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## RELIGIOUS BRANCHES OF BUDDHISM: HUMANISTIC BUDDHISM IN TAIWAN (CHINA)

This article explores the emergence and evolution of the Humanistic Buddhism movement, examining its response to the social and cultural transformations of the contemporary era. The main objective of the movement is to modernize and humanize Buddhist practice in China and Taiwan by reinterpreting the core doctrines of traditional Buddhism in accordance with modern societal needs. By analyzing the historical development of Humanistic Buddhism in Taiwan, the article demonstrates how this movement has contributed to the formation of a socially engaged and accessible form of Buddhism that resonates with modern life. In addition, the study compares the unique cultural inclusivity and social universality of Buddhism with other world religions, highlighting its exceptional adaptability to various cultural contexts. The scientific significance of the work lies in uncovering the formation processes of socially active and culturally inclusive forms of Buddhism. Its practical value is reflected in the justification of this movement's influence on contemporary religious studies, cultural studies, and sociology. The research employs comparative-analytical methods and historical-cultural analysis. The main findings include the role of Humanistic Buddhism in Taiwanese society, its compatibility with modern lifestyles, and its influence on the cultural and religious traditions of the population. Particular attention is paid to Buddhism's social universality and its capacity to adapt to diverse cultural environments. The authors emphasize Buddhism's greater potential for adaptation compared to other world religions. By considering this adaptability, the study reveals how Humanistic Buddhism contributes to a deeper understanding of the interaction between religion and culture in Taiwanese society and underscores its transformative role in the modern world. The results illustrate the potential of religion in promoting social integration, shaping cultural identity, and fostering societal stability, thereby characterizing Humanistic Buddhism as a significant phenomenon among contemporary religious movements.

**Keywords:** Buddhism in Taiwan, Humanistic Buddhism, Modernization, Cultural Tolerance, Society

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### Буддизмнің діни тармақтары: Тайвандағы гуманистік буддизм (Қытай)

Бұл мақалада гуманистік буддизм қозғалысының пайда болуы мен эволюциясы қарастырылады, оның қазіргі дәуірдегі әлеуметтік өзгерістер мен мәдени өзгерістерге реакциясы қарастырылады. Қозғалыстың негізгі мақсаты – дәстүрлі буддизмнің негізгі ілімдерін қазіргі заманғы әлеуметтік қажеттіліктерге сәйкес қайта түсіндіру арқылы жаңғырту, сол арқылы Қытай мен Тайваньдағы буддизм тәжірибесін модернизациялауға және ізгілендіруге ықпал ету. Тайваньдағы гуманистік буддизмнің тарихын қарастыра отырып, мақала заманауи өмірмен резонанс тудыратын буддизмнің әлеуметтік белсенді, қолжетімді түрін дамытуға әсерін тигізді. Сонымен қатар, бұл зерттеу буддизмнің ерекше мәдени инклюзивтілігі мен әлеуметтік әмбебаптығын басқа әлемдік діндермен салыстырады, оның әртүрлі мәдени контексттерге ерекше бейімделуін көрсетеді. Жұмыстың ғылыми маңызы – буддизмнің әлеуметтік белсенді және мәдени тұрғыда инклюзивті формасының қалыптасу жолдарын ашып көрсетуінде, ал тәжірибелік маңызы – осы үрдістердің заманауи дінтану, мәдениеттану және әлеуметтану салаларына тигізетін ықпалын негіздеуде. Зерттеу барысында салыстырмалы-талдамалық әдіс пен тарихи-мәдени сараптама тәсілдері қолданылды. Негізгі нәтижелерге гуманистік буддизмнің Тайвань қоғамындағы орны, оның заманауи өмір салтымен үндестігі және халықтың мәдени, діни дәстүрлеріне әсері жатады. Сондай-ақ, буддизмнің әлеуметтік әмбебаптығы мен әртүрлі мәдени контексттерге бейімделу қабілеті ерекше назарға алынды. Авторлар буддизмнің басқа әлемдік діндерге қарағанда жоғары бейімделу әлеуетін ескере отырып, гуманистік буддизмнің

Тайвань қоғамында дін мен мәдениеттің өзара ықпалдастығын терең түсінуге жол ашатынын және заманауи қоғамдағы трансформациялық рөлін айқындады. Қолжеткізілген нәтижелер діннің әлеуметтік интеграциядағы, мәдени сәйкестік пен тұрақтылықты қалыптастырудағы мүмкіндіктерін көрсетіп, гуманистік буддизмді қазіргі заманғы діндер ішіндегі маңызды феномен ретінде сипаттауға мүмкіндік береді.

**Түйін сөздер:** Тайваньдағы буддизм, гуманистік буддизм, модернизация, мәдени толеранттылық, қоғам

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### **Религиозные ветви буддизма: гуманистический буддизм на Тайване (Китай)**

В данной статье рассматриваются происхождение и эволюция движения гуманистического буддизма, а также его реакция на социальные и культурные изменения современного периода. Основная цель движения заключается в обновлении традиционного буддизма путём переосмысления его ключевых учений в соответствии с актуальными социальными потребностями, что способствует модернизации и гуманизации буддийской практики в Китае и на Тайване. Анализируя историю гуманистического буддизма на Тайване, статья демонстрирует его влияние на формирование социально активной и доступной формы буддизма, созвучной современному образу жизни. Кроме того, в исследовании проводится сравнительный анализ культурной инклюзивности и социальной универсальности буддизма по сравнению с другими мировыми религиями, подчёркивается его способность адаптироваться к различным культурным контекстам. Научная значимость работы заключается в раскрытии процессов формирования социально активных и культурно инклюзивных форм буддизма. Практическая значимость – в обосновании влияния этих процессов на современное религиоведение, культурологию и социологию. В исследовании использованы сравнительно-аналитический метод и историко-культурный анализ. К основным результатам относятся: роль гуманистического буддизма в тайваньском обществе, его соответствие современному образу жизни и влияние на культурные и религиозные традиции населения. Особое внимание уделено социальной универсальности буддизма и его способности адаптироваться к различным культурным условиям. Авторы подчёркивают, что адаптационный потенциал буддизма выше, чем у других мировых религий. Учитывая это, гуманистический буддизм позволяет глубже понять взаимовлияние религии и культуры в тайваньском обществе и определить трансформационную роль религии в современном мире. Полученные результаты демонстрируют потенциал религии в социально-культурной интеграции, формировании культурной идентичности и устойчивости, что позволяет охарактеризовать гуманистический буддизм как важное явление среди современных религиозных течений.

**Ключевые слова:** Буддизм в Тайване, гуманистический буддизм, модернизация, культурная толерантность, общество

## **Introduction**

Buddhism is the most influential religion in Taiwan and has shaped the spiritual, cultural, and social pattern for more than 400 years. Its roots start with the early migrations of Chinese communities that brought Buddhist traditions together with them to Taiwan. Some major historical events in the XX century influenced the developmental track of Buddhism in Taiwan. Chinese Buddhist Association, a prominent religious organization, established in mainland China however further relocated to Taiwan with the Kuomintang during a period of political upheaval in 1949. After being registered in

1950 legally, this association expanded its influence quickly with the development of branches and sub-branches across Taiwan (Yan, 1997: 38).

Among the Taiwan Buddhist traditions, the Zhaijiao tradition holds a particular position with significantly larger followers than other Buddhist sects do. The historical roots of Zhaijiao date back to the late Ming Dynasty, especially during the reign of Zheng Chenggong. This tradition is divided into three main sects – Xian Tian Dao, Jin Zhuang, and Long Hua – whose followers are often known as Zhai Gu (female followers) or Zhai You (male followers). Zhaijiao also shares strong connections

with the Zen and Pure Land schools of mainland China, allowing it to blend and adapt, thereby reinforcing its versatility (Wan, 2003).

As Taiwan modernizes and keeps interacting with global influences, Buddhism has found ways to address contemporary challenges while maintaining its cultural and spiritual traditions. Humanistic Buddhism has become an important part of Taiwanese Buddhism. Its focus is not only on personal spiritual growth but also encourages active participation in society by promoting kindness, ethical living, and social responsibility in daily life. This movement shows a larger trend of adapting traditional Buddhist teachings to fit in modern contexts, enabling Buddhism to remain relevant in an increasingly secular society.

This paper analyzes key concepts in Taiwanese Buddhism to highlight the cultural adaptability and flexibility. With a comparative religious lens, the paper shows how Buddhism is defined and responded to social changes, shows the meaning and practices of it, remark its adaptability to various social and historical contexts, and the inclusiveness and universality of Buddhist culture. By considering these topics to provide further understanding of how Buddhism has developed in Taiwan under both local and global influences, highlighting its role as a link between tradition and modernity.

### **Justification of the Choice of Article and Goals and Objectives**

The paper shows a comprehensive consideration in the evolution, spread, and adaptation of Buddhism in China; however, a particular emphasis is placed on Taiwan, where Buddhism has developed distinct characteristics. As the development of Buddhism in Taiwan has followed in a separate way compared with the other religious trends in mainland China, it further creates a complex perspective that reflects the distinct cultural, political, and historical context of Taiwan. In the mid-XX century, the relocation of Buddhist institutions and leaders from mainland China to Taiwan has played a role in further transformation of Taiwanese Buddhism. This migration includes not only a geographical change but also cultural and ideological adjustments in order to meet the religious needs of Taiwanese society.

In addition, the mix of Buddhism with various Taiwanese folk beliefs has created a rich, combined religious environment. Unlike other religious traditions that have strict rules, the openness of Buddhism to including elements of local culture

and other beliefs has made it more adaptable in Taiwan. This combination of Buddhism with native Taiwanese beliefs and customs has caught the attention of religious scholars, making Taiwan an essential ground for studying the interaction of Buddhism with other cultures and religions. These connections provide an opportunity to observe the adaptability, mobility, and capacity of Buddhism to address both spiritual and secular concerns in a rapidly changing society.

This paper utilizes a comparative approach to explore the openness and adaptability of Buddhism that allow it to meet the demands of diverse social contexts as its main goal. By considering all of these to offer insights into the broader social and cultural roles of Buddhism in Taiwan. The objectives are threefold: to understand the special development path of Buddhism in Taiwan, to analyze the socio-cultural factors that influenced its transformation, and to compare it with other world-class religions, which may not be as adaptable or inclusive.

Fundamentally, this paper highlights the importance of Buddhism in Taiwanese society, demonstrating the adaptation that meets spiritual and social needs for its followers. Then it continues to provide the explanation of the impacts of Buddhism in different cultural contexts and the potential role of Buddhism in contemporary global issues as social unity, ethical living, and cultural inclusivity.

### **Scientific research methodology**

In order to comprehensively analyze the religious pattern in China, the researchers use various methods. One of the ways is to use comparative analysis to identify common trends but different developments in different religious practices. Christianity and Islam are also considered with Buddhism to provide a concept to analyze one specific country and its historical, political, and religious paths. Historical and archival research also helps to trace the development of Buddhism in ancient and contemporary China to form a comprehensive understanding of its evolution and current adaptations.

### **Results and discussions**

#### *Defining the Connotation of Social Change*

In the context of Buddhism, social change includes both the temporal and spatial dimensions that it exists and develops. From a temporal perspective, social change appears as the change of social structure over time – such as the transformation from the

agrarian societies with natural economies to the industrial societies with market-based economies. The transformation is known as the modernization that has significantly affected social forms, and spawned new cultural, economic, and political realities (André, 2006).

From a spatial perspective, social change is also reflected in the movement of Buddhism across different regions, adapting to and influencing a variety of cultural contexts. Ancient Buddhism originated in the caste societies of India and then gradually spread to East, South, and Southeast Asia, interacting with societies with distinct cultural characteristics. This geographical expansion continued into East Asia, where Buddhism permeated countries like China, Korea, and Japan. Within the revival of Buddhism in East Asia in recent centuries, particularly in Taiwan, Buddhism has transcended from the predominantly Eastern origins to contact with a diverse global cultural environment. This intercultural exchange and dissemination illustrate the spatial adaptability of Buddhism as it continues to respond to changes in different social and cultural environments.

Buddhism operates in a broader social environment that interconnects political, economic, and socio-cultural structures. Thus, under the change of these social structures, the Buddhist practice and understanding are influenced and reshaped. From a cultural perspective, social change can be viewed through three dimensions: the material culture, the intellectual and normative culture, and the spiritual culture.

The first dimension is material culture that refers to physical objects, including all goods and tools created by human labor. The second dimension is the culture of intelligence and norms, representing the intermediate structure between “mind” and “matter.” It includes conceptual frameworks around nature and society, social organizations, human relations, and environmental beliefs. The third dimension is spiritual culture as foundational structure. It includes social psychology, values, interpersonal concepts, cognitive approaches, aesthetic tastes, morality, national character, and other cultural meanings.

In contemporary China, including Hong Kong and Taiwan, the deep transformation within this third dimension – the spiritual and psychological layers of culture – continues as the modernization process advances. To comprehend the modernization of Buddhism, one must deeply appreciate and contextualize its current social landscape. A critical examination of “Humanistic Buddhism” is essential

for understanding how contemporary Chinese Buddhism adapts to and reflects its modern social context (André, 2006).

#### *Definition of the meaning of Humanistic Buddhism*

Humanistic Buddhism focuses on modernizing and humanizing Buddhist teachings to fit the values and needs of modern society (Ling, 2009). This movement represents and actively applies the original teachings of Buddha, emphasizing a socially engaged and accessible form of Buddhism that is relevant to the modern world. This movement represents a reinterpretation and active application of Buddha’s original teachings, emphasizing a socially engaged, accessible Buddhism that resonates with the modern world. Rooted in the principles of compassion, empathy, and social responsibility, Humanistic Buddhism advocates a proactive, world-centered approach to Buddhist practice.

This Buddhist interpretation has developed via interactions with different historical periods. For example, when Indian Buddhism was introduced into China, it merged with Chinese culture and developed Chinese Buddhist tradition. This cultural inclusiveness and universality helped Buddhism contribute significantly to a new cultural paradigm in China, different from the Indian origins. In Taiwan, the efforts to restore traditional Chinese Buddhist practices were led by the Chinese Buddhist Association, which sought to re-establish mainland Buddhist values and practices, distancing Buddhism from remnants of Japanese colonial influence (Paul, 2003).

After 1950, Venerable Taixu’s disciples, such as Venerable Cihang (1893-1954) and Venerable Yinshun (1906-2005), became central figures in Taiwanese Buddhism. Taixu was a proponent of modernizing and reforming Buddhism, supports the concept of “Life Buddhism”. The concept focuses on bringing Buddhism into daily life. Cihang and Yinshun continued the vision of Taixu through the practice of “Buddhism on earth”. It emphasizes that Buddhism should be a lived experience with both monks and laypeople actively participating in society rather than retreating into monastic isolation (Yao, 2014).

The Humanistic Buddhism movement existed from a period of socio-political transformation when internal and external pressures challenged the Buddhist community. Under these circumstances, there was a collective awakening within the community



that led to a focus on self-help and world salvation as responses to social and environmental crises. Although traditional Buddhist texts include teachings on compassion and helping others, these doctrines were historically constrained by karmic concepts, which emphasized that salvation was reserved for those with karmic connections or predestined relationships with Buddhism. Consequently, traditional Buddhist actions to benefit society were often passive rather than active (Dong, 2010:54).

The Humanistic Buddhism redefines traditional Buddhist teaching through social change. Traditional Buddhism focuses on reaching out to individuals who come to the Buddha. Humanistic Buddhism encourages both monks and lay practitioners to leave the confines of temples, actively engaging with the world to address the challenges. This change represents one of the most significant distinctions between traditional Buddhism and humanistic Buddhism. Humanistic Buddhism presents an outward-facing and community-centered practice to improve lives through social action. However, the traditional one focuses on spiritual salvation within temple walls, thus embodying the principles of empathy, inclusivity, and universal care.

In this way, Humanistic Buddhism works as a link between traditional Buddhist teachings and contemporary social demands. By placing value on active social participation, it reorients the Buddhist mission to include societal welfare, suggesting that the highest spiritual goals are inseparable from efforts to improve human conditions. This transformation of doctrines into conscious, collective behavior is considered one of Humanistic Buddhism's greatest contributions to modern society, as it repositions Buddhism as a force for ethical action and social cohesion in a rapidly changing world.

#### *The Challenge of Buddhism's Social Time-Space Adaptability*

Stability of a religion in a cultural system or a nation is related to its degree of integration in a society. Including its integration into the political and cultural frameworks of that society. Religions that successfully embed themselves into the daily lives and values of a majority are often resilient and enduring. For example, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Brahmanism (later evolving into Neo-Brahmanism or Hinduism) have become deeply embedded within their respective cultural and social systems, forming essential aspects of people's identities and lifestyles (Wan, 2003). Similarly, Confucianism in ancient China achieved this integration through its

transformation into a state ideology and quasi-religion. The integration creates a "social unconscious" by aligning religious values with social norms.

Compared with traditional Taoism, Buddhism in China has not historically achieved complete cultural integration, largely because of the preeminence of Confucianism as the dominant ideological framework in Chinese political and social life. Buddhism has certainly been marginalized because of the emphasis on Confucian ethics and the level of acceptance of a polytheistic religion in China. (Zhao, 2013). While Buddhism has found a more stable integration in Taiwan, where it has adapted to local cultural and social contexts, it has not reached the same degree of embeddedness in mainland China as seen in other major religions within their respective societies.

#### *The Inclusiveness and Social Universality of Buddhist Culture from a Comparative Perspective*

Most of the monotheistic religions tend to exhibit exclusivity and dogmatism while Buddhism is distinguished by its inclusiveness and adaptability. Monotheistic religions, such as Christianity and Islam, are generally characterized by a singular, transformative approach that reshapes heterogeneous cultures rather than blending seamlessly with them. This often led to the Christian and Islamic worlds of different regions to form distinct but relatively uniform cultural models (Ma, 2016; Zhou, 2019). For instance, some countries within the Christian or Islamic cultural parts – whether in Europe, North America, or Central Asia – often share a degree of uniformity in cultural practices, moral frameworks, and religious identity.

Buddhism offers a contrasting model. Over the Buddhist world, including South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia, Buddhism has developed a certain ability to exist together and to integrate into diverse cultural environments. Buddhist societies, despite differences in traditional cultural characteristics, have incorporated Buddhist teachings over time, allowing for varied expressions of the religion while retaining core spiritual values (Sallie, 2009: 53).

This flexibility enabled Buddhism to develop distinct schools and regional forms. Each of them not only reflects the unique cultural heritage of the region, but also preserve the common essence of Buddhism.

Buddhism highlights universality and inclusivity by its adaptability. Compared with other religions that impose a uniform identity, Buddhism

accommodates diversity, allowing each region to interpret and express Buddhist values within its cultural framework. This adaptability has given rise to multiple forms of Buddhist practice – such as Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana – that, while externally different, share a consistent underlying Buddhist spirit. Adaptability is a main part of the resilience of Buddhism. Generally promoting cultural integration without compromising its core spiritual principles. In this way, Buddhism serves as a model of religion that maintains adaptability and inclusiveness to provide valuable insights into how religion can flourish in diverse social contexts (Fen, 2010).

### Conclusion

The primary purpose of religion, and its essential value, lies in providing ultimate care for humanity. While religions often contribute to improving the quality of secular life, this is neither their main purpose nor their exclusive function. Secular humanistic care can be fulfilled by non-religious organizations, which means that the unique role of religion extends beyond these activities to address the deeper existential and ethical concerns of human existence. The main purpose and the essential value of religion is to provide ultimate care for humanity. While religions often contribute to improving the quality of secular life, this is neither their main purpose nor their exclusive function. Secular humanistic care can be fulfilled by non-religious organizations, which means that the unique role of religion extends beyond these activities to address the deeper existential and ethical concerns of human existence. If a belief system does not address the deepest concerns of life, then it cannot be called as religion. This idea is especially important in exploring the concept of Humanistic Buddhism that bridges spiritual principles with engagement

in secular life. A central question arises: can the ideal of a “Pure Land on Earth” be realized within contemporary society, allowing for a “Utopia” or “Pure Land” that embodies the ultimate religious care within Buddhist doctrine to be fully humanized and accessible? (Murray, 2020).

The Buddhist doctrines, the adaptation of traditional concepts, and the practical strategies integrating these ideals within modern social structures. In Taiwan, new Buddhist groups have demonstrated a successful model of community revitalization, providing an alternative to the social cohesion that declined with rapid industrialization and rural-to-urban migration.

These specific groups have had a big impact because of two main points. First, they have become widespread, attracting diverse participation that strengthens social networks and generates significant social connections. Their activities foster connections among individuals who may otherwise remain unacquainted, thereby enhancing the overall stock of social capital within these communities. Second, Buddhist groups in Taiwan by highlighting core Buddhist values of empathy and compassion have developed outward-facing methods. Through their socially engaged activities, they encourage members to build connections with each other and feel a sense of collective belonging and responsibility (David C, 2009).

The practice of Humanistic Buddhism in Taiwan illustrates the transformative potential of religious engagement in social life. By balancing spiritual objectives with social action, these groups embody Buddhism’s capacity for adaptability and its commitment to fostering communal well-being, offering a valuable model for how religions can contribute positively to modern societal structures.

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