

Humanistic Buddhism: Holding True to the Original Intents of Buddha Foreword

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(Translated by Venerable Miao Guang)

“What is your faith?” A asks B.

“Humanistic Buddhism.” Answers B.

“If your faith is Buddhism, then it’s just Buddhism. Why add ‘Humanistic’?” Asks A again.

“Because the founder of Buddhism, Sakyamuni Buddha, was not a god but simply a human being. The uniqueness of Buddhism is that it was founded by a human being, that is why it is called Humanistic Buddhism.”

“What is good about Humanistic Buddhism?”

“Just to name a few. Humanistic Buddhism purifies the body and mind, enhances our mortal ethics, makes us compassionate, helps understand ourselves, gives us strength to rely on ourselves, inspires us to help and accept others, teaches us the Truth of Dependent Origination, helps us uncover our wisdom to transcend the mundane world and attain a state of true ultimate existence, and shows a life of liberation and perfect ease.”

“Would any of these benefits disappear if we turn to just ‘Buddhism’?”

“Certainly not. Just as traditional Buddhism had branched into the Eight Schools of Chinese Buddhism. No matter which you follow, their essence is always the same.”

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“Then why bother specifying the belief of Humanistic Buddhism?”

“For over two thousand years, traditional Buddhism has been tainted by beliefs that, under the disguise of Buddhism, preached superstition such as divination by time, fengshui, geography, picking sticks, and fortune telling. Buddhism had almost been turned into a superstitious belief that worships deities and spirits.

As the saying goes, “Out of prevailing rules arises faults.” These misunderstandings have arisen due to the fact that the long periods Buddhist dissemination have enabled the infiltration of teachings and practices into Buddhism that have gone against the Buddha’s original intents. As a result, the Buddha’s humanistic character became lost, and the overall image of Buddhism distorted, which is a true pity. Without Humanistic Buddhism, how could the true identities of heretics who feed off the advantages of Buddhism have been exposed?

Today, we abide by the humanistic teachings of Buddhist masters such as “Dharma can only be found in the world, and enlightenment cannot be attained away from it” by Huineng the Sixth Patriarch, or “Who we shall look up to is none other than but the Buddha, and the goal that we shall pursue is none other than but the perfection of our character” by Master Taixu, for these are all teachings to urge Buddhists to unite as one and reinstate Buddha’s original intents.

As we look at Zhao Puchu and Venerable Xuecheng, one former and the other the current President of the Buddhist Association of China, are their endeavors not also the propagation of Humanistic Buddhism? A clear evidence is that Venerable Xuecheng has included “the establishment of Buddhist undertakings with the mission of propagating the Humanistic Buddhist philosophy” in the Association’s Constitution.

One of the most arduous tasks required of traditional Buddhism is to clarify false understandings and reinstate the true goal of Buddhism by tracing it back to the Buddha’s humanistic character. Is this at all feasible?

If it is, a common realization of what Buddha had originally intended to teach will arise among all Buddhists, and consequently, all shall realize the importance of advocating Humanistic Buddhism.”

“There already exist various traditions such as Northern, Southern, Tibetan, Japanese, Sectarian, and Early Buddhism. Then why add another one called ‘Humanistic Buddhism’?”

“In light of the complex system of Buddhist sects and terminology, which has caused deviation from the earliest form of Buddhism, we now hold true to Buddha’s original intents by tracing back to the historical facts of Buddha’s birth, enlightenment, teaching, and death, all of which had taken place in this world to call upon a faith in Humanistic Buddhism.

I have also come across many Buddhists, scholars, and professors who have mentioned the need to separate Buddhism and traditional Chinese folk religions as well as religions in deities and spirits. This is indeed a way of Humanistic Buddhism.

Indeed, in effectively eliminating fallacious views, correcting biases, and rediscovering right view and right thought, Humanistic Buddhism is a ray of hope to society that shall bring happiness and provide a means of liberation to all.

“What happens if people refuse to recognize Humanistic Buddhism?”

“This failure to recognize Humanistic Buddhism comes from their ignorance, lack of understanding in the Dharma, and ego. Not only do they not see Buddha’s original intents, they also do not recognize Buddhist history. For over two thousand years, Buddhism underwent heretic attacks, political persecutions, and had been subjected to public bias and misunderstandings. As a result, Buddhists were driven from cities into mountain forests, monastics confined to temple grounds and away from people, faith as a family legacy neglected, and awareness in the need to be of service and contribution to the purification of society have disappeared. Instead, the focus shifted to mere metaphysical discussions and inappropriate means of teaching Buddhism that hold a passive attitude in encouraging seclusion from the world rather than actively helping people.”

“Buddhism speaks of transcending the cycle of birth and death. Where would we go after that?”

“Where would you like to go? You would still be in this world. Even if

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you become a sage, a saint or even a Buddha, you still cannot be away from this world. All of the Ten Dharma Realms exist within our mind, for the mind embodies the great void and the entire universe. If not, where would you like to go?”

“I thought we will be headed to the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss?”

“The Western Pure Land is indeed one of our future abodes, but ultimately, a Pure Land is only a creation of the mind, while Amitabha Buddha is found in our intrinsic nature. Thus Pure Land is also found within this world.

Imagine a faith that only encourages individual cultivation away from society without having any regards for the people, how would this faith be of any help to the world?

It must be known that Buddha carried the original intention of helping humans when he spoke of the Five Vehicles. Only with compassion, prajna, and bodhi can liberation be sought. To participate in this-worldly endeavors with an other-worldly attitude would be a realization of the Bodhi mind.

“What is the essence of Humanistic Buddhism?”

“That would be Buddhism. Humanistic Buddhism is ‘what the Buddha taught, what is essential to human beings, what purifies, and what is virtuous and beautiful.’ The essence of Humanistic Buddhism is found within the Threefold Trainings--discipline, concentration, and wisdom. Its core concepts are found within Dependant Origination, the Middle path, and its mission found within guiding modern day people in finding peace and stability.”

“Is there an alternative to the name of ‘Humanistic Buddhism’?”

“No, there cannot be, because Sakyamuni Buddha--the founder of Buddhism was born in the human world to teach human beings to help them discover guidance and happiness. He never taught his Dharma to animals, thus we cannot attribute Buddhism to animals. He never taught it to deities or ghosts, therefore we cannot call it Buddhism for Deities and Ghosts. He never taught it to people with fallacious or superstitious views, thus we cannot call it Superstitious Buddhism. Having been established in the human world and taught to humans, it shall therefore be named ‘Humanistic Buddhism.’”

“Wouldn’t the ‘Humanistic’ prefix take away the sacredness in Buddhism?”

“Buddha claimed that all living beings have the buddha-nature. By admitting that we are buddhas ourselves, we are elevating ourselves to the same status as that of the Buddha, holding the same True-Thusness. Is this not sacred?

Is not your reliance on Buddha’s teaching on the Three Dharma Seals, Four Noble Truths, Twelve Links of Dependent Origination, Six Paramitas, the Bodhi Mind, and the Bodhisattva path also sacred?

When each of us keeps faith that Humanistic Buddhism will bring harmony, family happiness, a positive mind, and liberation, is this also not sacred?

Since Humanistic Buddhism is centered on human beings, the true Buddhist teachings shall carry the aim of finding ultimate happiness by relying on oneself, and the Dharma. Is this not sacred?

By reaching out to society and serving the people, are not the great ideals and aspirations of ‘propagating the Dharma to benefit living beings’ and ‘to reach for Buddhahood and at the same deliver living beings’ sacred?”

“Just as you have said, Buddha bore a humanistic character. Then where is he in this world right now?”

“‘The sounds of the creeks are voices spoken by the Buddha’s broad and long tongue; the mountains are none but manifestations of Buddha’s pure body.’ The Buddha’s Dharma-body has become one with the universe. So where is he not found?” The Buddha is found within faith. When you have faith and practice his teachings accordingly, then he will be found in your heart, and in everything that you do.”

“What are the benefits of having faith in Humanistic Buddhism?”

“Faith in Humanistic Buddhism shall lead to the purification of body and mind. With an open mind, you shall transcend all differences between the self and others, as well as free yourself from attachment, delusion, and affliction. Additionally, you shall feel the joy of Chan and Dharma. These are all benefits that can be attained through the practice of Humanistic Buddhism.”

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“Who are the advocates of Humanistic Buddhism as Buddha’s original intent?”

“Zhang Taiyan, one of the prominent Chinese thinkers once said, ‘Those claiming to be intellectuals cannot do without the Buddhist philosophy, because the Buddha’s teachings such as causes and conditions, and karmic retribution are universal rules applicable to all, and therefore important to all.’

Liang Qichao, one of the greatest Chinese scholars also claimed, ‘The Buddhist faith is one of wisdom, not superstition. It emphasizes the greater good over the lesser good, and advocates this-worldly mindset over an other-worldly one.’

In addition, Sun Yat-sen also said, ‘Buddhism is world-saving grace, the mother of philosophy; the study of Buddhism amends the biases of science. The Dharma serves as a supplement to the Law, the latter stops crime, while the former prevents them.’

His mother being a devout Buddhist, Mao Zedong mentioned the need to promote the outstanding Buddhist traditions and regard religion as culture, not superstition.

Albert Einstein once said, ‘Buddhism has the characteristics expected in a cosmic religion of the future: it transcends a personal God, avoids dogmas and theology; it covers both the natural & spiritual, and is based on a religious sense aspiring from the experience of all things in meaningful unity. Buddhism fits this description. If there is any religion that would cope with modern scientific needs, it would be Buddhism.’

Therefore, what is needed today is a consensus on Humanistic Buddhism, that it shall benefit humanity and resolve human concerns. Once these problems are resolved, what further problems could possibly arise?”

“What references and resources on Humanistic Buddhism are available?”

“After reading this book, you shall gain an overall understanding of Buddhism. Furthermore, by practicing accordingly we shall progress from being a human being to becoming a buddha. Our faith in Humanistic Buddhism shall lead us towards the perfection of life.”

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How difficult is it to read this book?

It is not. The book consists of six chapters:

Chapter One provides an overview of the spread of Buddhism across the world over the past two thousand years and its subsequent influences on different countries.

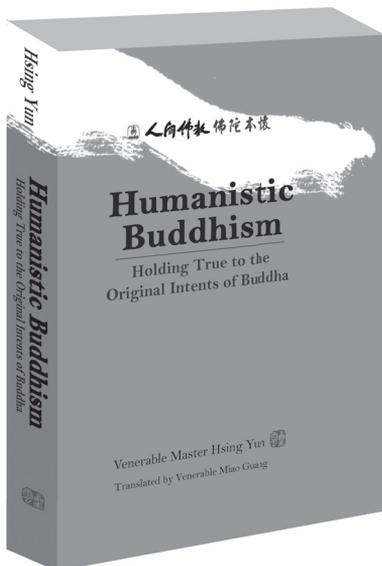
Chapter Two elaborates on Buddha's lifetime conducts such as his daily life and teachings to disciples, devotees, and society.

Chapter Three is a discussion on the core concepts of the Buddha Dharma.

Chapter Four expounds on the spread of Buddhism in China. Furthermore, Buddhism has already become an essential part of the Chinese culture. Without the elements of Buddhism, we would have trouble speaking the Chinese language. Without the spread of Buddhism, vegetarianism probably would not exist today. Even the elements of our daily routine, language, culture, and arts are deeply related to the Buddhist culture. Thus Buddhism is no longer just Buddhism; Buddhism itself is already a type of culture.

Chapter Five continues with the progress of Humanistic Buddhism.

Chapter Six concludes with an elaboration of the rise and fall of Buddhism.



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