.”

Preliminary practice refers to the preparatory stage before formally cultivating Fo Guang Chan. According to the available resources, the preliminary practice of Fo Guang

Chan mainly includes three aspects, which are “daily life,” “character,” and “method.”

More specifically, “daily life” of the preliminary practice includes regular practice, frugality, cherishing one’s blessings, contentment, and simplicity in daily life. “Character” of the preliminary practice actualizes as being reasonable, optimistic, open-minded, humble, compassionate, determined, independent, diligent, repentant, and grateful. “Method” of the preliminary practice includes techniques for the elimination of karmic obstacles, such as chanting, prostration to the Buddha, repentance, and transference of merits, which accrue merits. These could be further divided into:

- i. the methods of accumulating merit, such as practicing generosity, volunteering, upholding precepts;
- ii. the methods of accumulating wisdom, such as listening to dharma teachings, studying sutras, contemplating the meaning of the Dharma (reflecting on the preciousness of attaining a human life, the important matter of life and death, impermanence, the suffering of *samsāra*); and
- iii. the methods of skillfully regulating the five matters, such as adjusting the body, regulating the breath, mind, diet, and sleep.

It should be pointed out that the three preliminary practices of Fo Guang Chan can equally be understood as assisting the path of practice, or effectively helping practitioners with the core practice.

As for the core practice, it is the essence of the Fo Guang Chan practice. It is further divided into three stages—beginners, intermediate, and advanced—of the progression from basics to advanced systematically and progressively.

Firstly, Mindfulness of Breathing is the beginners’ Chan practice. Specifically, it includes:

- a. counting breath in and out;
  - b. contemplating whether the breath is long or short, contemplating the whole breath, contemplating the subtle breath; and
  - c. other methods, such as chanting the name of the Buddha and reciting mantras.
- From a traditional Chan practice point of view, mindfulness of breathing originates from the five contemplations of meditative concentration in the Theravadin system.

Next, Metta Meditation is an intermediate Chan practice. More specifically, it includes:

- a. loving-kindness contemplation: reflecting and remembering the kindness of all beings, and
- b. compassion contemplation: reflecting and remembering the sufferings and afflictions of all beings.

Finally, the Wisdom (*prajñā*) Meditation is an advanced Chan practice, it specifically includes:

1. Non-self contemplation: reflecting and observing non-self in five aggregates.
2. Mind-only contemplation: reflecting and observing the nature of emptiness.
3. Middle way contemplation: reflecting and observing on dependent origination.
4. Self-nature contemplation:
  - a. the method of silent illumination: clarity in perfect tranquility, perfect tranquility in clarity; and
  - b. the method of investigation: living in the present, mindful of *huatou* (capping phrase).

As for the method of practice for Fo Guang Chan, such as the basic method of meditation (prepare for sitting, adjusting the body, regulating the breath, taming the mind, end of the sitting), details of each will not be covered here due to word constraints. What needs to be made clear is that Fo Guang Chan emphasizes on actual practice. However, the actual practice needs to be guided with Right View, so that one can progress on the bodhi path with calm and ease, not practicing blindly. On this view, Fo Guang Chan, based on the principles of Humanistic Buddhism as advocated by Venerable Master Hsing Yun, suggests the bodhi mind as its core values. Additionally, to assimilate the stages of enlightenment from both the Mahāyāna and Theravāda traditions, establishing a concrete sequence and method of meditative contemplation. Furthermore, depending on the degree of aspiration and practice of the bodhi mind, that determines the cultivation goals. This becomes the beginning of perfecting one's character, gradually prompting the aspiration and cultivation of bodhi mind, through the accumulation of merits and wisdom, and progressing to "ultimate bodhi mind" for the completion of buddhahood. Although Fo Guang Chan on cultivation in this world, the entire goal is the transcendental path of liberation and buddhahood. Without it, there would be no basis for the ultimate bodhi mind.

As described above, the stages of cultivation, goals and methods of Fo Guang Chan is clear in content, precise in goal, systematic in methodology, and holistic in framework. It is a compilation of evidence-based methods from traditional cultivation. It is grounded in stages of cultivation so its content is practical; it is unique in effectiveness for it is founded on the bodhi mind. It will benefit people in modern life and provide guidance in both mundane and supramundane ways.

## **5. Fo Guang Chan Originated in Life and Elevates Life Through Care and Engagement with Humanity**

To truly reflect the philosophy of Venerable Master Hsing Yun's Humanistic Buddhism, Fo Guang Chan has attracted more participation to this modern form of Buddhist practice. For this reason, it is understandable that Fo Guang Chan emphasizes the fundamentals of Buddhism. The realization state of Chan is like drinking water, hot or cold, it can only be experienced by the drinker, rather than described. However, the practical benefits of meditation and its related virtues can be elaborated for people to know. For this reason, Fo Guang Chan focuses on the benefits, achievements, and virtue of meditation, and is an essential way to promote the principles of Humanistic Buddhism.

In concrete terms, there are eight great benefits and merits in the Fo Guang Chan practice. These include effectively eliminating the pressures of life, enhancing bodily health, elevating inner cultivation, experiencing the joy of Chan, and eradicating greed, hatred, and afflictions, uncovering *prajñā* wisdom, seeing our pure innate nature, and completing the bodhi path.

To better adapt to vicissitudes of lifestyles, the cultivation of Fo Guang Chan emphasizes on other supporting methods. These supporting methods have brought about the cultural influence of Fo Guang Chan. These will be described briefly here:

1. The facilitating methods of Fo Guang Chan, such as prostrating to the Buddha, repentance prostration, taking vows, prayers, sutra copying, chanting, and others. Among these, in the Meditation Hall of Fo Guang Shan, sutra copying is highly recommended as a uniquely effective facilitating practice.
2. Fo Guang Chan as practiced in the dynamic daily life includes self-cultivation

such as observing the breath, reciting the Buddha's name, as well as "communal cultivation" that includes participating in group activities, volunteering, and Dharma service.

3. Fo Guang Chan's emphasis on "cultivation in daily life" includes a regular daily routine, moderation in food intake, suitable amount of work, perseverance in exercise, practice doing good and avoid evil, being kind to others, abstaining from alcohol and pornography, and faith in cause and effect.

If the Linji School is a representation of Chinese Chan in discovering and showing what self-nature is, then one can attribute Humanistic Buddhism in Taiwan as the catalyst. This influence can be considered as originating from the specialized and supporting practices of Fo Guang Chan. Hence, "the discovery of life" in Fo Guang Chan contains not only general implications for everyday life but also profound philosophical implications. As to why Fo Guang Chan in Taiwan repeatedly emphasizes the need for Fo Guang Chan to be applied in everyday life, and its Buddhist texts reference, Venerable Master Hsing Yun has often explained why.

Venerable Master Hsing Yun once issued a writing on the "*Discussion on the Benefit to Yourself and Others of the Six Paramitas*," of which is section five, 'Discussion on the Paramita of Meditative Concentration: Remain the Same in Movement or Stillness.'<sup>10</sup> In a concrete exposition, Venerable Master Hsing Yun firstly refers to "When minds are in a state of connectedness, there will be nothing that cannot be accomplished" in *The Sutra on the Buddha's Bequeathed Teaching*. Also "To hold all unsettled mind is meditative concentration" in the *Treatise on the Perfection of Great Wisdom*. These elucidate, "only by calming conditions and quiet contemplation, can one open up and reveal the original wisdom, understand one's mind and see one's intrinsic nature, thereby attaining Buddhahood."

Venerable Master Hsing Yun sourced from sutras and commentaries to provide an in-depth explanation. He specifically stated that sitting cross-legged, soft gaze forward, observing the mind, and alike, are not the essence of Buddhist meditative concentration. "Bare tranquility" like weathered trees and dead ashes are indeed not the original essence of meditative concentration. Chan is in daily life; if life is without liveliness, where can the essence of lively Chan be found? Chan is natural, Chan is co-existing with nature,

and Chan is unconcealed.

True Chan masters embrace all beings in their mind, live a light-hearted life, and in particular with humor and wisdom. In their minds, the world is full of liveliness, all beings possess Buddha nature, everything is lively and natural. True Chan teachings should be realized from daily actions like walking, abiding, sitting, and resting, to be practiced everywhere, and attain the state of “movement in stillness, stillness in movement.” The non-duality of “movement and stillness” is true meditative concentration. Therefore, Fo Guang Chan is just like Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s proposition of “The Buddha’s Light Philosophy,” which strongly emphasizes on humanistic living.

Venerable Master Hsing Yun pointed out, “If we do not promote a prosperous and happy life, then we are abandoning Buddhism in our lives, without emphasizing Buddhism in family and life. From today on, Buddhism will not be readily accepted by society at large.” What Venerable Master Hsing Yun promotes is not a Buddhism that abandons life, rather a Buddhism that engages in the world and society. It is a kind of “Buddhism for daily life.” Buddhism for Daily Life has become an important objective for the Buddha’s Light International Association (BLIA), founded by Venerable Master Hsing Yun with the goals of promoting Humanistic Buddhism, establishing a Fo Guang Pure Land, practicing in the world, and benefiting the world through loving-kindness and compassion.

It is with the ideology of “Buddhism for daily life” that Venerable Master Hsing Yun repeatedly described the humanistic implications of Fo Guang Chan on different occasions. He has pointed out that Chan possesses the nature of society, universality across time and space, disciplinary self-respect, and practical daily living. Among these, repeated emphasis is placed on the practice of Chan among the nature of society in the world, and seeing our nature to attain Buddhahood in practical daily living. The so-called nature of society, in fact, refers to the “realization of the truth can be found everywhere.” Practical daily living refers to Chan that is of non-duality gate, which means not separate from the world and everyday living. The realization of truth and methodology of Chan both originate from the present life, highlighting the essence of humanism in Chan thoughts.

## **6. Implementation of the Fo Guang Chan System and Its Humanistic Effect**

Fo Guang Shan Monastery in Taiwan has always placed great importance on the implementation of its system. Similarly, the emphasis on standardization of the system in Fo Guang Chan is no exception. It is well known that Chan is the school that has undergone the most thorough sinicization. The influence of the Chan school from the time of Bodhidharma to Venerable Sengcan, the Third Patriarch of Chan, was minimal. Each followed the previous Chan masters in focusing on solitary meditation, with little interest in building Chan temples. After the establishment of the monastic system and its rules, Chan's influence became far-reaching. It can be said that this completely changed the trajectory of Indian Buddhism. After the founding of the Republic of China, there are three monasteries well-known for continuing their development in the tradition of Chan monastery, and preserving the rules and regulations of a meditation hall: Jinshan Temple in Zhenjiang, Tianning Temple in Changzhou, and Gaomin Temple in Yangzhou.

In the past three decades, the Chan School has maintained its traditional status as a monopoly of Chinese Buddhism, and has therefore been able to develop more than other schools. Some of the more famous temples in Taiwan not only have their own meditation hall and facilities, but also have their own customs, characteristics, and practices of Chan, as well as having different approaches to benefit the people and society. For example, the architecture of meditation halls in Fo Guang Shan Monastery is a blend of the traditional and modern. It not only has complete facilities but also plays a large role in benefiting the community through Chan practice. In this sense, the organization and implementation of Fo Guang Chan are concretely embodied in the organizational structure and facilities of the meditation hall in Fo Guang Shan.

Among these, the most important consideration was the establishment of the Meditation Hall ("Chan and Pure Land Dharma Hall" in Chinese<sup>11</sup>) as the Fo Guang Shan Cultivation Center. For years, Venerable Master Hsing Yun and monastics had been carrying out their vows to propagate the Dharma, and strove to uphold Buddhism. However, it was missing a multipurpose cultivation hall for both monastic and laypeople. In light of the pervasive greed and moral degradation in today's society, a place for sitting meditation, chanting, and sutra copying was essential to enhance the spirit, improve the social atmosphere, and purify the minds in society. Therefore, Fo Guang Shan Monastery established the Fo Guang Shan Cultivation Center. For the convenience and benefits

of meditation practitioners, it is divided into two sections, one for monastic, the other laypeople. For the monastics, it is further divided into Men's Meditation College and Women's Meditation College. As for the laypeople, it is called the Meditation Hall. The entire meditation hall has already established as the Fo Guang Shan Cultivation Center.

The Meditation Hall of Fo Guang Shan Cultivation Center went through five years of planning and preparation, and took three years to construct. Constructed in Autumn 1993, it is located on level 3 of the Tathagata Building, behind the Main Shrine. It is a large and magnificent location for spiritual practice. Most Venerable Hsin Ting was the first Director. Later it was taken over by Venerable Hui Jih, and Venerable Hui Chao is currently the Director. Since the development of Meditation Hall, not only in its methods of practice, facilities, system, rules and regulations, daily living, as well as its customs and traditions of Chan, are well established and have had a deep influence on the practice of Chan worldwide.

According to relevant materials, there are around ten meditation halls in the Taiwan headquarters of Fo Guang Shan. The ten includes both the large and small meditation halls located within the Meditation Hall, the Men's Meditation College, the Golden Buddha Building—the Women's Meditation College, Men's Buddhist College and Women's Buddhist College of the Fo Guang Shan Tsung-Lin University, and also the two for in the basement of the Devotees Building. Amongst the meditation halls, the largest is the Meditation Hall located on level three of the Tathagata Building. It is a tranquil, solemn and modernized hall. It has an area of around one thousand square meters, equipped with both traditional functions and modern amenities. It is a place of meditation and routine daily activities for monastics of the Men's Meditation College. Also, it is also a meditation hall for laypeople. Attracting many keen practitioners, there are often various meditation retreats being organized at the Meditation Hall. On the other hand, the Meditation Hall in the Golden Buddha Building is available only to the monastics of Women's Meditation College as a place for meditation and daily routines, it is not open for public. There are two meditation rooms provided for devotees and the general public in the basement of the Devotees Building that always open. Other than these two, most of the meditation halls are used for training and cultivation, not usually accessible to the public.

Besides the headquarters in Kaohsiung City, Taiwan, there are also Fo Guang Shan



branch temples around Taiwan with meditation halls provided for public use, such as: Taipei Vihara, Yilan Lanyang Temple, Keelung Chi Le Temple, Yonghe Temple, Beihai Vihara, Sanxia Jin Guang Ming Temple, Yingge Meditation Center, Hsinchu Fa Bao Temple, Changhua Fu Shan Temple, Chiayi Nanhua Education Center, Tainan Lecture Hall, Bao Hua Temple, Pingtung Lecture Hall, Taitung Ri Guang Temple, and Hualien Yue Guang Temple. Other temples use their shrine or lecture hall if they do not have meditation halls. These include Taipei Pu Men Vihara, Banqiao Lecture Hall, Xinzhuang Meditation Center, Taishan Meditation Center, Sanchong Meditation Center, Tamsui Meditation Center, Taoyuan Lecture Hall, Fengyuan Meditation Center, Taichung Guang Ming Academy, Donghai Vihara, Caotun Meditation Center, Nanhua House, Talin Lecture Hall, Chiayi Yuan Fu Temple, Hsinying Lecture Hall, Shanhua Hui Chi Temple, Yongkang Meditation Center, Tainan Meditation Center, Cishan Meditation Center, Siaogang Lecture Hall, Kaohsiung Pu Hsien Temple, Fengshan Meditation Center, and Chaozhou Lecture Hall. All the temples have scheduled, non-scheduled, one-day retreats, two-day retreats, and other meditation classes that are organized for local Buddhists and the general public who are interested in meditation.

## **7. Conclusion**

Fo Guang Shan branch temples are assimilated worldwide and there are monasteries with meditation halls overseas. Within the Fo Guang Shan system there is the Fo Guang Shan Seoul Temple, International Buddhist Progress Society (IBPS) Hong Kong, Fo Guang Shan Dong Zen Temple Malaysia, and Fo Guang Shan Johor Bahru in Asia; Hsi Lai Temple in Los Angeles, IBPS New York, IBPS Houston, IBPS Austin, Fo Guang Shan Guam, and Fo Guang Shan Temple of Toronto in the Americas; Fo Guang Shan Temple in Frankfurt, IBPS Holland, IBPS UK, and IBPS Manchester in Europe; in Oceania there are Nan Tien Temple in Sydney, Fo Guang Shan Chung Tian Temple in Brisbane, Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Temple in Western Australia, and also Nanhua Temple in Africa. All of these locations have meditation halls. For those overseas branch temples that do not have meditation halls use shrines, lecture halls, libraries, and any appropriate spaces for their meditation activities. Examples of this improvisation include Fo Guang Shan Tokyo Temple, IBPS Bangkok, Fo Guang Shan Singapore, Fo Guang Shan Malaysia Petaling Jaya, IBPS Manila—Fo Guang Shan Mabuhay Temple, Fo Guang Shan Temple Berlin, IBPS Deer Park, IBPS Vancouver, IBPS Edmonton, IBPS Montreal, and others. All of these have attracted people interested in meditation for many years.

Just like the buildings of Fo Guang Shan monasteries, meditation halls in these monasteries also retain a traditional style while integrating modern equipment, such as lighting, air conditioning, and lavatories. Meditation halls in temples were traditionally only used by monastics. The meditation halls at Fo Guang Shan are open to the public. Every year, thousands of people come to meditate and visit these meditation halls. In the perspective of vicissitude in modern lifestyle and humanism, these meditation practices have a unique and far-reaching influence on people's lives. From this, we can see the diversified and multi-level humanistic effects that result from the long-term propagation and development of Fo Guang Chan.

## Notes

1 Sometimes also referred to as essence and function.-Ed.

2 「佛教一旦離開了生活，便不是我們所需要的佛法，不是指導我們人生方向的指南針。……佛陀的教化，本來就是為了改善我們的人生，淨化我們的心靈，提升我們的品質……我一生的理想，就是弘揚人生佛教、生活佛教。」-Ed.

3 Venerable Master Hsing Yun: "My Religious Experience," in *Venerable Master Hsing Yun's Lecture Series (2)*, 670.

4 《坐禪的哲學》-Ed.

5 「禪應該說是最自由、最有創造性的人類思想。」-Ed.

6 「佛法世間覺」-Ed.

7 《佛光山禪堂規約》-Ed.

8 「為了提倡禪修風氣，推動心靈環保，接引禪子體會人間佛教禪風，令發菩提心，行菩薩道，再創禪門黃金時代。本堂（佛光山禪堂）也依佛陀菩薩道的思想，秉持星雲大師弘揚人間佛教的理念、精神，具體提出一種能治療現代『社會疾病』……功利、野心、奢侈、價值觀混淆等，以及適合各種人修持，又能照顧到人性生理與內在需求的禪法，取名為『佛光人間生活禪』，簡稱『佛光禪』。」-Ed.

9 Hui Ri, "Fo Guang Humanistic Living Chan's Continued Tradition and Its Basic Context," *Fo Guang Theses* (1997), 257-258. 〈佛光人間生活禪之傳承及其基本內涵〉，刊載於《佛光論文集》，1997，頁257-258。

10 See the Humanistic Buddhism Reader, <http://hbreader.org/wenji/renjianfojiaolun007.html>.

11 禪淨法堂 -Ed.