



Interpreting the “Humanistic” in *Renjian Fojiao* (人間佛教) as Advocated by Venerable Master Hsing Yun of Fo Guang Shan

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1) Introduction

Sakyamuni Buddha expounded the Four Noble Truths as his very first teachings out of the intention of showing human beings the cause of suffering, and more importantly, to give hope in that such sufferings can be ended. For this reason, Buddha is often referred to as the doctor who tends to human beings in their very fundamental needs: fulfillment in attaining freedom from suffering. As human interests and values are given broader definitions, the Buddhist movement also becomes much more diverse in scope, giving Buddhism the characteristic of humanism on various aspects of life.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the elements of humanism traceable in the teachings and practices of Buddhism and find relevance between such and *Renjian Fojiao* (Humanistic Buddhism).

2) Types of Humanism

“Humanism” is a Western concept which arose only recently in the 19th century, and is defined in various ways. Literally, the word “Humanism” means a devotion to the humanities or literary culture. In Western Cultural Humanism, it is a rational and empirical tradition that originated largely in ancient Greece and Rome, and now constitutes a basic part of the Western approach to science,

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political theory, ethics, and law. In Philosophical Humanism, it is an attitude centered on human need and interest. In Modern Humanism, it is a naturalistic philosophy that rejects all supernaturalism and relies primarily upon reason and science, democracy and human compassion. On the other hand, Religious Humanism aims to meet human needs based on moral values, an inspiring set of ideals, or a rationale for living life joyously.¹ Each meaning of the word constitutes a different type of humanism, so as to avoid further confusion caused in the attempt to define each meaning, the basic categorization of humanism and each of their relevance to religion is provided as follows:



Humanism suggests that humans are the central criteria in all considerations.

1. Humanism in general is defined as a doctrine, attitude or way of life centered on human interests or values.² It generally prefers evidence or rational thinking over established doctrine or faith. Though calling itself religious, it substitutes faith in man for faith in god.³ In the 6th century BCE, Sakyamuni Buddha himself already expressed skepticism towards the supernatural. Under such context, the word “humanistic” serves as an adjective of humanism, which when precedes “humanism,” attaches the primary importance of this religion to human beings.

2. Secular Humanism embraces human reason, ethics, and philosophical naturalism, while specifically rejecting religious dogma, supernaturalism,

1. Edwards, Fred (1989). “What Is Humanism?”. American Humanist Association. Retrieved 19 August 2009.

2. Nicolas Walter, *Humanism – What’s in the Word*, London, Rationalist Press Association, 1997.

3. *Webster’s New Dictionary of English Language*.

pseudoscience or superstition as the basis of morality and decision making.⁴ It posits that human beings are capable of being ethical and moral without religion or a god. One of its fundamental concepts is the strongly held viewpoint that ideology—be it religious or political—must be thoroughly examined by each individual and not simply accepted or rejected on faith. Along with this, an essential part of secular humanism is a continually adapting search for truth, primarily through science and philosophy. Buddhist humanism focuses on relying on one's own efforts to seek the Truth rather than depending on some divine entity to help, that is, the humanistic attitude.

3. Religious Humanism is “faith in action.” It is an integration of humanist ethical philosophy with religious rituals and beliefs that center on human needs, interests, and abilities. Though sharing the same world view and the same basic principles with that of Secular Humanism, Religious Humanists draw a distinction by defining religion as that which serves the personal and social needs of a group of people sharing the same philosophical worldview which can only be met by religion, which offers the most lasting and universal set of doctrines. Furthermore, Religious Humanists ensure that doctrine is never allowed to subvert the higher purpose of meeting human needs in the here and now. They emphasize that Religious Humanism is without a god, without a belief in the supernatural, without a belief in an afterlife, and without a belief in a “higher” source of moral values. In other words, it is fully knowledge based on evidence being considered preferable.

To lessen the paradox between this and Buddhism as a religion, followers of Buddhism are simply following the instructions given by Siddhartha Gautama, a human being who, based on his personal spiritual experiences, discovered a way to meeting human needs, that is, to end sufferings and find happiness, which in the end, may lead to a world transcending experience. That is to say, humanity is avert from dependence on any type of god either for worldly gains or for spiritual enhancement and salvation. In his paper, “The Faith of a Humanist,” UU Minister Kenneth Phifer declares –

4. *Compact Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford University Press. 2007. “humanism *n.* 1 a rationalistic system of thought attaching prime importance to human rather than divine or supernatural matters.”

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*Humanism teaches us that it is immoral for God to act for us. We must act to stop the wars and the crimes and the brutality of this and future ages. We have powers of a remarkable kind. We have a high degree of freedom in responsibility for the kind of world in which we live rests within us.*⁵

In the same manner, for Buddhists, the attainment of enlightenment or discovery of ways to free oneself from suffering in real life depends solely on their efforts, not on any divine power.

While Buddhism as religion encourages unshaken belief in the Buddha, he as the founder always remained open to skepticism.

*Now, Kālāmas, don't go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, 'This contemplative is our teacher.' When you know for yourselves that, 'These qualities are skillful; these qualities are blameless; these qualities are praised by the observant; these qualities, when adopted & carried out, lead to welfare & to happiness'—then you should enter & remain in them.*⁶

If there were ever those called Secular Buddhist Humanists, they would be the ones to suggest that, even if there were a divine entity, it is perfectly fine to disagree with or question this entity. The fact that humans are offered the right to question shows that Buddhism is fully empirical based on the personal experiences before faith in this religion is established.

To emphasize the close connection between humanism and religion,

5. Kenneth W. Phifer, “The Faith of a Humanist,” (November 11, 2018). Available at <https://blog.supplysideliberal.com/post/2018/11/11/kenneth-w-phifer-the-faith-of-a-humanist>.

6. “Kalama Sutta: To the Kalamas,” *Anguttara Nikaya* 3. (Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu). *dhammatalks.org*. Retrieved from https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/AN/AN3_66.html.

the following are some examples of humanism regarded as an essential characteristic of religion:

1. Western Humanism is a contemporary belief calling itself religious but substituting faith in man for faith in God. It involves a shift from: 1) Supernaturalism to naturalism; 2) Transcendental to the existing; 3) Absolute reality to the living reality.

2. In the Rigveda, man is described as the “Child of Immortality” (Amritasya Putrah)

3. In the Mahabharata, it says that there is nothing superior to man.

4. Indian Buddhism teaches that each man must seek his own truth and that there were no permanent divine orders to help one in this search.

5. Indian sages such as Kabir, Nanak, Tukaram distinguished themselves with their sympathy, their understanding of the needs and interests of the oppressed section of the society and their apparent addiction to certain deeper sympathies. It is such charismas which they have displayed as ordinary human beings that deemed themselves worthy of respect and following.

6. What Buddha, Jesus (son of God), and Muhammad (messenger of Allah) have in common is that they were all real human beings found in this world to spread a teaching about a divine state of being.

7. Neo-Humanism is a form of reaction against the mechanism and dehumanization resulting from the overconfidence instilled in man by science. Humanism is now based on our understanding of man and his relation with the environment.

8. Contemporary Humanism incorporates man’s continuity with the rest of life, and the rest of life with the rest of the universe. Thus the elimination of “absolutes” is now an attitude towards and an approach to man’s life and values confined to his life here on earth. The focus is: interest in man, concern for man,



Indian sage Tukaram

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and faith in his reason and conscience to perceive truth and goodness. In other words, a contemporary humanist is a believer of the dignity of man instead of dependence on God for worldly gains or spiritual upliftment and salvation.

9. In Buddhist Humanism the following are emphasized:

- i. Universal compassion and unconditional compassion for all living beings.
- ii. To free human beings from worldly sufferings and help them to attain happiness.
- iii. In order to achieve the above, the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Noble Path had been taught by the Buddha to human beings.
- iv. Peace as an ethical imperative: Not a single drop of blood has ever been shed in the name of Buddha’s teaching. Though Buddhists had been persecuted by anti-Buddhist movements in India, China, the Middle East, and other parts of the world, no Buddhist king or association is known to have resorted to war for the propagation of Buddhism.
- v. Self-transcendence achieved through the idea of Nirvana helps the extinction of egoism or inordinate craving (source of suffering).
- vi. Individual self-culture sublimated into universal liberation of mankind.
- vii. The conception of the Pureland is demonstrated by the Sangha – Buddha’s miniature model of a humanistic society, where all differences between human beings disappear, and wisdom and moral excellence would serve as a tie to bind individuals together into a common humanity.

To sum up, Religious Humanism is the attitude which attaches primary importance to man and his faculties, affairs, temporal aspirations, and wellbeing: self-effort, personal experience, and a set of doctrine that guides one towards individual and universal liberation.

3) The “Humanistic” Aspects of Buddhism

First, the fact that Buddhism is a thoroughly humanistic teaching can be

seen in its close relations to humanism:

1) An emphasis on the uniqueness and unavoidability of being human –

*Sakyamuni Buddha was born into this world, He cultivated himself in this world, attained enlightenment in this world, and share with others the deep truths he realized in this world. The human world was emphasized in everything he did.....The Buddha's life as a human being can serve as an inspiration and as a model for spiritual practice on our own lives.*⁷

In order to become a Buddha, it is necessary for one to be born into the world of humanity, having first developed into a bodhisattva through countless rebirths in the world of humanity, and then spending a certain amount of time in Tushita Heaven. Thus Buddhism is largely an anthropocentric principle that only humans, and none other than humans, may become Buddha.

2) Of all categories of sentient beings, only humans have the capacity of receiving and implementing the Buddha's teachings – Only the characteristics of the human realm offers an environment that makes it possible for the Dharma to be practiced, and for humans to liberate themselves and others from *dukkha* (suffering) and enter the realm of the Buddha (i.e. to attain Buddhahood).

3) Buddhism values human beings as the highest or most ideal realm of being – only human beings have the capacity to develop the bodhicitta (the Bodhi Mind of Awakening) by implementing the Buddha's teachings, and subsequently attain *anuttara samyaksambodhi* (Unsurpassed Awakening), a state where suffering or conditionality no longer arise.

4) Buddhism offers a step-by-step path of spiritual cultivation leading to several intermediate levels and corresponding personality types, in order to attain the supreme state of buddhahood.

Based on the above, it can be said that the Buddhist teaching is largely humanistic due to two facts: 1) that humanity is regarded as both the object and implementer of the Buddha's teachings; and 2) only humans have the ability

7. Hsing Yun, *The Fundamentals of Humanistic Buddhism*, Buddhism in Every Step, vol.2, Buddha's Light Publishing. pp.3-5.

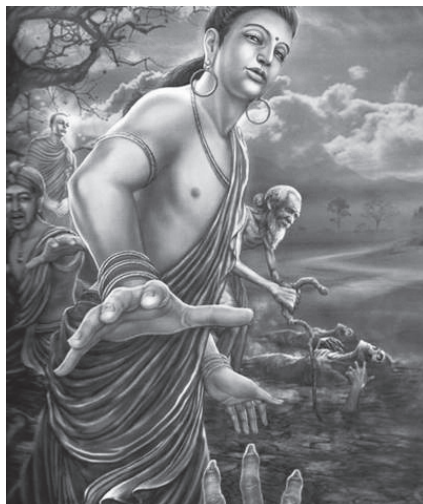
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to liberate themselves as well as other beings from suffering, which is inherent to the existence of sentient beings.

Secondly, as much as great Chinese thinkers such as Confucius and Lao-Tzu had pronounced humanistic teachings, Buddha probably has a greater claim to be called humanistic. Unlike them, Buddha was averse to indulging in metaphysical teachings. It was said that when he first went outside the palace, he saw an old man, a sick man, and a dead man, which made him feel that he was vulnerable to old age, sickness, and death. He then came across an ascetic who claimed to have renounced household life out of the fear of birth

and death, to attain liberation. After becoming enlightened, the Buddha taught his realizations to all beings in hopes of bettering human welfare. Out of compassion for humanity, he had dedicated the rest of his life to helping people relieve themselves from afflictions regardless of social status, race, or belief. Buddha had taught humanity an attitude of unconditional compassion and impartial loving kindness, joy, and equanimity.

With the goal of freeing human beings from worldly sufferings, the Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths and Noble Eightfold Path in the first turning of the Dharma wheel. Stating that ultimately there is suffering which is caused by desires, a path can be followed to reach the cessation of that suffering, namely, nirvana. In addition, the path stated above is the Eightfold Noble Path, which consists of a set of guides to how one can live the human life accordingly, namely, right view, right thought, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right diligence, right mindfulness, and right concentration. All taught out of concerns for the welfare of humanity, this is Buddhism’s humanistic attitude toward all sentient beings. The Buddhist ideal of human life is the extinction of



On Prince Siddhartha’s first trip outside his palace, his unease and doubts about life emerge on seeing old age, sickness, and death.

egoism, and the cessation of suffering.

There exist two major schools of Buddhism, the Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhists, which differ in the ultimate goal of human existence. The former ultimately pursues the goal of arhathood, which means individual nirvana achieved through gaining insight into the true nature of existence; while the latter pursues bodhisattvahood, which bases on the four immeasurable,⁸ to aspire for the liberation not just for the self but also for the rest of the living beings. The Mahayanist ideal is to sublimate individual attainment into universal liberation of humanity, which is how Buddhism envisages the possibility of universal ethics of humanity, which is just another name for humanism in the sense of the religion of universal liberation.⁹

*Buddhism teaches that all people are inherently Buddhas. I believe that this Buddhist view of humanity embodies a key and fundamental principle for world peace.*¹⁰

Buddhism exemplified itself as the earliest forms of religious humanism in the world. The “ideal world” in Buddhism is a world of bliss ruled by a compassionate and non-violent sovereign – a Chakravartin who does not rule by the use of arms, and does not conquer by force but by the means of



In Ancient India, King Ashoka ruled his kingdom based upon the principles of Buddhism. Pictured is the statue of King Ashoka in the Sichuan Museum Collection.

8. *catvāri-apramāṇāṇi*: the four kinds of meditation to give bliss to, and to take away the suffering of sentient beings; four minds of immeasurable concern for others: *maitri*, *karuna*, *mudita*, and *upeska*.

9. Kumar, Ashwani. “Humanism in Buddhism,” *Bulletin of Tibetology*, No. 3, 1988, p.4.

10. Ikeda, Daisaku. 2002. “*Dai 15 kai honbu kanbu kai deno meiyokaicho speech* [President Ikeda’s Speech at the 15th Headquarters Leaders Meeting].” *Seikyo Shimbum*, March 7, p. 3.

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Dharma. Furthermore, the Buddhist morality which Buddhist practitioners are expected to follow are: 1) Not to kill, 2) Not to steal, 3) Not to commit sexual misconduct, 4) Not to lie, and 5) Not to take intoxicants¹¹ are summarized into one very basic rule, “do not trespass upon others.” Such is the Buddha’s policy of peace, self-sacrifice, kindness, and generosity which protects living beings from suffering, fear, and danger.

*The philosophy of...Buddhism...undoubtedly represents one of the most comprehensive and systematic forms of humanism. It is based on naturalistic metaphysics, with causal dependence as its central theme. Rejecting any form of transcendentalism, determinism, or fatalism, it emphasizes its ultimate faith in man and recognizes his power or potentiality in solving his problems through reliance primarily upon empirical knowledge, reason and scientific method applied with courage and vision. It believes in the freedom of man, not in a transcendental sphere, but here and now. The highest goal it offers is not otherworldly but this worldly.*¹²

In sum, it can be said that Buddhist Humanism is founded on faith in the inherent dignity of human beings and profound confidence in people’s capacity for positive transformation. It is the practice of compassion and kindness towards others in the universe. Therefore, is humanism an essential characteristic of Buddhism?

- i. A broader and more meaningful interpretation of Buddha’s teachings is gained through the implementation of humanism – the fundamental tenets of Buddhism could be considerably better and more clearly comprehensible from the point of view of contemporary thought and rationality.

11. The *pañca-śīla*, the Five Precepts.

12. David J. Kalupahana, “Buddhism and Chinese Humanism,” p.11. A paper presented at a Symposium on Chinese Humanism, sponsored by the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy during a special session of the American Philosophical Association, March 25.

- ii. The conception of humanism can be broadened when the important aspects and meanings that are largely unknown or undervalued in contemporary culture, but are of key importance in Buddhism is added to it – the doctrine of liberation or emancipation.

4) Characteristics of Humanistic Buddhism as advocated by Fo Guang Shan's Venerable Master Hsing Yun

Questions about Humanistic Buddhism have been asked: What is Humanistic Buddhism? Who introduced it and when was it introduced? Is it similar to Engaged Buddhism? Should it be classified as Neobuddhism? Or Is it actually Buddhism?

*Humanistic Buddhism refers to a Buddhist movement originated in China and accelerated from Taiwan. Therefore it has been a greater contribution of Taiwan in modern Buddhism, which is a gift to the world that motivates to the model of social welfare of humanity.*¹³

More than half a century ago, Buddhism in Taiwan was no more than just praying to Buddha and burning incense sticks. The monastic community consisted mostly of the elderly who acted mostly as conductors of funeral services, and seldom disseminated the Buddhism as a form of teaching, let alone promoting Buddhism as a way of life. Very few people were willing to admit in public that they were Buddhists, as it would associate them with a belief that is passive and is only a significant part of life when death is involved. Things have changed nowadays, being a Buddhist means that one has the duty of showing concern to others. The Buddhist concept of compassion has transformed from passive to being active. Furthermore, Buddhist beliefs are no longer exclusive to secluded temples but have become a part of daily life.

The inception of Humanistic Buddhism began with Master Taixu's introduction of “*Rensheng Fojiao*” (Human Life Buddhism) in his article,

13. Christopher Queen, Charles S. Prebish, Damien Keown, *Action Dharma: New Studies in Engaged Buddhism*, Routledge Curzon, 2003.

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“Instructions to the Chinese Revolutionary Monks” in 1928, where people were encouraged to be a good person and practice the bodhisattva path because these are considered the prerequisite of Buddhahood. Human beings are considered the core of Human Life Buddhism, and through a transformation to bodhisattvas and then buddhas, the perfection of humanity and enlightenment can be achieved simultaneously,

*What is human life? I use the term ‘human life’ to refute the fallacies in the teachings of Buddhism by some people in the past. The Buddhist teachings may be divided into two: the Buddhism of the death and the Buddhism of the ghosts. Many people thought that the aim of learning the teachings of Buddhism is to encounter death in a painless way and to have good fortune after death. This is not the true meaning of the Buddhist teaching.....As I talk about human Buddhism, I emphasize the improvement of human life.*¹⁴

In Taixu’s mind, the idea is not to avoid this world but to make a better place out of it in the here and now. His views inspired monks of younger generations to take actions in “revitalizing” and even “revolutionizing” Buddhism. One of those monks happened to be Venerable Master Hsing Yun, founder of the Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Order.

Having gained so much popularity in recent times, most Buddhist groups claim to have a humanistic outlook. In fact, most such groups are more or less humanistic anyway, but a particular modern Chinese Buddhist organization called Fo Guang Shan (literally Buddha’s Light Mountain) calls itself an advocate of “*Renjian Fojiao*” (literally Human World Buddhism), or more commonly known as Humanistic Buddhism now.

This modern Chinese Buddhist thought, that is, Humanistic Buddhism, encompasses all of the Buddhist teachings from time of Sakyamuni Buddha to the present, and claims to propagate “all Eight Schools of Chinese Buddhism.” The goal is to follow the bodhisattva path, that is, to actively strive to help all

14. *Tai Xu Dashi Quanshu* (The Complete Works of Venerable Tai Xu), vol. 5, p. 218-222.

sentient beings liberate themselves. Humanistic Buddhism focuses more on the issues of the world rather than how to leave the world behind; on caring for the living rather than for the dead; on benefiting others rather than benefiting oneself; and on universal salvation rather than salvation just for the self.¹⁵

Although “*renjian*” is sometimes defined as “Buddhism between people,” or “Buddhism for human beings,” Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s theories of Humanistic Buddhism offer an even broader perspective,

*True Humanistic Buddhism attaches more importance to reality than to abstruse knowledge. It shows more concern to the masses than to the individual self. It lays strong stress on society rather than to the individual self. It lays strong stress on society rather than on the mountain monasteries.....Humanistic Buddhism as I understand it, aims at using the teachings of the Buddha for the improvement for our lives and the purification of our mind. We take the Dharma teachings of the Buddha as the basis for our life, thus making our life more significant and meaningful.*¹⁶

Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s interpretation perceives the real essence of Humanistic Buddhism in that it is Buddhism that advocates loving-kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity for humanity, and that it is Sakyamuni Buddha’s original intention to teach the truth to human beings.

*Humanistic Buddhism itself is not [a] new form of Buddhism but the new interpretation of the component that has already been imbedded in Buddhist Sutras and other Buddhist texts.*¹⁷

15. Guruge, Ananda Wp, *Humanistic Buddhism for Social Well-Being: An Overview of Grand Master Hsing Yun’s Interpretation*. Buddha’s Light Publishing. 2003.

16. Hsing Yun Dashi Jiangyenji (*A Collection of Speeches of Venerable Master Hsing Yun*), vol. 1, Buddha’s Light Publishing, 1979, p. 238.

17. Thapa, Dr. Shanker, “Chinese Origin of Humanistic Buddhism and Master Hsing Yun’s Contribution in the Contemporary Humanistic Buddhist Movement in Taiwan” (October 14, 2010). Available at SSRN:<http://ssrn.com/abstract=1692238> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1692238>

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He defines Humanistic Buddhism as a teaching that which 1) was taught by the Buddha himself, 2) is essential to human beings, 3) purifies, 4) beautifies and makes virtuous [all aspects of human life].¹⁸ Furthermore, the purpose of learning and practicing Buddhism is the attainment of harmony in various aspects of human existence:

- 1) Individual Harmony achieved through joy.
- 2) Family harmony achieved through deference.
- 3) Interpersonal harmony achieved through respect.
- 4) Social harmony achieved through cooperation.
- 5) World harmony achieved through peace.¹⁹

Very frequently, Humanistic Buddhism is designated as a parallel of Engaged Buddhism, or Socially Engaged Buddhism, because all of them in fact are concerned with human welfare. Yet, Humanistic Buddhism focuses on a much broader scope of welfare, one that is far greater than just the betterment of society, but also that of the individual well being attained through the actual practice and realization of the Dharma.

The term “engaged Buddhism” is attributed to Thich Nhat Hanh, who published a book by that title in 1963, according to Kenneth Kraft, *Inner Peace, World Peace: Essays on Buddhism and Nonviolence* (Albany: State University



All teachings conducive to increasing the happiness of human life are Humanistic Buddhism.

18. Manyi, *Humanistic Buddhism in the Hsing Yun Model, xing-yun-mo-shi-de-ren-jian-fo-jiao*, Commonwealth Publishing, 2005.

19. Venerable Master Hsing Yun, “The Value of Faith,” a speech given at the 2012 Summer Davos.

of New York Press, 1992), p8. ...the French term “engage,” meaning politically outspoken or involved, was common amongst intellectuals in French Indochina long before the 1960s.²⁰

A strong difference between Taiwan’s socially engaged Buddhism and the engaged Buddhism found elsewhere in Asia is in attitudes towards politics. Manifestations of engaged Buddhism are often strongly political, e.g. in Sri Lanka and Vietnam. In Taiwan, however, most groups formally reject direct participation in the political process. For example, while Fo Guang Shan founder Venerable Hsing Yun embraces the rights and freedoms that are prized in Western democracies, and emphasizes equality and democracy, he eschews interference in the political process: as Fo Guang Shan members, people should “show concern but do not interfere,” and lobbying for policies constitutes interference.²¹

Nonetheless, the elements of bettering the human life, be it Engaged Buddhism or Humanistic Buddhism, share similarity key elements: 1) the emergence of a leader who provides a charter for change, a model for emulation, and becomes a symbol of a new order; 2) role shifts, specifically a this-worldly asceticism directed to political and social goals; and 3) “a rationalization of the religious life” involving the discrediting of folk religious elements (such as theistic devotionism or ritualism) and an emphasis on mental and moral development through education and virtuous living.²²

Some examples of Buddhist movements are as follows:

1. The Buddha challenged the caste system. He stressed on the equality of humans of all classes before the law of Karma and, ultimately, under the law of the Dharma. The Buddha’s standpoint is that good life is open to everyone and the highest truth is the common treasure claimable by everybody; there can be no restriction because of castes or classes, and gender differences.

20. Christopher Queen and Sallie King, *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*, State University of New York Press. 1996.

21. David Schak and Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao, “Taiwan’s Socially Engaged Buddhist Groups”, <http://chinaperspectives.revues.org/2803>

22. Christopher Queen and Sallie King, *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*, State University of New York Press, 1996, p.7.

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2. Asoka: Inspired by the Buddha, his attempt to build a nation in accordance with the principle of humanism can be justified in a shift of government policy from military conquest to chartering the citizen rights.

3. Prince Shotoku: A Japanese prince who introduced Buddhism to his country, not only built a Buddhist temple, a hospital, a dispensary, and an asylum, but also inspired monasteries to built bridges and ferries, offer medical aids, and be involved with other social welfare activities.

4. The Ta Prohm inscription of Jayavarman VII of Kambuja (1181-1200 CE) states 102 hospitals built by this king across his kingdom to treat his people, and also rest houses along the roads, reservoirs, and other constructions that bettered the people's lives.

5. Dr. Ambedkar: Indian's fiery civil rights leader and statesman who, in protest of the unjust caste system, initiated the mass conversion of Hindus to Buddhism to gain freedom and dignity. His message to his followers was, “Educate! Agitate! Organize!”

6. Nobel Peace Laureate - the Dalai Lama's campaign for reconciliation since the Chinese crackdown in 1959.

7. Aung San Suu Kyi: Influenced by the Buddhist concept of non-violence, this revolutionary Burmese leader sacrificed relationships with her family for the good of her country by choosing to spend 15 years under house arrest as a peaceful resistance and

effort to draw attention to the human right abuses in her country. Her spirit of inclusion, patience and forgiveness allow her to be a unifying force for a divided country. “The only prison is fear. And the only real freedom is freedom from fear.”

8. Restoration of the Theravadan Bhiksuni Order: The questions and concerns of restoring the bhiksuni Sangha in Thailand and elsewhere drew attention to human rights, in particular, the issue gender equality. Through



Dr Ambedkar, the father of the Constitution of India.

international collaboration, the bhikkhuni sangha was restored in Sri Lankan Theravada Buddhism: in 1996 in Sarnath, the Korean order held a historic ordination ceremony for 10 women from Sri Lanka, and in 1998 in Bodhgaya, Taiwan's Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Order hosted an international ordination ceremony at which a further twenty Sri Lankan bhikkhunis were ordained.

9. The thriving of Buddhist organizations in Taiwan under Buddhist leaders who originated from China saw to a new wave of Buddhist development. Using the terms such as *Rensheng Fojiao* (Human Life Buddhism), or *Renjian Fojiao* (Humanistic Buddhism), Buddhist masters such as Taixu, Yinshun, Sheng Yen, and Hsing Yun pioneered movements that encouraged the recognition of oneness amongst human beings, the altruistic Bodhisattva practice that sought freedom from suffering for both oneself and others, as well as application of Buddhism into reality so as to help better society and the world.

10. Venerable Master Hsing Yun: One of the most prominent Buddhist leaders who founded the Fo Guang Shan Order that is an umbrella to over 200 branch temples across the world with a following of two million followers. His ideal of Humanistic Buddhism aims at ensuring that Buddhism is relevant to and fits the needs of modern society so as to maintain spiritual and physical harmony from individual, interpersonal, family, societal, to the world levels.



Map of Fo Guang Shan branch temples worldwide.

That the Humanistic Buddhist movement promoted by Venerable Master Hsing Yun is listed as the final in the list is to stress that his ideals cover the all scopes of that mentioned. With references to the Buddhist texts, he has considered the function of Humanistic Buddhism in ethics, morality, livelihood, emotions, society, loyalty and filial piety, wealth, long life and happiness, maintaining good health, loving-kindness and compassion, cause and effect, religion, life, knowledge, education and amusement, funerals and celebrations,

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nature, government, international affairs, and the future. It is his hope to help provide a blueprint for life and articulate the ideals of Humanistic Buddhism for all.²³

*Humanistic Buddhism is a basic philosophy of life that encourages us to integrate the Buddha’s teachings of kindness, compassion, joyfulness, and equanimity into our daily lives for the benefit of ourselves as well as others. In addition, it teaches us the ways to cultivate the wisdom that clearly understands the true nature of all things.*²⁴

5) Conclusion

The fact that Buddhism has been taught to help with the attainment of personal and worldly well being, it is largely humanistic in characteristic and holds the purpose of showing concerns for human interest and values. The word *Renjian* in Humanistic Buddhism can be said to hold the following purposes in the attainment of liberation:

- i. Individual liberation guided by the Buddhist path.
- ii. The recognition of oneness between human beings makes liberation whole.

*“Whatever joy there is in the world
Arises from wishing for others’ happiness.
Whatever suffering there is in the world
Arises from wishing for your own happiness.”*²⁵

- iii. Transcendental Humanism.



23. Hsing Yun, *Humanistic Buddhism: A Blueprint for Life*, Buddha’s Light Publishing, 2008, p.xxi.

24. Venerable Master Hsing Yun, <http://www.ibps.org/english/history/faq.htm>

25. The path of bodhisattva practice is mentioned as a core idea in Shantideva’s *Bodhicaryavatara*.