

The Ethics in Humanistic Buddhism —Studies on Venerable Taixu and Master Hsing Yun's Views on Ethics

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the three striking differences between Buddhism and Chinese tradition. The first challenge Buddhism encountered when it was introduced into China was the concept of filial piety, an indigenous tradition firmly ingrained in Chinese minds. There is no such strong sense of filial piety in Indian culture. The second difference lies in the six relationships Buddhist ethics and five basic human relations outlined by Mencius. The third issue is the equality of all living beings in obtaining the Buddhahood in Buddhist literature while the Chinese follow the Three Cardinal Guides and Five constant Virtues as specified in the ethical code that marked a rigidly stratified society.

Tremendous changes took place in the 20th century. Chinese Buddhists made modifications in order to suit the dazzling development of the era. Taixu raised the issue of Humanistic Buddhism aiming at revitalizing Buddhism in the difficult situation for survival. Taixu tried to integrate the Buddhist principles with the Chinese tradition with emphasis on Buddhist contributions to family, society, state and religion itself, thus pulling Chinese Buddhism back onto earth.

Master Hsing Yun has been the forerunner of Humanistic Buddhism. Basing on the concepts raised by Taixu, he further develops Humanistic Buddhism both in theory and practice. He has raised twenty issues in ethics regarding concrete practice. In the sixth topic, Master Hsing Yun presents his views on loyalty and filiality. Always far-sighted, he illustrates the attitudes of Humanistic Buddhism towards these two concepts. He is fully aware of the importance of both values in managing the state and bringing peace to the world. His expositions highlight the way of Humanistic Buddhism in dealing with a sensitive issue in the history of Chinese Buddhism for more than 1600 years.

Introduction

Buddhism was introduced into China over two millennia ago. Indeed, it took a long period of time for Buddhism to become part of Chinese culture. This sinicization process was marked by many interesting characteristics. As a foreign religion, Buddhism demonstrated its vitality and flexibility in taking root and growing in its steady development. It suffered setbacks when it had conflicts with Chinese indigenous religious traditions. It has been generally successful in adapting itself in the vast land of China and exerting tremendous influences on Chinese culture. It also spread to Korea and Japan and exerted great impact there.

I propose to focus on the views on Buddhist ethics of Venerable Taixu and Master Hsing Yun in the following four headings:

- 1 Three Striking Differences in Ethics between Buddhism and Chinese Tradition.

- 2 Ethics in Humanistic Buddhism Raised by Taixu.
- 3 Ethics and Practice of Humanistic Buddhism by Master Hsing Yun.
- 4 Some Reflections.

Three Striking Differences in Ethics between Buddhism and Chinese Tradition

The family is the base of ancient Chinese society and the cornerstone of all social ethics. State has been the enlargement of the family. In *Daxue (The Great Learning)* it is said:

The men of old who wished to make their bright virtue shine throughout the world first put in order their own states. In order to put in order their own states their first regulated their own families; in order to regulate their own families they first disciplined their own selves. In order to discipline their own selves they first rectified their own minds (or, hearts); in order to rectify their minds they first resolved sincerely upon their goals; in order to resolve sincerely upon their goals they first broadened their understanding of things to the utmost. The broadening of understanding to the utmost was accomplished by studying the nature of thing.¹

It is natural for the Chinese to adhere to the principles of “xiao” (filial piety) at home. Equally important is the principle of “zhong,” the loyalty to the state. The key values of Chinese tradition thus are “xiao” (filial piety) and “zhong” (loyalty). *Xiaojing* says:

The Master said, “Filiality is the root of virtue, and that from which civilization derives. The body, the hair and skin are received from our parents, and we dare not injure them: this is the beginning of filiality. [We should] establish ourselves in the practice of the true Way, making a name for ourselves for future generations, and thereby bringing glory to our parents: this is the end of filiality. Filiality begins with the serving of our parents, continues with the serving of our prince, and is completed with the establishing of our character.”²

In another passage, the scripture quotes Confucius:

The Master replied, “Filiality is the first principle of heaven, the ultimate standard of earth, the norm of conduct for the people. Men ought to follow the pattern of heaven and earth, which leads them by the brightness of the heavens and the benefits of the earth to harmonize all under heaven.”³

Mencius said, “Which is the great duty? Duty to parents is the great.... Among our many duties, the duty of serving the parents is fundamental.” “To have no father and no sovereign is to be like the birds and beasts.... These pernicious opinions mislead the people and block the way of human-heartedness and righteousness.”⁴ Any actions that are not in conformity with “loyalty” and “filial piety” are considered to be in violation of Chinese ethic standards. The value of filiality based on the blood relations and the value of loyalty based on the patriarchal clan system have been closely twined, forming a strong force of The Three Cardinal Guides and The Five Constant Virtues.⁵ Confucians often examine any ethic values of foreign cultures strictly with these

traditional Chinese standards. This could be the starting point of any cultural conflict between Chinese culture and foreign culture.

There is no such a word as “filial piety” in Sanskrit or in Pāli. But the concept appears in early Vedic Brahmanism as Mātrdevobhava Pitrdevo bhava (treat mother and father as gods).⁶ Hinduism recognizes that the principles that bring a healthy and fulfilled human life change throughout the course of a lifetime, and thus the Dharma scriptures put forth the ideal of four stages of life: student, householder, forest-dweller and renouncer. The Law-code of Manu (Manusmriti) states:

When a householder sees his skin wrinkled and his hair gray and
when he sees the son of his son, then he should resort to the forest.

In other words, the old men, having completed their responsibilities for raising children, they should go into spiritual retirement and become a “forest dweller.” The final stage is called “sannyasin,” the “renouncer” who breaks all ties to enter the last part of the path toward liberation.⁷ To certain extent, Sakyamuni followed this tradition. He left his kingdom at the age of twenty-nine and started his spiritual pursuit of enlightenment.

In contrast to the Indian ideal of renunciation, the Chinese emphasized the family ties. Mencius said, “Of three kinds of ungratefulness to one’s parents, the greatest is not to have a male descendant.” “The body, the hair and skin are received from our parents, and we dare not injure them: this is the beginning of filiality.” (From *Xiaojing*) These concepts certainly conflict with the Buddhist values of renunciation, and celibacy life that brings the family line to a halt.

In the earlier days when Buddhist was introduced into China, Confucians often accused Buddhists for “departing from parents, showing no respect to kings, giving up the six relations (father, mother, elder brothers, younger brothers, wife and children), and forsaking propriety and righteousness. They made father-son love distant, king-subject ties disagreeable, husband-wife relations neglected, and friends’ correspondence stop.”

How far are these criticisms of Buddhism justified? The Buddha was not altogether unmindful of family harmony and solidarity.

The *Sigālovāda Suttanta* states:

In five ways should the child tend to mother and father, the East:

- Being nourished by them, I will nourish them
- I will do my duties toward them
- will preserve the family and clan
- will protect their heritage
- will make offerings when they are dead

Thus tended, mother and father reciprocate: they

- prevent the child from evil
- inculcate the good
- have the child taught an art
- contract marriage with a suitable partner

- hand over the inheritance in time.⁸

In this translation of the Pāli discourse, there is no mention of “filial piety.” The Chinese version of the same discourse is somewhat more elaborate:

(1) Being son, he should follow five ways to his parents. What are the five ways?

- offering sufficient support to their life,
- letting them know what he is going to do before hand,
- being respectful and submissive with no objection,
- following parents’ instructions, and
- keeping the parent’s heritage.

In five ways, the parents should treat their sons:

- prevent the children from evil,
- teach them to be good,
- instill profound love into them.
- make arrangement for their marriage,
- provide whatever they need.⁹

In *Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra*, eight evils are criticized. They include the unfilial actions to parents, showing no respect to brothers or wife, or other members of the clan, and paying no worship to the ancestors.¹⁰ The Buddha condemned those who show no filial piety to parents, no respect to Sramanas, and practicing no benevolence or righteousness. These persons will go to yama hell when they die.¹¹

Secondly, the early Buddhist literature discussed the six mutual relationships in the *Sigālovāda Sutta*: parent-son, teacher-students, husband-wife, friends, master-servants, and śramanas and laity people. The discourse continues to state reciprocal obligations in each relationship:

(2) In five ways should the students tend to the teachers, the South:

- by rising
- by waiting upon them
- by obedience
- by personal service
- by studying the art diligently

Thus tended, the teachers reciprocate:

- lead the student into perfect discipline
- ensure that he holds on to well-established (norms)
- instruct him the lore of every art
- spread his reputation among their friends and companions
- provide for his safety in every direction

(3) In five ways should the wife and children, the West, be tended by the husband:

- by respect
- by not humiliating
- by being faithful
- by handing over authority

- by presenting jewelry

Thus tended the wife reciprocates:

- with duties well performed
- with hospitality to relatives all around
- by being faithful
- protect what is earned and acquired
- by being proficient and industrious in all duties

(4) In five ways should a householder treat his friends and companions, the North:

- with gifts (or generosity)
- with pleasant words
- by benevolence
- by treating as equals
- by not disputing

Thus tended the friends and companions reciprocate:

- protect when he is heedless
- protect his wealth when he is heedless
- become his refuge when in fear
- do not abandon him in adversity
- show consideration to his family and relatives

(5) In five ways should the slaves and servants, the Nadir, be tended

- assigning work according to strength or capacity
- providing food and salary
- ensuring health care
- sharing special delicacies
- Granting leaving as times.

Thus tended the slaves and servants reciprocate:

- by awakening earlier
- by going to sleep later
- by being content with what is given
- by working well
- by praising (the master) and spreading his fame

(6) In five ways should the recluses and Brahmans, the Zenith, be tended by a layman:

- friendliness in action
- friendliness in word
- friendliness in thought
- keep doors open
- supplying their needs

Thus tended, the recluses and Brahmans reciprocate:

- restrain from evil
- establish in the good
- love with kind thoughts

- teach what is not heard
- elucidate what is heard
- show the way to heaven¹²

Confucianism in a relatively concise manner emphasizes five basic human relations as outlined by Mencius:

Between father and son, there should be affection,
Between sovereign and minister, there should be righteousness.
Between husband and wife, attention to their separate functions.
Between old and young, there should be a proper order.
And between friends, there should be fidelity.¹³

Underlying the basic human relations is the principle of reciprocity. As Professor Tu Wei-ming pointed out, strictly speaking, man cannot become truly human if he does not feel the need to reciprocate the affections of other people. One's ability to relate to others in a meaningful way, such as in the spirit of filiality, brotherhood, or friendship, reflects one's level of self-cultivation.¹⁴

When we compare this part of ethic values between Confucianism and Buddhism, we see that the Chinese follow a route of patriarchal system in which the inferior must be responsible to the superior. The Buddhists, on the other hand, adhering to the principles of equality, object to the superiority of Brahmanism. However, as Buddhism took root and developed in Chinese soil, it quickly felt the strong influence of the totalitarian regime. Buddhists had to make adjustments by reconciling their doctrines with the Chinese environment. They had to bow down before the emperors. Venerable Daoan, the famous Buddhist leader in the fourth century, said that the cause of the Dharma could not be established without relying on the king.¹⁵ This concern fashioned the relations between Chinese Buddhism and ruling class. It also demonstrates the complimentary function of Buddhist ethics in Chinese society. On the one hand, it offers a positive ethical function to society and, on the other hand, it enlists the blessing of the ruling class. Even in recent century, eminent monks still followed this line.¹⁶

Thirdly, Indian Buddhism holds that all living beings are equal. Śākyamuni challenged the irrational concept of the Four Varna Caste system. He held that action and not birth made one noble or inferior. If one of high birth, takes life, steals or commits other bad actions his high birth will not make him better. All people, whether they have left the household to become monastic or stayed at home as laity, can obtain Buddhahood as long as they practice the Dharma. There is no difference between ranks regarding their achievement in Buddhahood. Monks did not have to bow down before their parents or kings. On the contrary, the kings and parents should show respect to monks even if the latter were subjects or sons: A stanza in *Da Zhuanyan Lun Jing* (Mahālankāra Sūtra Śāstra) says:

If people strive to practice the Dharmas,
You should care to which caste they belong.
Those who are born in the upper classes may do evil.
They are widely criticized.
As this is true, their names are actually low.
Those who are born in low caste practice the correct way inwardly.

They are widely respected.
As this is true, their names are high in esteem. Because they are full of virtues.
You may ask why they are not respected.
Evil-mindedness makes them look ugly.
Good will makes them noble.¹⁷

The Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues as specified in the ethical code mark a rigidly stratified society in China. The Three Cardinal Guides explain that ruler guides subject, father guides son, and husband guides wife. The Five Constant Virtues refer to benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and fidelity. In the last two millennia, the Chinese feudal regime was usually a strictly hierarchical institution. The stability of this institution depends on these rigid relationships between emperor and subjects, husband and wife and so forth.

Brahmajāla Sūtra presents a Buddhist parallel:

At that time, Sakyamuni, sitting under the Bodhi tree, obtained the superior wisdom. He summed up 250 precepts for monks (prātimoksa). It is necessary to show filial piety to parents, teachers of Sangha and Three Treasures. The filiality is a way as well as a precept.
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Sūtra Spoken by the Sixth Patriarch on the High Seat of "the Treasure of the Law" further elaborates:

For a fair mind, observation of precepts (Sīla) is unnecessary.
For straightforward behavior, practice in Dhyāna (contemplation) may be dispensed with.
On the principle of gratefulness, we support our parents and serve them filially.
On the principle of righteousness, the superior and the inferior stand for each other (in time of need).
On the principle of mutual desire to please, the senior and the junior are on affectionate terms.
On the principle of forbearance, we do not quarrel even in the midst of a hostile crowd.
If we can persevere till fire can be obtained through rubbing piece of wood,
Then the red lotus (the Buddha-nature) will shoot out from the black mire (the unenlightened state).
That which is of bitter taste is bound to be good medicine.
That which sounds unpleasant to the ear is certainly frank advice.
By amending our mistakes, we get wisdom.
By defending our faults, we betray an unsound mind.
In our daily life, we should always practice altruism,
But Buddhahood is not to be attained by giving away money as charity.
Bodhi is to be found within our own mind,
And there is no necessity to look for mysticism from without.
Hearers of this stanza who put its teaching into actual practice
Will find paradise in their very presence.¹⁹

In the reconciliation of the concepts of Indian Buddhism with the Chinese environment, there seems to have evolved a new concept of filial piety mixed with the Buddhist concept of retribution for good or evil deeds. On the one hand, the Chinese have to follow the traditional responsibilities to the ancestors. On the other hand, they

have to take the responsibilities for themselves so that they could arrive at the harmony of various relations and the self-cultivation for themselves. The concepts of hell, transmigration and retributions have exerted a positive impact in forming the ethical values.

Another characteristics of Chinese Buddhism is its this-worldliness. Wang Yueqing points out, Chinese Buddhists follow the value of benefiting themselves and benefiting others. They pursue enlightenment for themselves as well as for others. They believe that they can obtain liberation in this life. Chinese Buddhist practices meditation and engages in farming work at the same time. All these demonstrate that the Chinese Buddhist ethics and practice aim at saving all human beings. Chinese Buddhism is worldly oriented. Chinese Buddhists attach importance to worldly affairs and propagate the Buddhist practice for liberation among people.

As Wang Wei, the famous Tang poet, states:

All sentient beings are in Pure Land,
Buddhists do not separate from human beings,
They live among local people.
They are engaged in saving human beings from misery.
They are monks working among farmers and laborers.²⁰

The Ethics in Humanistic Buddhism Raised by Taixu

Taixu (1889-1947), a well known Buddhist leader in the 20th century in China, was active in the reform of Chinese Buddhism, aiming at invigorating it so that it might develop in this unprecedented world in which China witnessed vicissitudes of change and suffering. Seeing the decline of Chinese Buddhism, Taixu vowed to revive it by introducing the Humanistic Buddhism.

Taixu first used the term “Rensheng Fojiao,” a term slightly different from “Renjian Fojiao” (Humanistic Buddhism or Human World Buddhism). “Rensheng Fojiao” can be rendered as “Human Life Buddhism.” Some scholars argue that the difference between Human Life Buddhism and the Humanistic Buddhism lies in the fact the former refers to the universality of individuals whereas the latter refers to the universality in general. The Human Life Buddhism takes human beings as individuals while the latter considers them as masses. Human life emphasizes the transformation of the significance and values of the individual existence. Other scholars do not agree. They hold that the concepts of Human Life Buddhism and the Humanistic Buddhism are basically the same, because, according to Taixu, Human Life Buddhism lays stress on the perfection of human life.²¹

What is Humanistic Buddhism? Taixu answers:

Humanistic Buddhism tells people not to become either spirits or ghosts by leaving the human beings, or simply leaving the households for temples or mountain forests to become monks. Humanistic Buddhism is defined as Buddhism that uses the doctrines of Buddhism for the transformation of society and for human progress.²²

Taixu infused the traditional Chinese ethics into Buddhism. He urged followers to know the basic ethics of how to be a decent person. He illustrated this ethics of “paying a debt of gratitude” into four kinds:

- (1) Paying a debt of gratitude to parents' grace. The survival of a person is far more difficult than that of other animals.... It takes more than a decade for raising and education. From birth to adulthood, the parents exert a great effort. Thus, Buddhism teaches people to understand the grace of parents. To pay gratitude to parents is what is called “filiality.”
- (2) Paying a debt of gratitude to society. As human beings' daily necessities for clothes, food, house, and transportation, they not only have to rely on the masses in modern society, but also the outstanding achievements inherited from our ancestors. Thus, our existence for one day relies on the supplies accumulated from ancient times and made from every part of the world. Therefore, we should pay gratitude to the society, to all sentient beings....
- (3) Paying a debt of gratitude to the state. Although we were born and raised by our parents, and the society offers great assistance, yet we experienced natural disasters, invasions, bullying by the strong, ... The state institution plays an important role. It offers strength for order to secure the safety of the people of the country. In other words, the state institutions, law, arm, and police take the responsibility for the security of the people. Therefore, everyone should know this and pay a debt of gratitude to the state.
- (4) Paying a debt to the grace of Sacred Religion. With an understanding of the above-mentioned three kinds of grace, one is still limited. He remains an ordinary person because he is not guided to improve himself with an immeasurable spirit. He cannot escape the destiny of decaying with the grass and plants. Therefore, those who have received the teachings and guidance from the sages should understand the grace that improves human spirit. And Buddhism is one of the sacred teachings.... Therefore, we bring about the respect to it. We know the grace and would pay a debt of gratitude and make it an ethical behavior. This is the spirit that Buddhism teaches us to perform.²³

What is the human virtue in Buddhist studies? Taixu defined it as the human virtues based on the standpoint and view of Buddhism. Taixu said,

Many scholars and common people do not comprehend Buddhism. They criticized Buddhism through misunderstanding. They hold that Buddhism is non-virtuous and non-human. Especially in recent years, those who teach Chinese philosophy and life philosophy have made many mistakes. In fact, the doctrines that the Buddha taught were highly motivated for all people. His audience was human beings. All doctrines and virtues that the Buddha has taught are not separated from the humans.

Taixu elaborated the virtue of Buddhism to his followers with reference to the six directions first recorded in the *Sigālovāda Suttan*:

When worshipping in the East for the parents, they give rise to the feeling of filial piety and respect. When they worship the South, they should show respect as they do to their teachers. When they worship in the direction of the West, they feel as they show love and family harmony. When they worship the North, they just show respect

as they do to the prince. They should know the rites in which the prince and subjects encourage, help, support and become successful each other. When they worship in the upper direction, they should know that they are respecting sages, including the Buddha and all sages of all religions. Therefore, they demonstrate the appropriate worship and respect.. When they show respect in the lower direction, they should be aware of the righteousness in the relations between masters and servants. The masters should be kind-hearted and servants should follow what the master says....

The human ethics of Buddhism consists of Ten Virtues:

1. no killing,
2. no stealing,
3. having no relations with other's wives. This refers to the human behaviors,
4. in speeches, four things are included: no lies,
5. no vulgar words,
6. no gossip,
7. no cursing words.
8. In thinking, one should choose the correct means or ways, no greedy desires.
9. With malice to none or things. The opposite of malice is compassion and peace.
10. To all knowledge, one should try to understand with broad wisdom. One should not limit himself in his field. That would lead to ignorance.

Taixu pointed out that the ten kindnesses could be explained in terms of Five Constant Virtues: benevolence, righteousness, propriety, fidelity and wisdom. No killing means benevolence. No stealing stands for righteousness. No adultery refers to propriety. To abstain from lies, vulgar words, gossip words, and cursing words demonstrates one's fidelity. Having no greedy desires, no anger, and no ignorance shows wisdom. It is therefore concluded that the ten virtues in Buddhism are similar to the Five Constant Virtues of Confucianism. The Buddhist virtues are more in detail.

Taixu then illustrated his ideas on how to practice the Ten Virtues:

What is the definition of virtue? When we walk or sit, speak or keep silent, go out or come back, whatever we think or do, it will benefit others and us and do no harm. We follow this principle now and will follow it in the future. This principle of benefiting oneself and others at present and future is the definition. It is the basis of all virtues that Buddha has taught. Thus, we see that the virtues taught by the Buddha refer to the human virtues based on the principles of benefiting oneself and others.²⁴

In another essay, Taixu discussed the virtues of bodhisattvas and citizens in society. He said,

The Chinese have mentally mistaken the word "bodhisattva" as a pronoun for "idol." This is not true. "Bodhi" means the enlightenment. "Sattva" refers to sentient living beings. Those who have consciousness and knowledge are called living beings. Thus, bodhisattvas refer to

those living beings who are enlightened.... The bodhisattvas are those who have become enlightened ones but still are making progress towards the goal of final enlightenment.²⁵

Taixu lamented the miseries the Chinese were suffering at the time.

China has witnessed more than two to three decades of political changes and has not obtained the goal of equality and liberty. This is due to the fact that the Chinese people lack ethics. Therefore, the most needed thing for us Chinese is the ethics for every citizen. If we cannot cultivate ethics for citizens, we would not have a single peaceful day in building a modern society no matter what changes have taken place in the army, government or enterprises. ... In order to build a state ruled with democracy, we should cultivate the essential element of ethics for citizens. The first point of ethics for all citizens is to let all people know that all people are equal. In other words, all are regarded as brothers. Bearing this idea in mind, we all will take the interests of the masses in society and state as the pre-condition. This is the starting point when we do anything. We make it the actions of bodhisattvas—the common ethics for citizens. In this way, people may get rid of the sufferings in their own strife, giving rise to the sympathy and empathy. They may benefit peace and happiness from this. When people of the country share this interest, we too share it. ... If everybody possesses this ethics, then all can realize a society with democracy. However, China has suffered a lot with her old habits, it is far from easy to cultivate such ethics for all citizens. If we can find a bodhisattva outlook through our studies of the Buddha's teachings, it would not be difficult to realize the goal of citizen ethics. Therefore, our most urgent need is to cultivate citizen ethics from the life outlook of the bodhisattava...²⁶

The way of Bodhisattva is to synthesize the tradition ethics of ancient sages. The propriety, righteousness, the sense of honor and shame, are also the ethical crystallization of our ancestors. To implement these into the individuals, family and society, and whole nation is the goal of the New Life Movement.²⁷

Taixu claimed that Human Life Buddhism aims at the improvement of human life. Buddhists use the five regulations, namely, no killing, stealing, adultery, lying, intoxicating liquors, and purification of human beings. If people could follow the essence of Buddhist doctrines in their ethics, socio-economy, education, law, and politics, and international justice, they could make the society much better.

Taixu held the view that in our present society, science has been advancing rapidly. People make new weapons. If we do not apply ethics to restrain the use of these weapons and bring them under control, they may cause disasters to mankind. It is necessary to introduce religion with a high sense of morality.²⁸

Taixu made four comments on the aims of the Human Life Buddhism. The first one was to improve the human world by introducing the Five Precepts as state above. The other three aims are more or less other-worldly. They pursue good karmas for the next generation, the halt of transmigration, and the realization of Buddha fruit. He emphasized:

The old Buddhism is separate from reality. Therefore, it cannot help people to realize the effects of perfect teachings of Buddhism. Now I advocate Human Life Buddhism that aims at perfection and purification of people, basing on the practical life. In other words, people practice the Vehicle for humans for a complete understanding of the truth of Dharma...leading to the perfect result of Dharma world.

The Humanistic Buddhism aims at human progress and a better society. It has no intention to persuade more people to practice asceticism in monasteries. The Humanistic Buddhism does not encourage people to leave the world. It is due to the need of the people in the world to build Humanistic Buddhism, thus building a broad way leading to brightness and the improvement of the world.²⁹

We can see that the ethical values in Humanistic Buddhism as explained by Taixu follow the traditional route of combining the Confucian ethics and Buddhist ethics. Taixu raised these issues in Humanistic Buddhism in order to revitalize Chinese Buddhism. He far-sightedly warned Chinese not to follow the ways of the West, nor of the Russians. Unfortunately, his voice was drowned by the chaotic turmoil in the 20th century China.

Master Hsing Yun's Views on Humanistic Ethics

In the recent issue of *Pumen (Universal Gate Journal)*, Master Hsing Yun elaborated his concept of Humanistic Buddhism in twenty subcategories in a comprehensive article, which is at present available only in Chinese. These 20 topics cover all aspects, including ethics, and I plan to concentrate on (1) ethics—the way to live a good life, and (6) filial piety and loyalty—the way to establish oneself.

First and foremost, the Master offers his definition of the Humanistic Buddhism:

The so-called Humanistic Buddhism is not concerned with a particular area or nation. Originally, Humanistic Buddhism is the religious teaching that the Buddha taught the common people. The Humanistic Buddhism lays stress on the teaching to the whole world. Any person, any organization would be accepted by broad masses if they make any political and economical contributions to society. Similarly, Buddhism must play a supporting role in this period, offering people joy and happiness and making contributions to the country. This kind of Buddhism is worthy of existence, otherwise, it would fall into oblivion.... The concept of Humanistic Buddhism comes from the Buddha himself. The Buddha was born in the world. He practiced and got enlightened in the world. He enlightened people in the world. Everything he did was for the human world. Therefore, the founder himself was human Buddha. What he propagated was the Humanistic Buddhism. ...

Humanistic Buddhism is the Buddhism that human life needs. In the past, due to the erroneous guidance of some people, Buddhists attached importance to the practice in mountains for the next world. Now we will bring Buddhism from the mountains down to the society, from temple to family, propagating Buddhism in the world. Thus, we make life and family perfectly satisfactory. We make our spirit harmonious with the

world. The International Buddha Light Association has a hymn with these words:

Bring compassionate love and happiness to the whole world;

Cherish happiness and create affinity to benefit human beings and the heaven;

Practice meditation, follow the regulations, treat people on equal footing and be tolerant.

I feel that I have not done good enough and will pay a debt of gratitude to all.

The hymn explains the bodhisattva feelings in the Humanistic Buddhism. It may be said that the Humanistic Buddhism, taking human beings and family as its basis and bringing equality and universality to save all sentient beings like Avalokiteśvara who has great compassionate love for all, is also defended as implementing the Buddhist teachings in life.

The Humanistic Buddhism attaches importance to the ethical purification in life and the sublimation of the spirit. If you believe the principles of cause-effect, you may use it in your life, because cause-effect itself is Humanistic Buddhism. You may enjoy the compassionate love in your life as long as you believe in compassion because compassionate love is Humanistic Buddhism. The Three Surrenders to Buddha, the Dharma and Sangha, the Five Silas, the Six Paramitas, and Ten Kindnesses are Humanistic Buddhism. The Humanistic Buddhism is the Buddhism to save masses from miseries. I define all activities as Humanistic Buddhism. This may include many things: writing books, establishing schools for education, building temples, keeping vegetarian food, lecturing the Dharmas, sweeping the streets and environment protection, participating in all activities, education and culture, treatment of the patients, caring for the elderly and the young, transmitting the precepts, Buddhist lectures, pilgrimage, uttering Buddha's name in practice, taking the test of Buddhist knowledge, attending the concert of Buddhist music, propagation of wisdom and precepts in the army, in the village, and relationships of cause, the circular truth of cause-effect, the achievements made by the karma for the good, the world of emptiness, the perfect wisdom of truths, all these are Humanistic Buddhism.

Humanistic Buddhism attaches more importance to reality than theory. It stresses masses rather than individuals, the society rather than individual mountains. It prefers to benefit others and oneself. Whatever teaching methods may make human life happy are defined as Humanistic Buddhism.³⁰

Master Hsing Yun has been practicing Humanistic Buddhism for over a decade, and has accumulated rich experiences as regards to his down-to-earth strategies in integrating the principles of Buddhism with the concrete practice in Taiwan, the US and other parts of the world.

Master Hsing Yun reiterates that the ethics in Buddhism is an important link in forming cordial relationships among family members. Family has been the center of individual life. Filiality is the beginning of ethics. Buddhists hold that the filiality and gratitude to parents' grace are one of Four Graces.³¹

He also advised lay followers to take good care of their parents before it is too late. Master Hsing Yun further elaborates the five obligations stated in *Sigālovāda Suttanta*.

In the sixth topic, Master Hsing Yun presents his views on loyalty and filiality. He is fully aware of the importance of both values in managing the state and bringing peace to the world in Chinese perspective.

Master Hsing Yun offers his insight into the understanding of the concepts of “loyalty” and “filial piety” for the contemporary era. He tells people to avoid the blind faith, unrighteousness and injustice.

The Buddhists hold that loyalty means to be honest and perseverant. In the past, when people talked about loyalty, they were immediately reminded of their duties to serve the kings and state. Actually, we should broaden it to many aspects. Husband and wife should keep a faithful relationship. Friends should trust each other. Loyalty is seen as a responsibility towards the work and promise....

Being loyal implies that one must not give up righteousness in favor of profit. Loyalty is a belief as well as perseverance. It is a good adherence to the principle. It is necessary to make a good choice of the object to which one is loyal. The object should be good, righteous, and full of benevolence and justice. One should never be faithful to the evil because it is illegal. Therefore, loyalty means righteousness and benevolence.... Buddhist holds that one should follow the law instead of individuals. One should be faithful to the law, the system and institution indeed of being loyal to individuals.

Loyalty is bilateral. Not only should the subjects be faithful to the rulers, but the rules should also be faithful to the subjects. Loyalty may be either correct or incorrect, good or bad. It is necessary to tell which is good. However, there is no gain or loss in being loyal, no time limit, and no common interests. As long as something is the object to be loyal to, one should be so even if it may be unfavorable. This is called loyalty.

Loyalty means focus, comprehensive and perfect.... As long as we do a good job in our posts and fulfill our duty, this is loyalty. The housewife should clean the house and make it like a pure land. This is her loyalty to the household. When everyone in society is working hard, that is loyalty to the nation. Being Buddhists, we follow the Dharmas to purify human beings, and improve the social atmosphere. This is loyalty to the nation.

Both loyalty and filiality are mentioned in the same breath.... Thus, taking care of parents is a fundamental link in filiality. Apart from our filial piety to the parents, we should expand it to the clan, to the whole nation and all masses.

What is filiality? It is an expression of love. Filiality is a revelation of one's true love for the nation, for parents, spouse, children and so forth. It is an obligation of human relations. It demonstrates close ties between persons. The filiality holds together a sense of mutual precedence for elder and younger brothers. It is a good virtue inherited from parents to sons and daughters. Filiality expresses sincere gratitude to life and pays a debt to it without any regret. Buddhists further divide filiality into three: big, medium-sized and little. The little filiality refers to personal

love. The medium-sized stands for family and the big one refers to the nation. The Ullambanapātra Sūtra says, “The Buddhist followers who practice filial piety should often recall their parents when uttering the scriptures. They should even recall back to the seventh generation of grandparents.” Thus, we see that the Buddha did not only teach followers to be filial to their present parents, but also their grandparents, even to the previous generations and all parents of human beings. The meaning of filiality is not limited to the filiality and love to our present parents. We should start it when we treat our parents, brothers and sisters and finally expand it to the whole society with a transcendental feeling— “we do not feel more affectionate because they are parents or children.” Thus, we extend this love to all human beings. We do not only show filiality to our own parents, but also to parents of all human beings. We devote all our efforts to eliminate the troubles of humans. This is the filiality that the Buddha has in mind. As *Diamond Sutra* says:

As many beings as there are in this world of beings, comprehend under the terms of beings (either born of eggs, or from the womb, or from moisture, or miraculously), with form or without form, with name or without name, or neither with nor without name, as afar as nay known world of being is known, all these must be delivered by me in the perfect world of nirvana.³²

Thus, loyalty and filiality are in human world. They are mutual.... If we want others to communicate with us with the spirit of both loyalty and filiality, we must demonstrate our loyalty and filiality first.³³

From these detailed descriptions of the filiality and loyalty, we see how Master Hsing Yun integrates the ethical values of Chinese tradition with the Buddhist doctrines. Indeed, his expositions lighten the way of Humanistic Buddhism in dealing with the sensitive issues that existed in the history of Buddhism for more than 1600 years. It is important and necessary to incorporate the Chinese traditions into the current practice of Humanistic Buddhism.

Conclusion

Looking back to the last one and half centuries, we see that Chinese Buddhism was able to revitalize after experiencing chaotic changes and disasters in the 20th century. The vicissitudes of time brought chances to develop. In the 1980s, Buddhism was able to flourish in Taiwan and Hong Kong and the Buddhism in the Mainland China was able to recover and also develop, thus paving a broad way for the 21st century.

In the 20th century, Buddhism underwent tremendous vicissitudes to testify its strength to survive in an unprecedented situation despite strong hostility from officials and radical intelligentsia. Once again, Buddhism shows its vitality and flexibility to survive in a most difficult situation that it has never encountered before in Chinese history.

Notes

¹ Cited from Lawrence Thompson, *Chinese Religion: An Introduction* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1996), p.36.

² *Xiaoqing I (Scripture of Filiality)*, cited from Lawrence Thompson, *Chinese Religion: An Introduction* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1996), p.36.

³ *The Hsiao Ching*, translated by Mary Lelia Makra and edited by Paul K.T. Sih, (New York: St. John's University Press, 1961), Chapter VII, p.15.

⁴ *Mencius*, IIIb, 9, cited from Fung Yu-lan, *Selected Philosophical Writings of Fung Yu-lan* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1991), p.269.

⁵ The Three Cardinal Guides are as follow: ruler guides subject, father guides son, and husband guides wife. The Five Constant Virtues include benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and fidelity. These are specified as ethical code in traditional Chinese society.

⁶ According to Professor Ananda Guruge, Pāli word “mātāpitūpaṭṭhāna” may be an approximate translation.

⁷ Theodore Ludwig, *The Sacred Path of the East* (Upper Saddle River, NJ.: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1993). pp. 75-76.

⁸ See Ananda Guruge, *What in Brief is Buddhism?* (Monterey Park, CA: Mitram Books: A Subsidiary of Dharma Healing Way, Inc. 1999), p.132. Also refer to *Sacred Books of the Buddhists* translated by various oriental scholars and edited by T. W. Rhys David (London: The Pāli Text Society, 1977), p.180.

⁹ *Dīrghāgama*, in *Taisho*, Volume 1, p.71c.

¹⁰ *Mahāpārinirvāna Sūtra* in *Taisho*, Volume 1, p.172a. It was translated by Bai Fazu, in the years of 209-306.

¹¹ *Yamarāja Pancadivyaḍuta Sūtra*, in *Taisho* volume 1, p.828c.

¹² See Ananda Guruge, *What in Brief is Buddhism?* (Monterey Park, CA: Mitram Books: A Subsidiary of Dharma Healing Way, Inc. 1999), pp.132-134.

¹³ James Legge, *The Works of Mencius* (New York, Dover Publications, Inc. 1970), pp.251-252.

¹⁴ Tu Wei-ming, “Li as Process of Humanization,” in *Humanity and Self-Cultivation: Essays in Confucian Thought* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1979), pp.18-19.

¹⁵ *Gaoseng Zhuan* (Biographies of Eminent Buddhist Monks), in *Taisho*, Volume 50, p.352.

¹⁶ *Yinguang Ji* (Selected Works of Venerable Yinguang) (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 1996), p.21.

¹⁷ *Da Zhuangyan Lun Jing (Mahālankā Sūtra Śāstra)*, in *Taisho*, Volume 4, p.274.

- ¹⁸ *Brahmajāla Sūtra*, in *Taisho*, Volume 24, p.1004a.
- ¹⁹ *Sutra Spoken by the Sixth Patriarch on the High Seat of "the Treasure of the Law"* (Hong Kong: H.K. Buddhist Book Distributor Press, 1965), pp.44-45. Similar version is found in Thomas Cleary's *The Sutra of Hui-Neng Grand Master of Zen: With Hui-Neng's Commentary on the Diamond Sutra* (Boston: Shambhala, 1998), p.29
- ²⁰ Wang Yueqing, *Zhongguo Fo jiao Lunli Yanjiu (Studies on Ethics in Chinese Buddhism)* (Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 1999), pp.244-245.
- ²¹ Tang Yijie, "Renjian Fo jiao Zhi Yiyi" (The Significance of Humanistic Buddhism) (in Chinese), in *Pumen Xuebao (Universal Gate Journal)* (Taipei: Pumen Xuebaoshe), No. 5, 2001, pp.57-58.
- ²² *Taixu Dashi Quanshu (Complete Works of Venerable Taixu)*, volume 47b, p. 431.
- ²³ *Taixu Dashi Quanshu (Complete Works of Venerable Taixu)*, Volume 47, pp.432-435.
- ²⁴ *Taixu Dashi Quanshu (Complete Works of Venerable Taixu)*, volume 5, pp.159-166.
- ²⁵ *Taixu Dashi Quanshu (Complete Works of Venerable Taixu)*, volume 42A, pp.693-694
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.696-697.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.716. The New Life Movement was started by the Nationalist Government in the rear areas during the War against Japan. It was a movement to revitalize the national spirit with a sense of old values, such as propriety, righteousness and a sense of honor and shame.
- ²⁸ *Taixu Dashi Quanshu (Complete Works of Venerable Taixu)*, volume 5, pp. 234-238.
- ²⁹ *Taixu Dashi Quanshu (Complete Works of Venerable Taixu)*, volume 47b, p. 449.
- ³⁰ Hsing Yun, "Renjian Fo jiao De Lantu" (The Blue Print of the Humanistic Buddhism), in *Pumen (Universal Gate)* (Taipei: Pumen Xuebaoshe, 2001), No.5, pp.1-4.
- ³¹ The Four Graces include the grace of parents, sentient beings, the kings, and the three treasures.
- ³² Xu Yangzhu, *Jingang Bore Boluomi Jing: Xinyi Fanwen Fodian (Diamond Sutra: New Translation with Explanations to the Sanskrit Text)* (Taipei: Rushi Chubanshe, 1996), Volume 4, p.427.
- ³³ Hsing Yun, "Renjian Fo jiao De Lantu" (The Blue Print of the Humanistic Buddhism), in *Pumen (Universal Gate)* (Taipei: Pumen Xuebaoshe, 2001), No.5, pp.23-28.

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If we do not know how to be satisfied with what we have and peaceful in poverty, our desires will multiply and grow for many lifetimes. One of China's great Buddhist masters, Master Tao An (312-85), once was given a huge amount of rice by a well-meaning devotee who wanted to help him feed his disciples. The man gave so much rice, however, that Master Tao An hardly had enough room to store it all. When the rice at last had been put away, the master wrote a letter to the man. In it he said, "Thank you very much for the rice you gave us, but I must tell you that your gift has also caused us a lot of trouble because we have no place to put so much!"

– *Buddhism: Pure and Simple*, Hsing Yun, pp.64-65