



Master Mingkai's Humanistic Buddhist Thoughts: Origins, Methods and Uses in Contemporary China

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Abstract

This paper delves into the Humanistic Buddhist thoughts of Master Mingkai (明開長老) from Xiyuan Temple and its profound origins. By meticulously tracing Master Mingkai's life experiences and intellectual background, the paper reveals his unique contributions to the formation of Humanistic Buddhist thoughts. Humanistic Buddhism originated from Master Taixu's concept of "Human Life Buddhism" and was further developed by figures such as Venerable Master Hsing Yun and Master Fancheng, who emphasized the application of Buddhism in real life and its concern for society. As a student of Master Taixu, Master Mingkai integrated the traditional wisdom of Chinese Buddhism with the developmental needs of modern society, creating a distinct and characteristic system of Humanistic Buddhist thoughts.

Keywords: Master Mingkai, Xiyuan Temple, Humanistic Buddhism

1. Introduction

It has been exactly 30 years since Master Mingkai peacefully passed away on July 8, 1994. Master Mingkai had long served as the standing member of the Buddhist Association of China (BAC), vice chairman of the Advisory Committee under the BAC, president of the Jiangsu Buddhist Association, president of the Suzhou Buddhist Association, and abbot of Xiyuan Temple. Throughout his whole life, he devoted himself to his country, Buddhism and sentient beings; he was courageously and diligently determined to seek the Buddhist path; he compassionately committed to the Dharma spread and sentient beings; he valued the temple and sutras higher than his own body; he carried on the Buddha's seed and cultivated talented monks; he was strict in precepts and practiced upright words and deeds, and performed many other virtuous and noble deeds.¹

Master Mingkai was born in a turbulent era in China, experiencing the Xinhai Revolution, warlord separatism, the Anti-Japanese War, the Liberation War, the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the Cultural Revolution catastrophe, and the reform and opening up. In the chaotic vicissitude of the times, especially in the 32 years he served as the abbot of Xiyuan Temple, he adhered true to the original contents of Buddha, and closely integrated China's national policies, Buddhist precepts with the management of Xiyuan temple. The Venerable made important contributions to contemporary Chinese Buddhism, especially to the restoration and development of Chinese Buddhism after the reform and opening up.²

Xiyuan Temple is one of the prominent Han Chinese Buddhism temples in China and Jiangsu provincial cultural heritage site. Originally named Guiyuan Temple, it has a history of 700 years since its initial establishment during the Yuan dynasty (1264–1294). During the Jiajing period of the Ming dynasty, it became

1. Guo Yun, "Merits That Will Shine Through the Ages, Virtues That Will Last Forever: A Memorial Symposium Commemorating the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Passing of Master Mingkai," *jcedu.org*, May 29, 2018, <https://www.jcedu.org/201805/17113.html>.

2. Ji Huachuan, "Master Mingkai and His Contributions to Contemporary Chinese Buddhism," *Xiyuan Jiechuang Vinaya Temple Archives, 30 Years in Buddhism*, File No. 80, Year No. 2014.

part of a large classical Suzhou Garden and belonged to a Senior Government Official. When he died, his son donated the garden to the monastery and renamed it as Fugu Guiyuan Temple. In 1635, Mao Lin, a Vinaya master from Baoguo Chan Temple, was invited to be the abbot to promote the “Vinaya school,” while the temple’s name was accordingly changed to Jiechuang Vinaya Temple, which means “to raise high the banner of precepts, taking the precepts as the foundation and the Vinaya as the guiding principle.”³ Most of the buildings in Xiyuan Temple today were rebuilt in the late Qing dynasty and the early Republic of China. By 1949, due to poor maintenance, the temple buildings were dilapidated, but were fully restored in the 1980s. Under the unremitting efforts of the three abbots Mingkai, Anshang and Puren, Xiyuan Temple adhered to the inheritance of precepts and the construction of monastic style, highlighted the characteristics of Vinaya, attached importance to cultural accumulation, actively carried out monk education and Buddhist research, and embodied the concept of Humanistic Buddhism.⁴ Xiyuan Temple is therefore known as one of the three major temples in Suzhou, along with Hanshan Temple and Lingyan Temple.⁵

Humanistic Buddhism originated from the “Human Life Buddhism” proposed by Master Taixu in the 1920s, when the Chinese society was in the midst of war with endangering the government and suffering people. In this context, the social elites shouldered the historical responsibility of eliminating malpractices, revitalizing the country, and salvaging the nation. Master Taixu first made a sharp criticism of “funerary Buddhism,” a kind of superstition rituals to release souls from purgatory prevailed since the Ming and Qing dynasties, labelling it as “Buddhism of the dead,” and emphasized that it is necessary to awaken the Buddhist community in a wake-up call and transform Buddhism into “Human Life Buddhism” that serves the living. In the face of various social

3. “Introduction to Xiyuan Monastery (also known as Xiyuan Jiechuang Monastery),” *jcedu.org*, June 4, 2018, <https://www.jcedu.org/201806/111.html>.

4. Li Shangquan, “A Study on the Buddhist Culture of Xiyuan Temple in Suzhou,” *Journal of Nanjing Xiaozhuang University* 1 (2007): 62–68.

5. Phoenix News Culture Section, “Xiyuan Jiechuang Temple, Suzhou, Jiangsu Province,” *Ifeng News*, February 4, 2010, https://news.ifeng.com/history/special/2010qifu/ziliao/201002/0204_9458_1537300.shtml.

chaos and crises, he further proposed the concept of “Humanistic Buddhism.”⁶ “Humanistic Buddhism is not a Buddhism that teaches people to leave humanity and become gods or ghosts, or to become monks in temples and mountains. It is to use Buddhist principles to improve society, make human beings progress, and improve the world.”⁷ Although the three major revolutions of “doctrine,” “religious system,” and “religious property” proposed by Master Taixu failed at the time due to various reasons, his idea of Humanistic Buddhism was passed on. In Taiwan, many great masters such as Yinshun, Hsing Yun, Sheng Yen, and Cheng Yen vigorously promoted and practiced the concept of Humanistic Buddhism in their own way; in mainland China, after the establishment of the Buddhist Association of China, Zhao Puchu has been one of the main leaders of the association. Under his leadership, the idea of Humanistic Buddhism has been vigorously promoted and implemented since the 1980s.⁸ After presiding over the Suzhou Buddhist Association, Master Mingkai had “always regarded Humanistic Buddhism as the main theme for the development of Buddhism in Suzhou.”⁹

In China, academic research on Master Mingkai includes *The Life and Writings of Master Mingkai* written by Li Shangquan and his published paper “A Study on the Buddhist Culture of Xiyuan Temple in Suzhou,” which gave a detailed introduction to the life of Master Mingkai, but his Humanistic Buddhism thoughts were only briefly mentioned; Master Puren wrote in “Master Mingkai’s Contribution to the Sinicization of Contemporary Buddhism”: “Master Mingkai was strict in precepts, upright and diligent in practice, pious to Buddhism. He made great efforts for modern Chinese Buddhism, and contributed enormously

6. Wang Zhiyuan, “The ‘Nine-Stage Theory’ of the Sinicization of Buddhism and ‘Humanistic Buddhism in the New Era,’” *10vows.com*, May 28, 2024, <https://www.10vows.com/detail/0jCsssQUT>.

7. Taixu, “How to Establish Humanistic Buddhism,” *United Association of Humanistic Buddhist Colleges*, November 26, 2018, https://www.uaohbc.org/news_in.aspx?siteid=&ver=&usid=&mnuid=1049&modid=18&mode=&nid=81&noframe=.

8. Venerable Zhengcheng, “Layman Zhao Puchu and Humanistic Buddhism in China (Part I),” *fjdh.cn*, May 12, 2010, <https://www.fjdh.cn/wumin/2010/05/104057111703.html>.

9. Li Shangquan, *The Life and Writings of Master Mingkai* (Lanzhou: Gansu People’s Publishing House, 2009), 32.

in the practice of Sinicization of contemporary Buddhism and the conformity of reason and opportunity in particular.”¹⁰ In his many speeches, Abbot Puren galvanized his disciples to inherit and carry forward Master Mingkai’s “diligent spirit of study and practice,” “firm spirit of Buddhist piety,” “dedicated spirit of hard work,” “heroic spirit in adversity,” and “altruistic spirit of responsibility.”¹¹

This article, through a comprehensive review of existing scholarly works, articles, and publications, as well as the review of relevant archival documents stored in the archives of Xiyuan Temple, explores the origins, methods and uses of Master Mingkai’s Humanistic Buddhism thoughts through his life and practices in contemporary China.

2. The Life of Master Mingkai

(1) A Brief Biography of Master Mingkai

Master Mingkai, whose secular name is Xu Dexian, was born in Shaoxing, Zhejiang in 1910. He lost his parents when he was young. He lived around Zhaoqing Temple (昭慶寺) in Hangzhou, where he was influenced by Buddhism, making him a good candidate for becoming a monk. He became a novice at the age of 16, and a bhikkhu one year later. Then he went to study in many places, including the Precepts Hall of Tianning Temple in Changzhou, the Dharma Society of Guanzong Temple in Ningbo, and the Nanputuo Minnan Buddhist College in Xiamen. While studying at the Minnan Buddhist College, Mingkai learned from famous masters such as Master Taixu, Master Hongyi (弘一), Master Changxing (常惺), Master Daxing (大醒), and Master Zhifeng (芝峰). Not only did his horizons broaden and his wisdom increase, but he also inherited the good qualities of these eminent monks. In 1933, he graduated from the Minnan Buddhist College with a relatively deep understanding of Buddhism. From 1933 to 1938, he went to the Haihui Temple in Yixing and a thatched hut on Qionglong

10. Puren, “Master Mingkai’s Contribution to the Sinicization of Contemporary Buddhism,” *Archives of Xiyuan Jiechuang Monastery, WS2021 Permanent Collection*, File No. 150, Record No. 2021.

11. Puren, “Inheriting and Carrying Forward the Five Great Spirits of Master Mingkai,” *Xiyuan Jiechuang Vinaya Temple Archives, 30 Years in Buddhism*, File No. 26, Record No. 2014.

Mountain in Suzhou to study sutras and practiced Chan mediation, laying a solid doctrinal and practical foundation.

The accomplished Master Mingkai settled in Beichan Temple in Suzhou in 1938 and began a long journey of Dharma propagation in Suzhou until the winter of 1947. He propagated Buddha-Dharma for nearly ten years, contributing greatly to the spread of Buddhism.

After 1949, Master Mingkai devoted himself to restoring Suzhou Buddhism and promoting its development. The master participated in the establishment of Suzhou Buddhist Association and served as the president for four consecutive tenures. He worked hard for Suzhou Buddhism and devoted his whole body and mind to Buddhism. During the Cultural Revolution, many temples in Suzhou were destroyed, but Master Mingkai wittily and courageously protected Xiyuan Temple, as well as a large number of ancient Buddha statues and ancient sutras. After the Cultural Revolution, he strived to restore the Buddhist Orders for Lingyanshan Temple, Xiyuan Temple, Hanshan Temple and other temples, as well as the maintenance work for the temples, making exceptional contributions to the re-development of Suzhou Buddhism.

Mingkai is patriotic and loyal to Buddhism, and he attaches great importance to the cultivation of Buddhist talents. Although he was deafened during the Cultural Revolution, he let go of his past and firmly safeguarded national interests during foreign affairs activities, showing the quality of Suzhou Buddhist monks and establishing the image of the country in the hearts of international people. He attaches great importance to the construction of Buddhist talents, and proposed to establish the Lingyan Mountain Branch of the Chinese Buddhist Academy. He also ordained many batches of monks for the Branch and held ordination ceremonies. The timely and necessary establishment of Buddhist colleges not only cultivated a large number of talents for Suzhou Buddhism, but also for Chinese Buddhism.¹²

12. Mingxue, "Speech at the Dharma Assembly Commemorating the Twentieth Anniversary of Master Mingkai's Passing," *Xiyuan Jiechuang Vinaya Temple Archives, 30 Years in Buddhism*, File No. 74, Record No. 2014.

(2) History of Xiyuan Jiechuang Vinaya Temple

The architecture of Xiyuan Jiechuang Vinaya Temple is more like a typical Jiangnan garden. Situated in the outskirts of Suzhou, the temple boasts the majestic Great Buddha Hall, elegant garden, pavilions, and corridors, widely known as a “garden temple.” In 2010, Xiyuan Temple was rated as the first national advanced collective for the creation of harmonious temples, monasteries and churches by China’s State Administration of Religious Affairs.

Initially built in the early Yuan dynasty, the temple was well-equipped and was known as the “Great Temple in Wuzhong.” In the late Ming dynasty, the 21st patriarch of the Vinaya school, Master Mao Lin, resided here and changed it to “Jiechuang Vinaya Temple.” Later, he vigorously promoted the Vinaya, and the temple became the Vinaya school’s branch.

Most of the buildings were destroyed during the Taiping Rebellion in 1860.¹³ Master Guanghui bravely took on the important task of reviving the ancient temple. Under the support of great donors such as Sheng Kang and Sheng Xuanhuai, it took more than 30 years to rebuild and restore the inheritance of the temple’s Vinaya school, making the temple once again the “prime temple in Wuzhong.” During the Cultural Revolution, the temple halls, Buddha statues and ancient books were preserved due to the protection of Premier Zhou and General Chi Haotian and the defense of Master Mingkai and Master Anshang. Xiyuan Jiechuang Vinaya Temple thus became the only basically intact temple in Suzhou.

Since 1998, under the leadership of the abbot Master Puren, Xiyuan Jiechuang Vinaya Temple has achieved remarkable results in the construction of moral character, the education of monks, the propagation of Dharma and the benefit of sentient beings. It has been widely praised by believers and all sectors of society, and has made positive contributions to the spread of Buddhism in the new era and the harmony and stability of society.

13. “Introduction to Xiyuan Monastery (also known as Xiyuan Jiechuang Monastery),” *jcedu.org*, June 4, 2018, <https://www.jcedu.org/201806/111.html>.

3. The Origins of Humanistic Buddhism

(1) Master Taixu's Human Life Buddhism

It was Sakyamuni Buddha who initially advocated Humanistic Buddhism. He engaged in teaching, meditation, and the propagation of his way of life before ultimately achieving nirvana in this world. He emphasized that Buddhas arise from the human realm and cannot attain enlightenment in heavenly realms.¹⁴ Thus, they bring the teachings of the dharma directly to every household, actively engaging in the human world. The *Vimalakirti Sutra* underscores the importance of seeking enlightenment and Buddha-nature among sentient beings, emphasizing the inseparability of Buddhism from the human realm.



“Buddhas arise from the human realm and cannot attain enlightenment in heavenly realms,” emphasized by Master Taixu.

A stanza from the *Platform Sutra* by Huineng, the Sixth Patriarch of the Chan School of Buddhism, further reinforces this concept. Following Huineng, distinctions between life and death, Nirvana and samsara, and this world and the world beyond gradually blurred, marking the emergence of “Humanistic Buddhism.”¹⁵

During the Sui dynasty (581–618) and Tang dynasty (618–907), Buddhism experienced a period of prosperity in China. However, Chinese Buddhism

14. Long Darui, “Humanistic Buddhism from Venerable Taixu to Grand Master Hsing Yun,” *Hsi Lai Journal of Humanistic Buddhism* 1 (2000): 53–84.

15. Lai Yonghai, *Buddhism and Confucianism* (Hangzhou: Zhejiang People's Publishing House, 1992), 219.

underwent a notable decline during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) and Qing dynasty (1644–1911), both have been significantly impacted by the vicissitude of dynasties as well as the emperors' attitudes toward Buddhism. Chinese Humanistic Buddhism evolved as a form of engaged Buddhism following its encounter with Christianity and Western imperialism. During the Opium Wars, China faced significant losses and was compelled to open up to Christian missionaries, which led to a decline in traditional Buddhism's influence. This situation gave rise to Buddhist reformers in China, with the prominent figure being the monk Taixu (1890–1947).

Taixu advocated for better education among Chinese Buddhist monastics, many of whom were illiterate. He emphasized “Human Life Buddhism,” encouraging the engagement of Buddhism with social issues and taking it beyond the confines of monasteries to address societal needs.¹⁶ Taixu explained what he had in mind:

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 dead 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 Buddhist teaching [...] As I talk about Humanistic Buddhism, I emphasize the improvement of human life.

Taixu portrayed his reforms as a return to the original purity of Shakyamuni's teachings before Chinese Buddhism had been influenced by various aspects of Chinese folk religion and culture.¹⁷

Taixu's ideas garnered positive responses from many other monastics and lay Buddhists, inspiring them to work towards modernizing Chinese Buddhism.

16. Don A. Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu's Reforms* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 32.

17. Liu Tianfu, *Humanistic Buddhism and Climate Change: Propagating the Bodhisattva Ethic of Compassion for People and the Planet* (PhD diss., University of California, San Diego, 2019).

Several prominent leaders emerged during this movement, including Venerable Yinshun (印順, 1906–2005), Venerable Dong Chu (東初, 1907–1977), Venerable Master Hsing Yun (星雲, 1927–2023), Venerable Sheng Yen (聖嚴, 1930–2009), and Venerable Cheng Yen (證嚴, 1937–present), and Master Mingkai (明開, 1910–1994). While there was no centralized organization led by Taixu, each leader contributed individually to updating Chinese Buddhism and adapting it to the contemporary world.

For instance, lay Buddhist reformer Yang Wenhui (1837–1911) aimed to make Buddhism more accessible to the modern, educated middle class.¹⁸ He started collating and printing Buddhist sutras and commentaries to make them widely available.¹⁹ The publication of these sutras led to the establishment of various lay and monastic organizations, which provided popular explanations of the texts, resulting in the demand for Buddhist seminaries or institutes of Buddhist Studies. This shift also fostered the growth of study groups among lay Buddhists and increased interest in studying Buddhist sutras and teachings among the laity.²⁰

While each Humanistic Buddhist leader brought their unique perspectives, this new form of Buddhism can be best characterized as “text-based, ethical, socially engaged, and ‘humanist,’ diverging from the traditional ‘funerary Buddhism.’”²¹

Starting with Master Taixu, most Dharma masters within the Chinese Humanistic Buddhist movement have encouraged their followers to cultivate themselves and serve society with the aim of establishing a pure land in the human realm on Earth.²² Taixu emphasized that self-cultivation in the challenging

18. Holmes H. Welch, *The Buddhist Revival in China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 45.

19. Chün-fang Yü, *Passing the Light: The Incense Light Community and Buddhist Nuns in Contemporary Taiwan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2013), 64.

20. Chün-fang Yü, *Chinese Buddhism: A Thematic History* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2020), 13.

21. Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 21.

22. Charles B. Jones, *Taixu’s “On the Establishment of the Pure Land in the Human Realm”* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 58.

human world, through moral education and efforts to alleviate suffering in one's community, is more effective than seeking cultivation solely in the pure Buddhist realms. Venerable Yinshun further developed the concept of creating a pure land on Earth, teaching that this transformation is the natural outcome of every suffering human realm undergoing purification, guided by the efforts of Buddha, Bodhisattvas, and human beings.

In its practice, Chinese Humanistic Buddhism often blurs the lines between the secular and the sacred for both lay and monastic practitioners. This approach aims to maintain a spiritual and worldly attitude, integrating sacred religious practices into all aspects of believers' daily lives, while focusing on addressing contemporary human issues and questions.²³

(2) Venerable Master Hsing Yun's Humanistic Buddhism

Established in 1967, the Fo Guang Shan (FGS, Buddha's Light Mountain) Order experienced steady growth initially within Taiwan before expanding its presence to Los Angeles in the United States and subsequently to major cities worldwide. In just two decades, it has evolved into a network comprising 200 branch temples scattered globally. Additionally, it serves as the headquarters for the Buddha's Light International Association, recognized as a non-governmental organization by the United Nations, boasting a membership of two million lay and monastic Buddhists. Notably, it houses the Buddha Memorial Center, a renowned Buddhist landmark, which attracted over 10 million visitors within its inaugural year of opening.²⁴

While studying at the Buddhist Institute in Jiaoshan, located in Jiangsu Province, Venerable Master Hsing Yun was exposed to various teachers who held great reverence for Taixu. Venerable Master Hsing Yun extensively read Taixu's essays and books, thus indirectly absorbing his teachings. In Taiwan, Venerable

23. Stefania Travagnin, "Genealogy and Taxonomy of the 'Twentieth-Century *Renjian Fojiao*: Mapping a *Famen* from Mainland China and Taiwan to Europe," *Renjian Fojiao Research Newsletter* 9 (2019): 180–97.

24. Shih Miao Guang, "Issues of Acculturation and Globalization Faced by the Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Order," in *Studies on Humanistic Buddhism III: Globalization of Buddhism* (Kaohsiung: Fo Guang Cultural Enterprise Co., Ltd., 2020).

Master Hsing Yun encountered a relatively stable environment compared to the challenges Taixu faced in China during his lifetime. Venerable Master Hsing Yun was able to pursue his ambitious reforms in a more relaxed and conducive atmosphere. “At that time, I also considered the inheritance of Chinese Buddhism, but it was closed and conservative and would definitely decline in the future; Theravada Buddhism, although completeness of faith, lacked perseverance; Japanese Buddhism, although there were Buddhology discussions, but the precepts were not strict. So where is Buddhism headed? I decided to follow the concept of ‘Humanistic Buddhism’ of Master Taixu, so ‘Humanistic Buddhism’ has always been the path I took,” Venerable Master Hsing Yun reflected.²⁵



Buddhist Institute in Jiaoshan.

The Venerable Master proceeded to elucidate four aspects of modernity within Buddhism:

i. The modernization of languages:

He encouraged his followers to expand their proficiency in foreign languages to facilitate the global dissemination of Buddhism. Emphasizing the significance of working languages in Buddhist scholarship, he highlighted the importance of languages such as Sanskrit, Pali, Tibetan, English, and Japanese.

ii. Utilization of contemporary tools for the propagation of Buddhism:

The Venerable Master advocated for the adoption of modern technologies such as computers, videos, television, and other advanced equipment in spreading Buddhist teachings.

25. Venerable Master Hsing Yun, *Humanistic Buddhism: Holding True to the Original Intents of Buddha* 人間佛教回歸佛陀本懷 (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2016), 6.

iii. Modernization of lifestyle practices:

He urged his disciples to emulate the examples set by ancient masters who served their communities in various capacities. The Venerable Master emphasized that Buddhist practitioners could contribute to society through their respective professions, such as education, healthcare, arts, literature, and more.

iv. Transformation of monasteries into modern educational institutions:

Venerable Master Hsing Yun advocated for the modernization of monastic institutions, suggesting the expansion of their functions to include medical services, provision of housing for the underprivileged, and educational initiatives.

Loving Kindness (metta, 慈), Compassion (karuna, 悲), Empathetic Joy (mudita, 喜), and Equanimity (upekka, 捨) are the Four Immeasurable Minds. Venerable Master Hsing Yun expanded on these concepts by introducing the Four Givings, thereby providing practical avenues for Dharma practice. He developed the Fo Guang Shan Working Creed based on the Four Immeasurable Minds: “Give Others Faith”–Loving Kindness, “Give Others Hope”–Compassion, “Give Others Joy”–Joy, and “Give Others Convenience”–Equanimity.

These Four Givings, rooted in the Four Immeasurable Minds, cultivate blessings, virtue, and the right causes and conditions, enhancing friendly relationships and promoting social harmony and stability. The Venerable Master’s “Four Givings” form the core concept of “Humanistic Buddhism,” and together with the Buddha’s Light Association’s working creeds, they put “Humanistic Buddhism” into practice.

Fo Guang Shan aims to promote the principles of Humanistic Buddhism and to foster peace and harmony among all people worldwide. The organization pursues these goals through educational initiatives, cultural events, community service, and extensive writings and teachings on the Buddhist path of wisdom and compassion. Venerable Master Hsing Yun emphasizes that enlightenment does not require seeking another place; instead, it can be realized here and now, within this precious human birth and this world. Practicing altruism, joyfulness, and universality aligns with the core concepts of Humanistic Buddhism. By giving faith, hope, joy, and service, individuals help all beings, including themselves.²⁶

26. “Objectives,” *Fo Guang Shan* official website, accessed March 18, 2024, <https://www.fgs.org.tw/en/Objectives/Culture/>.

For nearly half a century, Venerable Master Hsing Yun has devoted his efforts to transforming the world through the practice of Humanistic Buddhism. He asserts that transforming the world requires active engagement, stating, “Community transcends the individual, and in doing so, fulfills the individual in the most complete way possible.” He encourages uniting local and global communities to create a world of equality, joy, and perfect peace.

4. Explore Master Mingkai's Thoughts on Humanistic Buddhism

(1) “Taking the Vinaya as One's Teacher”

“A model of virtue worthy of worship in the three realms, a teacher of pure precepts and conduct for humans and gods.” 「德範三界堪供養，戒行清淨人天師」²⁷ Master Mingkai grew up around Zhaoqing Temple, a Vinaya-centered monastery in Hangzhou, and was deeply influenced by Buddhist culture.²⁸ At the age of 16, he was ordained as a novice by Master Wuchan at Zhaoqing Temple. The following year, he received full ordination as a bhikkhu at the same monastery. According to Shen, Zhaoqing Temple, a Vinaya-centered monastery and stronghold of monastic discipline, was built in the first year of Tianfu in the Later Jin dynasty.²⁹ Since the Song and Ming Dynasties, Zhaoqing Temple has been known as the famous “Four Great Monasteries” in Hangzhou together with Lingyin Temple (靈隱寺), Jingci Temple (淨慈寺) and Shengyin Temple (聖因寺). In the second or fifth year of Qiande in the Northern Song dynasty, it was rebuilt and revived by Nanshan Vinaya school Master Yongzhi.³⁰ In 978, the ordination platform was built, which became one of the three famous Vinaya school Buddhist temples with ordination platforms at that time, along with Beijing Jietan Temple and Kaiyuan Temple in Quanzhou, Fujian. Four years later, Emperor Taizong of Song dynasty bestowed the title “Great Zhaoqing Vinaya Temple.”

27. Inscribed by Mr. Hua Rende, a famous calligrapher from Suzhou.

28. Puren, “Inheriting and Promoting the Five Great Spirits.”

29. Hong Shen, *City Chronicles: Hangzhou 1793–1937—The Lost Memories of Hangzhou in the West* (Beijing: Beijing Times Chinese Press, 2019), 238.

30. Yang Yiming, Shen Shixian, Jin Yari, and Du Chenqin, “A Study and Reconstruction of the Zhao Qing Temple at West Lake in the Southern Song Dynasty,” *Landscape Architecture* 41, no. 2 (2024): 30–37, 45.

Discipline is the foundation of Buddhism. According to the translation of the Buddha's Last Teachings by Kumarajiva (344–413), when the Buddha was about to enter nirvana, he specifically urged Ananda and other disciples to “take Vinaya as one's teacher.” Venerable Master Hsing Yun noted that “the essence of Humanistic Buddhism is found within the Threefold Training—discipline, concentration, and wisdom. Its core concepts are found within Dependent Origination, the Middle Way, and its mission found within guiding modern-day people in finding peace and stability.”³¹

It was under the influence of monastic discipline that Master Mingkai cultivated a deep belief in Buddhism and a monk's character of strictly observing discipline, he practiced upright words and deeds, and withstood many hardships throughout his lifetime. The master was beaten by bandits many times when the reading of the Tibetan scriptures in Qionglong Mountain; the master was deafened by torture and humiliated during the Cultural Revolution when he and almost all monks were forced to leave the sangha and return to secular life. Even so, Master Mingkai's determination of being pious to Buddhism and his country remained unchanged.

Master Mingkai has been a monk for nearly 70 years. He has always regarded the temple as his home, adhered to the disciplines of a monk, took precepts as his teacher, and emphasized the construction of the temple's moral character. From the Great Leap Forward to the “Cultural Revolution,” he strived to protect Xiyuan Temple, Buddhist cultural relics and scriptures regardless of his own safety, and played a positive role in the recovery of Chinese Buddhism after the reform and opening up.³² Master Mingkai also paid special attention to the establishment of the image of monks and avoided misjudgment. In particular, he never accepted visits from female believers alone.³³

Master Mingkai has always emphasized that “temples shall be monk-centered, and home to monks,” and “managing the temple well is conducive to national development.” As early as April 11, 1969, Master Mingkai wrote in

31. Hsing Yun, *Humanistic Buddhism*, 6.

32. Ji, “Master Mingkai and His Contributions,” 3.

33. Puren, “Inheriting and Promoting the Five Great Spirits,” 2.

his diary: "Temples shall function like temples, monks shall act like monks. We should be good at managing temples in order to prevent 'itinerant ritual monks' from damaging the image of Buddhism and draw a clear line between Buddhist belief and feudal superstition."

According to Master Anshang, during the Republic of China (1912–1949), there were more than 200 temples in Suzhou, which could be divided into two types: "Chan school" (referring to larger monasteries, which mainly performed Buddhist rituals, supplemented by land income, with dozens of monks and nuns, chanting daily and "providing temporary monastic lodging to monks and welcome believers") and "Buddha Chanting Hall" (small temples "practiced funerary rituals," and the vulgar ones were similar to small stalls doing business called "Buddhist stalls (佛攤)").³⁴

Monks and nuns are divided into three categories. The first category is the orthodox monks and nuns living in the monasteries. They engage in monastic disciplines and practices such as daily chanting and rituals, scriptural study, Dharma propagation, and the observance of Buddha and Bodhisattva festivals, etc.³⁵ The second category is the monks and nuns living in the "Buddha Chanting Hall," who observe monastic disciplines, but specialize in funerary rituals. The third category is the "itinerant ritual monks" who live a secular life with their wives and children. They make a living by performing funerary rituals and stay in the temples periodically. "If there is no room available due to big events, or room fee is costly, or unwanted by temples, they leave."³⁶ These are monks doomed to be eradicated from Chinese sangha. When Master Guanghui was dying, he warned his successors that "the foundation of prosperity and decline lies in the precepts. Once falls, it cannot be recovered."³⁷

34. Anshang, "An Overview of Buddhism in Suzhou," *Xiyuan Jiechuang Vinaya Temple Archives, Collected Works and Manuscripts of Master Anshang*, Year No. 1999, vol. 2, 47.

35. Anshang, "On Religious Activities in Suzhou," *Xiyuan Jiechuang Vinaya Temple Archives, Collected Works and Manuscripts of Master Anshang*, Year No. 1999, vol. 2, 50.

36. Anshang, "On Religious Activities in Suzhou," 51.

37. Li, *The Life and Writings of Master Mingkai*, 32.

Master Mingkai abhorred the “itinerant ritual monks” as well as other feudal superstitions. He said:

What is feudal superstition? I think that reactionary Taoist sects, witches and sorcerers, fortune-telling, healing with holy water, feng shui and other things are old customs and habits left over from the feudal society in the past, and have no sense. Some heretics also steal the language of Buddhist classics to cover up their improper activities. After 1949, this kind of superstition has gradually disappeared, but in some areas, there are still some remnants, which will affect our proper faith. As orthodox Buddhists, we cannot be indifferent; we actively oppose those feudal superstitions in order to safeguard our proper religious beliefs; we believe in proper religions and must prevent them from being confused with feudal superstitions.

What are legitimate religious activities? As we all know, in terms of Buddhism, burning incense and worshipping Buddha, morning and evening chanting, Buddha offerings, chanting sutras and repenting, seven-day Buddhist practices, meditating, Dharma talks, accepting disciples and passing on precepts, circulating scriptures, offering vegetarian food for the public, consecrating Buddha statues, consecrating ceremonies, and other Buddhist activities are all legitimate religious activities. The government protects our freedom of religious activities and does not allow others to interfere.³⁸

After the reform and opening up, Master Mingkai gave speeches on various occasions: “Monks should be like monks, temples should be like temples, policies should be like policies, and officials should be like officials.” This idea also influenced the implementation of the policy of freedom of religious belief by government departments in national and provincial. In 1980, the Fourth National

38. Mingkai, “Report on Conveying the Spirit of the Fourth National Congress of the Buddhist Association of China,” *Xiyuan Jiechuang Vinaya Temple Archives, Master Mingkai: Social Activities—Materials on Participation in Various Levels of Buddhist Associations*, Archive No. 4, Year No. 1997, 28.

Representative Conference of the Buddhist Association of China was held in Beijing. Master Mingkai first proposed at the conference that “policies should be like policies, officials should be like officials, temples should be like temples, and monks should be like monks.” This idea was recognized by government officials. Mr. Zhang Zhi, Deputy Minister of the Central United Front Work Department, quoted Master Mingkai’s statement in his summary speech: “All temples that are restored as places of religious activities should be dominated by monks and nuns, and the temples should be like temples, and the monks should be like monks.”³⁹

Although Suzhou implemented new religious policies earlier than many other regions, challenges persisted. During the Cultural Revolution, Xiyuan Temple, Hanshan Temple, and Lingyanshan Temple were managed by the Suzhou Garden Department. When these temples were handed back to the monks, over 100 garden employees remained to assist with services, including more than 80 at Xiyuan Temple. This left the temples responsible for the employees’ wages. Xiyuan Temple, for instance, spent over 100,000 yuan on gas pipelines alone to address housing and living facilities for these workers. As the employees began to retire, their pensions became a significant financial burden on the temple.

In 1981, Xiyuan “Temple Management Committee” was established to oversee temple operations, but due to the scarcity of monks, it was managed by laypeople, which conflicted with the policy that monks should manage temples. Consequently, the committee was quickly disbanded. The remaining garden employees then formed the “Service Department,” which played a role in the temple’s operation and public services, but tensions arose between the secular employees and the monastic community. The presence of certain service facilities also disrupted the temple’s appearance.

To address these issues, the temple strengthened its leadership by appointing monks as directors and integrating the service department as an official part of the temple. The department was tasked with managing business operations and external services. To further align with the policy of “monks managing temples” and to enhance oversight, the “Xiyuan Temple Service Department Management

39. Buddhist Association of China, ed., *Fifty Years of the Buddhist Association of China: Collected Documents from the National Buddhist Representative Assemblies*, vol. 1 (Nanjing: Jinling Scriptural Press, 2005), 196.

Group” was established. Their efforts played a crucial role in improving the management and operations of the temple.⁴⁰

Master Mingkai studied the Buddhist Tripitaka, Vinaya and Abhidharma, and worked hard to practice. In order to adapt to the new role in the new society, he knew that he had to work harder to keep pace with the time. He successively participated in the patriotism and socialism study classes held by government departments, and skillfully combined political studies with the Buddha’s teachings of “repaying the country and sentient beings,” so that traditional Buddhist thoughts naturally adapted to the new socialist society.⁴¹

(2) Under the Guidance of Master Taixu

In 1927, Master Mingkai went to the Tianning Temple in Changzhou to learn Confucian enlightenment education and Buddhist precepts. In 1929, he went to Guanzong Hongfa Research Society in Ningbo to study Tiantai School doctrine. In addition to the president Master Dixian and the main lecturer Master Baojing, famous lay Buddhists such as Xu Weiru, Jiang Weiqiao, and Jiang Wenong taught here in the society’s most prosperous period. After studying for a year, Master Mingkai was admitted to the Minnan Buddhist College founded by Master



Master Taixu.

Taixu in Nanputuo Temple in Xiamen, and received three years of systematic modern college education. “Master Mingkai can not only inherit the fine traditions of Chinese Buddhism, but also eliminate the accumulated malpractices formed in the process of Buddhism’s spread, and strive to play the positive role of Buddhism in adapting to the times and guiding society.”⁴²

The experience of studying at Minnan Buddhist College, especially learned personally from Master Taixu, played a vital role in the formation of Master

40. Ji, “Master Mingkai and His Contributions,” 3–4.

41. Puren, “Inheriting and Promoting the Five Great Spirits,” 4.

42. Ji, “Master Mingkai and His Contributions,” 1.

Mingkai's thought of Humanistic Buddhism. After the reform and opening up, he advocated the abolition of the bad habit of burning the scars on the monks' heads, which reflected his thought of Humanistic Buddhism that Buddhism should adapt to the times and eliminate malpractices.

Burning the ordination scars is also called *jieba* in Chinese. It is said that in the Yuan dynasty, there was a monk named Zhide who was favored by Emperor Shizu of the Yuan dynasty. When he gave the precepts, he stipulated that all the ordination recipients must burn incense scars as a lifelong oath. In fact, this rule at that time was to distinguish lamas from Han monks, which contained discrimination against Han monks. Unexpectedly, later generations blindly inherited it. Not only did they have to burn the ordination scars on their heads when they received the Bodhisattva precepts, but they also burned one, two, three, six, nine, twelve, etc. points on certain parts of their bodies, such as their arms. The more points they burned, the more pious they were. Some even burned one or two fingers. In the Tang dynasty, monks burned their fingers and burned their bodies. Master Yijing strongly condemned this against the Buddhist doctrines. In fact, expressing inner sincerity through asceticism that harms the body was originally a tradition of Indian Brahmanism, which has nothing in common with Buddhist teachings.⁴³

As early as December 19, 1980, Master Mingkai proposed in a speech at the group meeting of the Fourth National Conference of the Buddhist Association of China: "In the future, when giving precepts, do not burn twelve scars on the top of the heads of new ordained monks. This bad habit should be abolished now." He took the lead in abolishing the bad habit of burning precept scars when giving the Three-Platform Great Precepts to the students of the Lingyan Mountain Branch of the Chinese Buddhist Academy at the Xiyuan Temple in Suzhou in 1982. From May 14 to 17, 1982, at the Second (Enlarged) Meeting of the Fourth Executive Council of the Buddhist Association of China, Master Mingkai proposed to "abolish the bad habit of ordination scars on the top of the heads of new monks and nuns when receiving precepts." Proposers were Mingkai,

43. Cai Huiming, "Good to Abolish the Custom of 'Burning Incense Scars,'" *Fa Yin* 3 (1984): 43.

Ming Xue; Seconders: Ming Shan, Zhen Chan, Ming Yang, Pu Yu. In April 1984, BAC abolished the practice of burning ordination scars, believing that: “The ordination scars is not an original ritual of Buddhism. Because it is harmful, it will be abolished in the future.” Under the initiative of Mingkai and other elderly masters, this long-standing bad habit in Han Buddhism was abolished.⁴⁴

(3) Master Fancheng—A Mentor and A Friend

In his book *The Life and Writings of Master Mingkai*, Li mentions that during his time on the Preparatory Committee of the Suzhou Buddhist Association, Master Mingkai worked with Master Fancheng for seven years. Master Fancheng focused on Buddhist cultural undertakings and the ideas of Humanistic Buddhism, which had a profound influence on Master Mingkai.⁴⁵

Fancheng (1884–1958), became a monk in Chongshan Temple in this county under Master Xirong at the age of 7. At the age of 22, he was fully ordained as a bhikkhu at Dinghui Temple in Jiaoshan, Zhenjiang and returned to study under Master Xirong. In 1910, He started studying at the Monastic Normal School in Nanjing established by the Jiangsu Provincial Association for Monastic Education. He learned from masters such as Dixian and Yuexia with classmates such as Renshan, Zhiguang, and Huimin. The master was influenced by what he saw and heard, and understood it by heart. He vowed to inherit and spread Buddhist culture and shoulder the Tathagata’s family business. Later, due to the impact of the Xinhai War, the school was closed and he had to return to Master Xirong. In 1912, he was ordered by his Master Xirong to serve as the abbot of Xifang Temple. Master Fancheng led the monks to reclaim dozens of acres of wasteland in the temple to plant crops, emphasizing both farming and meditation to ensure that the sangha had enough food. At the same time, he actively participated in social welfare and charity, raised funds to build Juhong Road and Tongli Bridge, improved the external transportation of Jugang, and facilitated the travel of the elders in his hometown. He built a tower in the temple to accommodate the unidentified bones in the wilderness.⁴⁶

44. Ji, “Master Mingkai and His Contributions.”

45. Li, *The Life and Writings of Master Mingkai*, 32.

46. Kong Qin, “The Life of Master Fancheng,” *Voice of Dharma* 2011, no. 2 (2011): 44–48, <https://doi.org/10.16805/j.cnki.11-1671/b.2011.02.011>.

Master Fancheng has a modern thought. He believes that “the essence of Buddhism is to relieve the suffering of sentient beings, not just to recite sutras and pray for the dead.” Based on this understanding, he actively participates in social welfare and charity, and pays attention to the protection of Buddhist cultural relics and the dissemination of Buddhist culture.⁴⁷

In 1929, Master Fancheng founded a “Gaodong Private Sangha Library” which houses Buddhist scriptures, Confucian classics, history, philosophy, anthology, local chronicles and various books of more than 100,000 volumes, as well as various magazines and newspapers. It is managed by a dedicated person and is open to the public. In addition, he has been collecting Buddhist cultural relics for a long time, such as scriptures, Buddha statues, inscriptions, and instruments, and plans to establish a Buddhist cultural relics museum. In 1930, Zhu Ziqiao invited Buddhist monks and laymen such as Ye Gongchuo, Di Chuqing, Jiang Weiqiao, Ding Fubao, Li Jingwei, Li Yuanjing and Master Fancheng to organize the “Song Qisha Canon Reprinting Association” in Shanghai to manage the printing of scriptures. Master Fancheng was elected as a standing committee member. In the spring of 1931, Fancheng led more than 20 photographers, printing technicians and assistants to work in Shaanxi and Shanxi for more than three years. They shot and made 40 boxes of glass plates, which were shipped to Shanghai. In 1935, 500 copies of the photocopied “Qisha Canon” were published. After the photocopying of the “Qisha Canon” was completed, Fancheng remained in Shanghai and stationed at the “Shanghai Buddhist Pure Land Society” in Jueyuan, assisting Ye Gongchuo to build the “Fabao Hall” in Jueyuan to collect Buddhist cultural relics, sort them out by category, and exhibit them in turn for the public to visit.⁴⁸ In 1949, Master Fancheng went to Suzhou to be the abbot of Jiecao Temple and the head of Bao'en Temple. In 1950, Suzhou City established the Cultural Relics Management Committee and specially appointed him as a member of the Management Committee.⁴⁹ In December 1952, more than 700 monks and nuns gathered at Huayan Temple in Suzhou,

47. Li, *The Life and Writings of Master Mingkai*, 32.

48. Yu Lingbo, “Master Fancheng,” <http://www.buddhismcity.net/master/details/241/>.

49. Zhao Yifeng, “Master Fancheng’s Pure Land of the Buddha Realm,” *rdrb.net.cn*, May 17, 2019, <http://www.rdrb.net.cn/Article/index?aid=2858029>.

and established the Preparatory Committee of Suzhou Buddhist Association. The meeting elected 27 members. Fancheng became the chairman, while Mingkai was among the members. Mingkai was elected as Secretary General in 1956.⁵⁰ Master Fancheng was elected as a director of the Buddhist Association of China twice in 1953 and 1957. In the winter of 1958, he returned to Jugang Xifang Temple, where he had been the abbot in his early years. On December 17, he bathed and changed his clothes, sat cross-legged, and passed away in the sound of chanting Buddha.

“Master Mingkai and Master Fancheng worked closely together”⁵¹ during the seven years, formed a close friendship, practiced Humanistic Buddhism, and jointly explored the organizational construction of Suzhou Buddhist Association. Since then, Master Mingkai has been committed to protecting Buddhist scriptures, spreading Buddhist culture, carrying out public welfare and charity, and promoting Buddhist education.

In the 1950s, in order to comprehensively sort out the basic situation of Suzhou Buddhism and facilitate the management of the Buddhist Association, Master Mingkai conducted a census of temples in the city and also had a preliminary understanding of the protection of cultural relics in various temples. Faced with the danger of the loss of temple cultural relics, Master Mingkai, who was the director of the Preparatory Committee of the Municipal Buddhist Association at the time, appealed and publicized among relevant government departments, takeover units and temples to rescue the scattered scriptures and Buddha statues, including many national treasures, which were properly protected and collected. “From March 26 to 31, 1957, the Second National Representative Conference of the Buddhist Association of China was held in Beijing. In his written speech at the conference, Master Mingkai proposed: “It is recommended to investigate cultural relics and keep them in a centralized manner to prevent them from being lost.”⁵²

50. Li, *The Life and Writings of Master Mingkai*, 32.

51. Li, *The Life and Writings of Master Mingkai*, 32.

52. Buddhist Association of China, *Fifty Years of the Buddhist Association of China*, 125.

In 1966, the “destroy the four olds” trend swept Suzhou when the Cultural Revolution began. On August 25, more than a thousand Red Guards went to Lingyan Mountain, pushed down and smashed all the Buddha statues, and then destroyed the Lengqie Temple and Yaocao Temple. The situation was very critical. Master Mingkai responded calmly in the crisis and commanded with confidence. On the one hand, all the cultural relics in the Xiyuan Temple Cultural Relics Room were preserved, especially the most precious 36 pieces were quickly transferred to the Suzhou Cultural Relics Management Committee for safekeeping (after the end of the Cultural Revolution, these cultural relics were returned intact); on the other hand, all the main halls and scripture buildings of the temple were sealed. He personally led the monks to patrol day and night and strictly prohibited outsiders from entering. During the ten-year Cultural Revolution, “Master Mingkai protected the temple and the sutras in spite of his own safety. He was beaten to deaf. However, precious cultural relics such as the sutras and many Buddhist statues in the temples were finally preserved intact. Xiyuan Temple thus became the only temple in Suzhou that was basically undamaged, and it made a huge contribution to the future revitalization of Buddhism in the region thanks to Master Mingkai’s great contribution.”⁵³

In September 1970, Master Mingkai sorted out Buddhist scriptures with Elder Anshang. These scriptures were ancient rare books that were preserved by Master Mingkai during the Cultural Revolution by all means. Faced with the task of sorting out ancient books, Master Mingkai immediately devoted all his energy to it. With a high sense of mission to be responsible for history and the future, he spent days and nights silently in the complicated work. He worked hard for three years, and together with Master Anshang and other resident monks of the temple, he preliminarily sorted and cataloged tens of thousands of ancient rare books. In the introduction of the “Catalogue of Ancient Rare Books in Suzhou City,” the hard work of Master Mingkai was fully affirmed and highly praised: “Suzhou’s Buddhist scriptures are magnificent. Although they have suffered many disasters, they have largely survived. The number, variety, and completeness of versions can be said to be the best in the southeast and well-known throughout the country.”

53. Ji, “Master Mingkai and His Contributions,” 3–4.

Master Mingkai explored the Buddhist democratic management system in combination with temple management very early. Before 1949, the abbots of most temples in Suzhou were in succession. After becoming the abbot in 1962, he did not follow the old ways. He strongly advocated the selection of talents from all directions. On February 25, 1987, the venerable pointed out in his speech at a BAC conference: “The temple management system is mainly based on the abbot. We must promote democracy and elect people with both talent and virtue. Those who are incompetent can be replaced at any time. The sectarianism and temple management should be separated.” On May 16, 1987, at the meeting of the Provincial Buddhist Association, he said: “You cannot treat the temple as your own small temple. There are monks from all directions living inside. The sectarianism and the abbot election are two different things and cannot be mixed up.” Later, the BAC stipulated that all Buddhist temples that are open as places for religious activities must be built into monasteries, and the management team must be elected by the monks for a five-year term. In terms of temple management, all major temple activities must be discussed and approved by the executive team. In fact, more than 20 years ago, Master Mingkai had already taken the lead in exploring and practicing the democratic management system of temples.⁵⁴

Master Mingkai worked hard to promote the work of ordaining monks and establishing education, and continued the Buddha’s wisdom. He discussed with the older generation of great masters such as Mingxue and Mingyang and initiated the establishment of the Lingyan Mountain Branch of the Chinese Buddhist Academy. The college opened on December 10, 1980, and played an active role in promoting contemporary Buddhism. In 1983, with the efforts of Master Mingkai and other Buddhist masters in and outside Jiangsu Province, the Qixia Mountain Branch of the Chinese Buddhist Academy was established in Nanjing. The establishment of the two Buddhist academies provides talent guarantee for the future development of Jiangsu Buddhism.⁵⁵

Master Mingkai also actively participated in social charity. He led the four

54. Puren, “Master Mingkai’s Contributions to the Sinicization of Contemporary Buddhism,” 7.

55. Puren, “Master Mingkai’s Contributions to the Sinicization of Contemporary Buddhism,” 8.

groups of disciples in Suzhou to sponsor a satellite relay station for distance education in schools in Suzhou city; donated more than 30,000 yuan to the China Disabled Persons' Welfare Foundation and Suzhou Welfare House, welfare for disabled children and mentally retarded children, and support for disaster areas in Africa; and donated 380,000 yuan for greening sites, building parking lots, and repairing bridges and roads. It is estimated that Master Mingkai donated more than 400,000 yuan in social welfare, receiving unanimous praise.⁵⁶

It is particularly worth mentioning that in 1989, Venerable Master Hsing Yun visited Xiyuan Temple and was warmly received by Master Mingkai and Master Anshang.⁵⁷

Since 1960, Master Anshang had followed Master Mingkai and assisted in overseeing Xiyuan Temple for 35 years. After Master Mingkai's passing, Master Anshang upheld the principle of "taking the Vinaya as one's teacher" and formulated Xiyuan Temple's "threefold" Humanistic Buddhist approach—emphasizing cultural development, educational advancement, and the cultivation of talents. He also charted the temple's direction of "integrating study with practice, and observing the precepts with discipline." Unfortunately, after drawing a grand blueprint, Master Anshang unfortunately passed away in September 1997.⁵⁸

"Ethical Discipline, Hard Work, and Talent Cultivation" are the core for the Humanistic Buddhist belief model of Xiyuan Temple, established by Master Mingkai and him over the past 40 years, summarized by Master Anshang.



Xiyuan Temple.

56. Puren, "Master Mingkai's Contributions to the Sincization of Contemporary Buddhism," 8.

57. Xiyuan Monastery, "Venerable Master Hsing Yun's Passing: Message of Condolence from Xiyuan Jiechuang Vinaya Temple," [jcedu.org](https://www.jcedu.org/202302/25249.html), February 11, 2023, <https://www.jcedu.org/202302/25249.html>.

58. Li, "A Study on Buddhist Culture."

5. Conclusion

This article, through an in-depth discussion of the Humanistic Buddhism thought and its origins of Master Mingkai of Xiyuan Temple, reveals his unique contribution and far-reaching influence in promoting the development of modern Buddhism. Master Mingkai inherited the concept of “Human Life Buddhism” of Master Taixu, combined the Humanistic Buddhism thought of Master Hsingyun, Master Fancheng, and others, as well as the tradition of Chinese Buddhism and the needs of modern society, and formed a Humanistic Buddhism thought system that was later summarized as “Ethical Discipline, Hard Work, and Talent Cultivation.”

First of all, Master Mingkai adheres to the concept of “taking the Vinaya as one’s teacher” and emphasizes the core position of precepts in Buddhist practice. He not only strictly disciplines himself, but also vigorously promotes precepts in temple management and monk education. This adherence to precepts not only establishes a good image for the monastic community, but also lays a solid foundation for the inheritance and development of Buddhism in modern society. The Venerable led the Suzhou Buddhist community to publicize the Buddhist principles of benefiting sentient beings, building a pure land on earth, equality of all beings, loving the country and religion, devoting to the country and Buddhism, refraining from all evil and practicing all good, compassion, joy and giving, etc. to the general public, which played a good role in promoting social unity and stability.⁵⁹

Secondly, during his time at Minnan Buddhist College, Master Mingkai was able to deeply study and understand Master Taixu’s Humanistic Buddhism thought, and closely combined Buddhist practice with social practice, advocating the application of Buddhism in real life and social care. He kept pace with the times, eliminated malpractices, and advocated the abolition of the widely criticized custom of ordination scars, so that the younger generation of monks and nuns would not suffer from the pain of burning their skin, reflecting his Humanistic Buddhism thought of putting people first and benefiting sentient beings.

59. Puren, “Master Mingkai’s Contributions to the Sinicization of Contemporary Buddhism,” 8.

In addition, influenced by Master Fancheng and other monks, Master Mingkai paid special attention to the protection of Buddhist scriptures, the cultivation of Buddhist talents and the dissemination of Buddhist culture in the process of inheriting and promoting the thought of Humanistic Buddhism. Master Mingkai worked tirelessly for Buddhism promotion. During the Cultural Revolution, regardless of his own safety, he protected the temple and precious Buddhist cultural relics. After the reform and opening up, he served as the president of the provincial and municipal Buddhist associations for a long time, led Buddhist disciples to adhere to the direction of the Sinicization of Buddhism, and was kind and generous, making important contributions to the inheritance and development of Chinese Buddhism.

In summary, Master Mingkai's thought on Humanistic Buddhism is not only holding true to the original intents of the Buddha, but also a positive response to the needs of modern society. His methods and uses injected new vitality into the development of Xiyuan Temple, providing valuable experience and inspiration for the development of Chinese Buddhism. Further studies on Master Mingkai's Humanistic Buddhism thought are necessary in order to contribute more wisdom and strength to promote the solid development of Buddhism.

