

# A Letter to Dharma Protectors and Friends in 2017

Dear Dharma protectors and friends,  
Auspicious greetings!

Gazing at beautiful sceneries of life, in the blink of an eye, it is time once again to welcome a new year. As Fo Guang Shan enters its 51<sup>st</sup> year, Venerable Master, though still in recovery, has instructed that I present a report to the public, especially our devotees and friends, on what we have accomplished over the past year as well as what the future development of Humanistic Buddhism will be.

This past year, Fo Guang Shan celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary with much warmth, diversity, and jubilation. To begin with, amidst anticipation and excitement, we held "Fo Guang Shan: Retrospection" to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> year of our founding. The establishment of Fo Guang Shan was only possible through the collaborative effort of millions of devotees, benefactors, friends, and thousands of temples, all working together in the spirit of cooperation. From May 14<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup>, we invited, as an expression of our gratitude, those with an affinity with Fo Guang Shan to share their memories on learning and practicing Buddhism.

For the first three days of "Fo Guang Shan: Retrospection," speakers featured public figures (such as Wu Po-hsiung, Chen Chaolong, Li Chi-mao, Charles H. C. Kao, Yang Chao-hsiang, Lin Tsong-ming, Lai Wei-cheng, Chang Yia-chung, and Li Jui-teng) and those who helped Venerable Master build Fo Guang Shan half a century ago. Notably, there was Hsiao Ting-shun who helped with construction, as well as Tai Pao-cheng who cooked at the Pilgrim's Lodge for over 40 years and is now retired at Fo Guang Shan Senior Home. More than 50 speakers, including Lin Chin-chi, Cheng Shih-yen, and Chao Tsui-hui, selflessly gave decades of support, and are manifestations of diligent, aspiring bodhisattvas in our world.

Of course, those who have contributed to Fo Guang Shan are not merely limited to those mentioned above. We can only list a few people as exemplary representatives as a token of our sincere appreciation. We would like to thank everyone for helping to turn a page in our history and dedicating your merits to society. May you uphold wisdom and peace for you and your whole family.

Furthermore, a reunion was held for the first eight classes of Fo Guang Shan Tsung-Lin University to share their memories on Fo Guang Shan's early days. Those in attendance included: Venerable Shou Yu, Abbot of Ten Directions Buddhist Center; Venerable Hong Yi, Associate President of Texas Buddhist Association; Venerable Pu Huei, Chairman of the Chinese Bhikkhuni Association; and Venerable Hsing Ying, Chief Editor of Cheng Wen Publishing. All are graduates of Tsung-Lin University who have been propagating Buddhism worldwide since the completion of their monastic education.

Concurrently, the Buddha Museum invited the Academy of Performing Arts of the Philippines to perform *Siddhartha the Musical*, and devotees across the world to jointly participate in the "Praise the Buddha Grand Concert." The wonderful sound of singing and music resounding through the sky is one of many ways to respect and praise the Buddha, as well as a celebration of Fo Guang Shan's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

Moreover, Fo Guang Shan headquarters and its branch temples, as well as the Buddha Museum, simultaneously held "A Look Back in History: Photo & Video Exhibition" to showcase Fo Guang Shan's milestones throughout the past 50 years of Dharma propagation, an undertaking of historical significance. Also, beginning July 1<sup>st</sup>, under the organization of the Board of Directors as a way of celebration initiated by his disciples, and planned by the Fo Guang Yuan Art Gallery, Venerable Master Hsing Yun's One-Stroke Calligraphy was displayed concurrently at 73 exhibition halls, art galleries, and museums in 19 countries worldwide to spread Venerable Master's teachings.

In January, Venerable Master began writing articles on *Humanistic Buddhism: Holding True to the Original Intent of Buddha* for the *Merit Times*, and the Chinese and English book editions were then published concurrently in May. Subsequently, the Simplified Chinese edition was published jointly by Renmin Publishing and China Religious Culture Publisher, and launched

at Dajue Temple in August. The Venerable Master has divided the book into the following sections:

1. Humanistic Lifestyle of the Buddha
2. Core Concepts of Humanistic Buddhism
3. Development of Buddhism in China
4. Contemporary Development of Chinese Buddhism

The purpose of this layout is to manifest the Buddha's original intents of benefitting the world. Buddhism is a religion of the human world. The Buddha was human, not a god. Therefore, Buddhism is humanistic and does not rely on the power of deities. Everyone should uphold the belief that we are all buddhas ourselves, proudly say, "I am a buddha," and pursue a life of happiness built on a foundation of self-growth by relying on the self and the Dharma.

Fo Guang Shan's cultural publication division also had a fruitful year. In January, the bi-monthly *Humanistic Buddhism: Journal, Arts and Culture* was launched, comprising both academic and literary papers suited for a wider audience. Additionally, the English edition of the 20-volume *Encyclopedia of Buddhist Arts* was published in May. Under the direction of Chief Editor Venerable Ru Chang and Venerable You Heng, the editing and layout design of the English edition was completed three years after the Chinese edition was published in 2013.

Furthermore, with the unceasing efforts of Venerables Man Ji, Yung Ben, Miao Shu, and their teams, the forty-volume *Yogacara Canon* and the nineteen-volume *Jataka Canon* of the Fo Guang Buddhist Canon were published and launched in August and September respectively. The Fo Guang Buddhist Canon contains a total of sixteen categories. The *Agama Canon* was published in 1983, followed by the *Pure Land Canon*, *Chan Canon*, *Avatamsaka Canon*, and *Prajna Canon* in subsequent years. So far, eight categories have been completed. Onwards, members of the Fo Guang Shan Order shall continue to dedicate themselves to illuminating the world through the torch of prajna wisdom.

The power of words is infinite. Thus, Venerable Master Hsing Yun has been diligently writing to disseminate the Dharma. At present, he has authored more than 300 titles, totaling over 30 million words. Last March, the publishing team for the Complete Works of Venerable Master Hsing Yun began making progress under the leadership of Chief Editor Tsai Meng-hua and Chief Designer Venerable Ru Chang. The collection is due to be published this year. In accomplishing the Three Imperishables in Confucianism: virtue, words, and merits, the publication of the *Complete Works of Venerable Master Hsing Yun* will be a priceless gem for the study of Fo Guang Shan and Humanistic Buddhism.

In terms of education, the Venerable Master Hsing Yun Public Education Trust Fund organized the 4<sup>th</sup> Hsing Yun Education Award in September, where 20 outstanding teachers were recognized for their contributions. In Venerable Master's mind, though the award may be small, to be awarded is no easy feat. The recipients undergo a rigorous process of public nomination, shortlisting, and a final review before they can be deemed exemplars of teaching excellence.

In October, the Fo Guang Shan International University Consortium hosted the 2016 University Presidents Forum. This three-day forum, held at Fo Guang Shan, Nanhua University in Chiayi, and Fo Guang University in Yilan, was attended by university presidents and scholars from eleven countries and twenty-one universities.

University is not a place solely for the pursuit of knowledge and truth; it is where great leaders and virtuous sages of the future are nurtured. In the face of our rapidly changing world, we hope that the experiences shared in the forum can empower universities to nurture talents who are both learned and virtuous, that they may contribute to humanity and the world.

Besides his interest in university education, the Venerable Master's care for underprivileged children has never diminished. The Sons of Zulai Program in Brazil, the Dragon Team in South Africa, Sramanera School in India, and Guang Ming College in the Philippines have thus been established. They were founded out of Venerable Master's belief that only education can transform the lives of disadvantaged children and youths, so

that they may have hope and a future.

Commencing in September, the first batch of 32 students were accepted in the "Seeds of Hope Project" instituted by the Fo Guang Shan Foundation for Buddhist Culture & Education, and began their studies at Pu-Men High School. In Venerable Master's meeting with them, he shared that although from a poor family, he felt that he was a seed with potential. Because of his diligence, commitment, kindness, and willingness to develop good affinities, this seed has grown to achieve greatness today. Venerable Master encouraged the youths that as young seeds, they should strive to be the most "noble, outstanding, and virtuous."

Poverty had kept Venerable Master from formal education. Nevertheless, he remains both very diligent and knowledgeable. In May, President Ku Yuen-kuang of National Pingtung University came to Fo Guang Shan to confer upon him an honorary doctorate degree. In October, Dongbei University of Finance and Economics in Mainland China invited him to be an emeritus professor. In December, the Chinese University of Hong Kong bestowed onto him an honorary doctorate degree in social science. Venerable Master has now obtained a total of 22 honorary doctorates.

Learning requires self-motivation. Both the Buddhist concept of "self-awareness" and the Confucian "self-learning" are the most noble educational principles. Based on this spirit, we applied for the establishment of academic institutes in Mainland China. Currently, Fo Guang Shan has four government-endorsed educational programs: the Yixing Yunhu Academy, Yangzhou Cultural Academy, Nanjing Jinling Academy, and Beijing Guangzhong Academy. These programs focus on the dual-cultivation of merits and wisdom, and equal emphasis on theory and practice. Venerable Master believes that "Buddhism is indispensable to the revival of Chinese Culture," and has faith that these undertakings will be beneficial to purifying the mind and inspiring morality.

Just as before, there were amiable and continuous cultural exchanges between the Cross-Strait. In 2015, the head and body of a Buddha statue dating back to the Northern Qi dynasty were reunited and enshrined at Fo Guang Shan. In February 2016, the head of the statue was ceremoniously returned to Mainland China. Liu Shuguang (Deputy Director of State Administration of Cultural Heritage), Zhang Lifang (Director of Hebei Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics), and government officials were present at Beijing Capital International Airport to receive the statue. More than 60 journalists of nearly 30 media outlets from Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan were in attendance. There, Venerable Master said:

"For 20 years, the head of the Buddha statue has been displaced. Its return to China through Taiwan is extremely significant. All Chinese people should remember that our culture, history, and blood ties cannot be sundered, just as emptiness cannot be severed and oceans cannot be separated..."

Further concrete results of cultural exchanges are shown by the exhibitions at the Buddha Museum throughout the year: *Month of Cultures at Fo Guang Shan: Beijing, Tianjin, and Hebei; Amazing Jiangsu: Jiangsu Intangible Cultural Heritage Exhibition; Eight Palace Handicrafts of Beijing*, and Gansu Dance Troupe's *Silk Road: The Classic Dance Drama*.

For Cross-Strait peace and the propagation of Humanistic Buddhism, Venerable Master continued to visit Mainland China in his old age. In April, he held a three-day Dharma lecture on "Chan in Daily Life" at Yixing Gymnasium and the Yangzhou Forum. In July, the Shanghai Library invited him to give a talk on "The Treasure in Books." That same month, Venerable Master was invited to speak at the Grand Bao'en Temple Park in Nanjing, where the Buddhist Association of China and Nanjing Municipal People's Government held activities to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Jinling Buddhist Press. In his address, Venerable Master praised Yang Renshan, founder of the Press, as a bodhisattva of "wisdom, compassion, endeavors, and global vision." Yang can be said to be a great contributor to the revival of modern Buddhism. In September, Venerable Master lectured on "Precepts as Teachers" to 500 newly-ordained bhiksu and bhiksunis at the

full ordination ceremony in Changzhou's Tianning Temple, leader of the four major monasteries in South Eastern China.

In September, the United Association of Humanistic Buddhism, Chunghua organized a Cross-Strait exchange delegation, with more than 180 monastics and lay participants from temples across Taiwan. Led by Executive Deputy Abbot Venerable Hui Chuan, the delegation visited temples, including Longquan Temple and Fayuan Temple in Beijing, to exchange experiences on temple management and Dharma propagation. They also visited Buddhist colleges and participated in the Cross-Strait Buddhist Education Conference with numerous Buddhist College representatives. At the trip's conclusion, the delegation attended a forum at the State Bureau of Religious Affairs of the People's Republic of China, and lastly the Humanistic Buddhism Discussion Forum at Dajue Temple in Yixing.

This exchange not only allowed those from Mainland China to gain a better understanding of Buddhism in Taiwan, but also encouraged unity and interaction amongst Buddhist organizations in Taiwan. Secretary-General Venerable Chueh Pei, responsible for organizing the exchange, expressed her gratitude to Venerable Master Hsing Yun for his guidance and pursuit of a new frontier. Indeed, Venerable Master has diligently sowed the seeds of Buddhism through building affinities and fostering talents over the past decade. The future rests on Chinese youths to continue their cultivation, in order to eventually blossom and bear fruit.

At the BLIA World Headquarters General Conference in October, Venerable Master gave a keynote speech on "Consensus and Openness." He encouraged all to seek consensus regarding Humanistic Buddhism and aspects including cross-sectarian respect, gender equality, valuing youths and fostering talents, and the heritage of faith. In conjunction, Venerable Master also believes in openness, such as that of monastery grounds, the mind, lay Dharma teachers, lineage personnel, and Cross-Strait Buddhist exchanges.

Certainly, in order to successfully accomplish our goals, we must not only have consensus and an open mind, but also the willingness to cooperate.

In November, Fo Guang Shan held the 2016 International Ten-Thousand Buddha Triple Platform Full Ordination Ceremony as part of its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. Three hundred preceptees from a hundred temples worldwide passed the challenging month-long precept assembly and cultivation, thereby becoming official monastics and aspiring bodhisattvas.

December 25<sup>th</sup> marks the annual "When Buddha Meets the Gods Event." Last year, the Chunghua Federation of Traditional Religious Associations and the Buddha Museum submitted an application to the World Record Association to recognize a new world record set at this event, whereby over five hundred temples and churches gathered at the same instance. It passed the preliminary assessment for "Global Multi-religious Reunion by the Most Number of Shrines, Temples, and Churches around the World - When Buddha Meets the Gods Event 2016" and certification as an Intangible Cultural Heritage. This is cause for celebration, and also illustrates the intrinsic values of respect, tolerance, and coexistence in Humanistic Buddhism.

The 6<sup>th</sup> BLIA Cup International Basketball Tournament took place last year. For the past five years, the Fo Guang University women's basketball team achieved 2<sup>nd</sup> place three times, 3<sup>rd</sup> place twice, but had yet to win 1<sup>st</sup> place. Last August, they finally won after an intense competition at Kaohsiung Arena. Propagating the Dharma through sports, arts, and music to allow people from all walks of life to know Buddhism are the keys to Fo Guang Shan's future development.

Fifty years ago, Venerable Master guided both monastics and laity in building Fo Guang Shan. This is where all our monastics reside, and thus can be called the "Sangha Gem." Thirty years later, thousands of temples and millions of devotees contributed to the construction of the Buddha Museum, the "Buddha Gem." In the last decade, the monastics of Fo Guang Shan have not publicly

fundraised to complete the Sutra Repository, the "Dharma Gem." Instead, they used their allowance, offerings received from holding lectures and Dharma services, royalties issued from publications, as well as income from the Water Drop Teahouses and Venerable Master's One-Stroke Calligraphy for its construction.

Now the infrastructure of the Triple Gem is completed. Within the first fifty years of its founding, Fo Guang Shan has accomplished not only its construction, but also successfully fostered talented people who have become its foundation. Everyone's collective efforts have propagated the Dharma and Humanistic Buddhism across the five continents of the world.

Progress over the next half century will be guided by Venerable Master's vision of a "Triple Gem Mountain," as well as reflections on and adjustments to the initial organizational structure of Fo Guang Shan. Overall, the system is divided into the administrative unit and specialized units. The administrative unit includes Dajue Temple and the "Triple Gem Mountain."

The "Buddha Gem Mountain" focuses on cultural development and comprises: Fo Guang Shan Buddha Museum, Fo Guang Tripitaka Editing Committee, Fo Guang Cultural Enterprise, Gandha Samudra Culture Company, Beautiful Life Television, the *Merit Times*, and Fo Guang Yuan Art Gallery Headquarters.

The "Dharma Gem Mountain" promotes education and involves: the Sutra Repository, Institute of Humanistic Buddhism, Tsung-Lin University, educational institutions of all levels worldwide, including all kindergartens, primary, and secondary schools.

The "Sangha Gem Mountain" encompasses different departments of Fo Guang Shan Headquarters, as well as domestic and overseas branch temples.

Specialized units include: Fo Guang Shan International University Consortium, Buddha's Light International Association, foundations, and other government registered entities.

Guided by Venerable Master and his blueprint for Humanistic Buddhism, monastics and laity should emphasize the following in the future propagation of Humanistic Buddhism: foster holistic and international talents; protect and support Fo Guang Ancestral Temple - Dajue Temple; support the Three Acts of Goodness Schools Program, the Cloud and Water Mobile Library, the Venerable Master Hsing Yun Public Education Trust Fund, as well as media and literary awards; value lay involvement in the development of Buddhism; organize "Glory Belongs to the Buddha" basketball teams; develop a system for temple assessment; proactively promote and develop the *Merit Times*; and propagate the Dharma in lectures through music and songs.

Success follows preparation, while failure follows unreadiness. The realization of these plans rely on all members of Fo Guang Shan being progressive and steadfast. However, regardless of the manner of development, what should be remembered both with reverence and importance are the guiding principles stipulated by Venerable Master: "Work by collective effort, lead by a system. Do what is in accordance with Buddha, and rely on nothing but the Dharma."

Human affairs arise and subside; time and space can ebb and flow. In the long course of history, Fo Guang Shan is still youthful in its fiftieth year. Therefore, it is even more important to be humble and diligent in learning. It is our fervent wish that the fourfold assembly of disciples can strive forward as one, so that Humanistic Buddhism and the sound of Dharma may prevail in this world.

As we come upon the Year of the Rooster, it is as said in a Tang poem, "The rooster crows the sound of success." In this new year, I shall use Venerable Master's calligraphy for this year's spring couplet, "Rising Dawn of Success," to wish you a year filled with soaring aspirations and eminence. Auspicious blessings and peace to you all, as well as the perfection of merits and wisdom!

Hsin Bao

Head Abbot

Chairperson, Fo Guang Shan Board of Directors

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