

Parliament Affiliated

World Interfaith Harmony Week Event

UN Official Observance

Creating Interpersonal Harmony:

**Honoring our
shared diversity**



UNITED NATIONS



**World Interfaith
Harmony Week**

UN Official Observance - 1st Week of February



Creating interpersonal harmony: Honouring our shared diversity

Zoom Online Forum - Synchronous Online Video Conference

**Parliament Affiliated World Interfaith Harmony Week Event, UN
Official Observance**

19 February 2022, 11:00 (NY EST)



**World Interfaith
Harmony Week**

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**World Interfaith
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AGENDA

Session one

11:00 - 11:04	Opening MC: Tracy Liu
11:04 - 11:18	Session One Talk by Prof. Dr. Bee Scherer Q&A with Mr. Yen Ting Low
11:18 - 11:32	Talk by Dr. Kenneth W. Holloway Q&A with Dr. Wei-Chen (Miso) Lee
11:32 - 11:46	Talk by Prof. Dr. Huey-Ming Tzeng Q&A with Mr. Stanley Chung
11:46 - 12:00	Talk by Dr. Jens Reinke Q&A with Ms. Jessica Nguyen

Session two

12:00 - 12:05	Ven. Dr. Miao Lung
12:05 - 12:10	Talk by Mr. Fadel Soliman
12:10 - 12:15	Talk by Mr. Tanveer Hussain Shah
12:15 - 12:30	Q&A Session

Session One

Opening:

Talk by Tracy Liu

Event Facilitator and MC
Ph.D. Candidate in Social Anthropology
Department of Social Anthropology
University of Cambridge, UK



Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening, to you all, wherever you are in the world.

I am Tracy Liu, a Ph.D. Candidate from the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge. I whole-heartedly welcome you with all my sincerity and on behalf of the organisers of this wonderful event. This event is inter-university collaborated, as part of the United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week, which is held annually to promote mutual understanding and cooperation between all people regardless of their faiths and religions.

Over the past two years, the world has been fighting a pandemic. In 2020, we discussed the Five Harmonies proposed by Venerable Master Hsing Yun, the founder of Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Organisation. Master Hsing Yun advocates the principles of Humanistic Buddhism in bringing harmony and peace to all living beings around the world and reminding people to transform the world through cultivating ourselves and benefiting others. The Five Harmonies, as one of the core teachings in Humanistic Buddhism, includes: 'harmony of joy within oneself, harmony of co-operation within the family, harmony of respect between self and other, harmony of unity in society, and harmony of peace throughout the world'. Last year, we focused on the first layer, and explored how to heal the mind and how to find inner joy, in what we hoped would soon be a post-pandemic world. This year, let us focus on the second and third layers and investigate how to create interpersonal harmony and honour shared diversity.

One of Fo Guang Shan's contributions to interfaith harmony and honoured diversity can be exemplified by this annual event, as you see on the screen. That is 'When Buddha Meets the Gods', held on the 25th of December each year, at Fo Guang Shan Buddha Museum, Kaohsiung, Taiwan. Praying for a well-rounded year and

realising the anticipation of 'living side by side without distinction', this world association of Gods was launched by Master Hsing Yun in 2011 and has been held for consecutive ten years. With multi-cultural performances, interfaith dialogues and forums, representatives of Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Catholicism, Islam, Judaism, folk religions, and other new religions gather and are deeply immersed in harmonious atmosphere across religious and national boundaries.

As the agenda shows, today we will have two sessions. It is a great honour to have scholars from different fields and distinguished speakers beyond academia. All of them will share with us based on their research, life stories or beautiful wishes.

If you have any questions to our speakers, welcome you to send your questions to the email address (2022unwihk@gmail.com) with your contacts. Our volunteers will collect them and send to speakers. You'll get the reply from our speakers soon.

Bio

Ms. Xin Ying (Tracy) Liu is a Ph.D. Candidate in Social Anthropology, Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge, the UK. Her research project stands at the intersection of the anthropology of ethics and the study of Humanistic Buddhism, pivoting on her long-term participant observation in Fo Guang Shan branches across different continents.

Interpersonal Harmony and Interfaith: Overcoming Othering

Talk by Prof. Dr. Bee Scherer

**The Chair of Buddhist Studies
The Rector of the Buddhist Seminary
Free University (VU) Amsterdam, Netherlands**



When we talk about inter-relational harmony from a Buddhist perspective, we cannot do so without referring to the core Buddhist idea of co-dependent arising (pratītyasamutpāda) that the great Master Thich Nhat Hanh called interbeing.

This realisation of the interconnectedness of all phenomena and beings, their lack of their autonomy and inherent essence, took shape in special form in East Asian Mahāyāna Buddhist schools, particularly in the traditions of the Avatamsaka and Lotus Sūtra schools as multi-layered ‘deep interfusion’ (圓融, yuanrong) which organically connected to Daoist and Confucian ideas of harmony in the world and in society.

So-called Humanistic Buddhism owes its focus on the Human Life and society to the great reformer Taixu太虛 (1890-1947). Among his spiritual heirs features Zhao Puchu 趙朴初(趙樸初) as one of the most influential Humanistic Buddhist leaders within mainland China. Despite his influence, his work is not as well known outside China as the leading Humanistic Buddhist masters based in Taiwan such as Zhao Puchu’s contemporary Yin Shun (印順, 1906–2005) and the slightly younger generation of Humanistic Buddhist leaders: Tzu Chi 慈濟 (Ciji)’s Master Cheng Yen 證嚴 (1937–), Dharma Drum法鼓山 (Fagu Shan)’s Master Shengyan (聖嚴; 1931–2009) and Fo Guang Shan 佛光山’s Master Hsing Yun 星雲 (Xingyun, 1927–). Zhao Puchu spoke of Buddhism as Rooted in the Human World, Interfused in the Human World, and Benefitting the Human World. (扎根人間, 圓融人間, 造福人間; Traditional Chinese: 紮根人間, 圓融人間, 造福人間)

‘Interfused with the Human World’ (圓融人間yuanrong renjian) connects with deeply harmonious interbeing; the closeness of Buddhist interfusion with Daoist and Confucian 和he (harmony) is then made explicitly by Ven. Master Hsing Yun 星雲 in his concept of the Five Harmonies, in which harmony in yourself is followed by

the harmony in the family and the wider harmony between humans - between other 'people and myself': ren wo he 人我和. For Ven. Master Hsing Yun, mutual respect (敬jing) is basis, process and result of this inter-relational harmony. Respecting – or giving honour – to others is the basis of interpersonal and interfaith harmonies. Yet often we struggle to give that respect against our human ego-impulses of Othering: to judgmentally demarcate an in-group and out-group boundary. This process of Othering is psychoanalytically seen as a strategy of creating order in the messy chaos of human life; but more than just order, Othering creates hierarchy, privilege, and ego-affirmation; in Buddhist perspective, Othering is nothing more than a process of selfish ignorance that closes the heart and fosters disturbing emotions such as pride and anger.

Faith judgments can become vehicles of Othering, of closed hearts that prevent respect and inter-relational harmony. Faiths can put their own doctrinal and often normative scripts above the Human life and the lived experience of those Othered and judged. Often there are conflicts arising from what faiths state to be true and right – interfaith conflicts and conflicts of faith judgments with human rights.

Religious leaders often justify closing their hearts to those of other faiths by proof-texting scripture – canonical texts. Proof-texting here means that those who are preaching Othering in the name of religion only look for and seemingly find their own bias in the texts they quote as alleged justification for exclusion and oppression.

In contrast, in harmony, all religions can choose to work together with an open heart, regardless of any doctrines, for the human future: If we as religions and world views concentrate on this practical goal – alleviating suffering and creating the conditions for happiness – we will find ourselves in harmony with each other,

working hand in hand.

Still, marginalisation goes beyond Interfaith issues and affects some of the most persecuted, disadvantaged, and discriminated against groups. In Buddhism the proof-texting strategy of using the Buddha's Word falls at the first hurdle of deeper inquiry: the eternal dharma is eternally appropriate means, transformative advice taken from contingent societal contexts. There were oppressive structure present in the Buddha's time and at the time of later commentators and interpreters; often the Buddha countered these scripts to what was to the maximum degree skilfully possible at that time; where discrimination and Othering entered scripture, they clearly are accidentals and accessories of the dharma, but not the dharma itself!

On that background we can try as Buddhists and Buddhist scholars how to re-read Buddhist texts for inclusion and celebration of our shared diversity, focussed on aspects of subjectivity and belonging such as dis/ability, ethnicity, race, class, socio-economic power, gender, gender identity & expression, and sexualities; we need to look at the embodied experience of those who experience discrimination and oppression: the dis/abled, neurodiverse, BIMPOC (Black, Indigenous, Mixed-Race, People of Colour)/BAME (Black and Asian Minority Ethnicities), class-object, working class, poor, women, LGBTIQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Queer etc.) people. We can show how societal prejudice against the marginalise is proof-texted through simplistic and wrong understanding of karma and the disregard for our shared and universal Buddha-nature. Such proof-texting is vested in privileged ego-delusion and constitutes a closed heart rejection of the very lovingkindness that expresses itself in the unlimited manifestations of Avalokiteśvara (觀世音Guanshiyin): Buddhist enlightened compassion does not judge but simply takes all forms that can help. A sex worker in a brothel; a bee in a cesspit humming Namō Buddhāya. As Buddhists we are not called to judge

others because that is already Othering. We are only called to alleviate suffering. We can do so only with an open ego-less heart. By stepping back from our own ego and focusing on eliminating suffering where we find it, we can create interfusional harmony.

I want to close with remarks on two concrete Interfaith examples cases. The first is the initiative of Dutch worldview groups advising the Dutch government in 2020-2021 on the proposed ban of LGBT so-called 'conversion' therapy, which is better denoted with the acronym DERC (Diversity Eradication, Repression and Change)-Efforts. Humanists, Buddhist, Hindus, and Christian groups united in a strong position paper informing the upcoming legislation. Similarly, the Global Interfaith Commission on LGBTQ+ (GIC+) lives (<https://globalinterfaith.lgbt>) has been actively searching to advise the governments and in particular the UK government to end the suffering of LGBTIQ+ people of faith enduring DERC efforts and we will meet again in March at a UK Foreign Office sponsored gathering of religious leaders. These initiatives show that change to eradicate suffering even against deeply rooted societal and religious prejudices is possible when we stop antagonising and Othering; when we open our hearts and respect and celebrate diversity. Thank you!

Followed by Questions from Mr. Yen Ting Low:

How can religious institutions foster a more inclusive environment for non-binary and LGBTQ populations? Many religious traditions are rooted in the gender binary and heterosexuality being the norms. For example, in Buddhist prayer services, females are on the left side and males are on the right, but we don't know where "others" should be. With the rising awareness of non-binary and LGBTQ populations, how can we help them find a place within today's religious institutions?

Answers by Prof. Scherer:

Thank you for this great question. I think first we need to recognise that the Buddha dharma is for all the same, transforming the experience of suffering into enlightenment. Enlightenment has no gender; only societal prejudice knows gender. The Buddha even recognised that explicitly when he taught that the gender binary is one of last nimittas (想/相), very stubborn conditioned characteristics of Human thinking, that must fall away in 'signless absorption' (animitta samādhi) and with full realisation. We can carefully ask any textual reading if what is said there is contextually relevant for liberation and enlightenment. Social scripts are just as societies not static, they are always changing and with them the appropriate means for liberation adapt. We live in a time where gender equality is possible. Where LGBT inclusion is possible. Our greater knowledge and understanding of human diversity can open our hearts. Therefore, we need to let go of privileges and anxieties: Enlightenment and Buddhahood is the same for all: men, women, cis, trans, non-binary, straight or queer. Let's respect and celebrate in diversity our common Buddha nature.

Bio

Prof. Dr. Bee Scherer (they/them) is the Chair of Buddhist Studies and the Rector of the Buddhist Seminary at Free University (VU) Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Bee founded the Queering Paradigms network and the interdisciplinary Social Justice research institute INCISE. After studies in Germany and the U.S., Bee received a Ph.D. from Groningen University in 2002. Before joining the VU in 2020, Bee was the Director of the INCISE and the Chair of Religious Studies and Gender Studies at Canterbury Christ Church University, UK. Prof. Scherer is also a longstanding practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism and dharma teacher.



Mr. Yen Ting Low is a Traditional Chinese Localization Specialist at Roblox, and currently in the Translation and Localization Management Master's Program at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey. He has been volunteering with the Fo Guang Shan organization for various translation and interpretation efforts.

Humanism as Defining Feature of Confucian Religiosity

Talk by Dr. Kenneth W. Holloway

**Levenson Chair and Associate Professor
Department of History
Florida Atlantic University, USA**



My presentation today piggybacks upon what Professor Bee Scherer was just discussing in that I am also discussing the importance of how Buddhism is not about dividing and separating us on the bodily level. However, I am approaching this question from a more conceptual level in terms of how we think of the divide between Buddhism, Confucianism, and even Daoism. The personal perspective I bring to this stems from having had the privilege to participate in a number of interfaith dialogues and prayer services since 2019. Because of this I have been thinking about how the ideas of Venerable Master Hsing Yun and Humanistic Buddhism have served as an organizational structure for these dialogues. Moreover, I have become increasingly aware of how humanistic religion has a positive effect on society, particularly in light of the challenges we have been facing in this pandemic.

I want to start with the history of religious divisions in East Asia and emphasize that this began in the early 20th century when the divisions amongst the religions of China were suddenly highlighted. This is an importantly new situation, and it is emphatically not representative of how these religions were understood traditionally.

The scholarly source I want to point to that reflects this situation is by Rebecca Nedostup and is entitled to *Superstitious Regimes*, which was published in 2009. She argued that it was only in the early 20th century that, under pressure to reform China's religions along Protestant lines, the divides between Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism first came to be emphasized. The reason for this was that having a clearly defined set of practices was essential for them escaping the category of "superstitious" which would result in having the religion's property seized and being banned from the country. Part and parcel of this was discrimination against traditional religions, particularly Confucianism, who then attempted to redefine

itself as philosophical instead of religious. Simultaneously, the line between Confucianism and Buddhism can be seen as a very new idea and does not to have deep roots.

The second source I want to share is Morten Schluter's *How Zen Became Zen*. This book argues that the engagement of Buddhism, which I see as the humanism that Venerable Master Hsing Yun discusses, dates to the progressive political climate of the Song Dynasty, which was 960 to 1279. During this time, Buddhism and Confucianism were simultaneously affected by the progressive politics of the time, which emphasized finding ways to become more engaged in the problems people faced in their lives and addressing issues of social justice. From this perspective, it is possible to see that the divide between Confucianism and Buddhism is easily overemphasized since they both underwent an important period of cross pollination a thousand years ago.

The final book I want to discuss in this history of the connections between Confucianism and Buddhist is by Jiang Wu and is entitled *Enlightenment in Dispute*. Here, the focus is the Ming dynasty, 1368 to 1640, and he discusses how the top disciples of the most famous Confucian of the day Wang Yangming all spent their later years researching and writing about Buddhism.

I myself have been following a similar trajectory, in that my first two books analyzed connections between Confucianism and Daoism, but now I am extending this into two more books that I will soon be publishing on connections with Buddhism. The common ground among religions is extremely important and it is important to think beyond these divides. The final area I want to discuss is based on my experience visiting Taiwan. In the large Buddha Museum in Kaohsiung, there is a very large statue of Confucius that I saw when I visited in 2019. My first visit to the museum

was in 2011, and actually in 2011 statue to Confucius had not been erected yet, but in that year I participated in the Water Land Dharma Service. This is a Buddhist ritual which includes Confucius and Laozi, whose spirits are invited to participate in the ceremony. This is the highest most elaborate Buddhist ritual that is celebrated today, and it takes a week to perform. The spirit of that Dharma Service continues in today's interfaith dialogue and in Venerable Master Hsing Yun's annual celebration of "When Buddha Meets the Gods". This event is reflective of this very long tradition of Confucian-Buddhist connections.

Now I want to close out my remarks by sharing one final example of this connection. If you have the chance to visit southern Taiwan, there is a temple called The First School in Taiwan (全臺首學), which both illustrates the religious nature of Confucian practice and its connections with Buddhism and Daoism. The particular religious need of young people is addressed by this temple at a moment of great anxiety, tension, and fear in their young lives, the college entrance exams. During this time, numerous young people will flock to this Confucian temple, which is the only one in Asia that has never had a break in the performance of their annual rituals to the spirit of Confucius since the Qing Dynasty. When students go there, their goal is to attend that annual Teachers Day Ritual, after which they attempt to pluck a hair from the ox which had been sacrificed to Confucius. Since this event often became quite chaotic, with scores of young children running towards this ox, trying to pull hair off its head, the gift shop now sells these hairs. So you do not have to even be there on the day of the ceremony. I purchased one in 2019 when I was visiting, and what you have here is they have taken a little red sticker and adhered these hairs right here, hairs from the ox to a picture of Confucius. The idea being that you will take this, and you will carry it with you in this little envelope when you go to take the college entrance exams. However, when you go to the gift store what they advise you to do is beyond just having this,

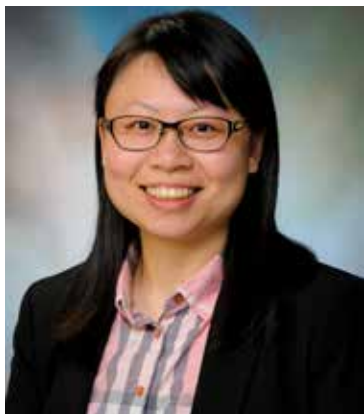
ashamed that I probably do not know as much as you do. Both Buddhism and Confucianism talk about love and harmony. However, love in Confucianism seems to be compounded with “obedience” that we are required to love our parents but also obey them. Do you think it is a truth or a myth? If it is true, how could we resolve the difference between Buddhism and Confucianism?

Answers from Dr. Holloway:

Thank you that is a fantastic question. What happens with all these religions is that as time moves forward, they come to be seen as representatives of this connection to political and social norms but when you read the texts carefully in the way that I try to do, you see things differently. Mencius in particular is always speaking truth to power; he has a lot of dialogues with like King Hui of Liang and he tells the king that you are going to die and you are going to be killed if you continue in this manner. So, Mencius is basically like a business consultant today, he is very low in social, political, and you know economic status in his world and in contrast this is a king who is very high up, so really if you read these texts carefully, they oppose these hierarchical ideals. In addition, there has been work done recently to try to connect Confucianism with feminism, there is the book that really launched this 20 years ago called *The Sage of the Second Sex*, which challenges a lot of these ideas that people have kind of imposed upon Confucianism as being this hierarchical and misogynist, you know a relic from the past. I think that by understanding the common ground with Confucianism and Buddhism and humanism that is the key to overcoming those misrepresentations of how these traditional elements of ancient society function in actual history, thank you.

Bio

Dr. Kenneth W. Holloway is Levenson Chair and Associate Professor of Department of History at Florida Atlantic University, the USA. He researches the history of religion from the pre-Han period in China through the development of Buddhism as it crossed East Asia. The first stage of his research was to establish a new model for understanding how religion developed in early China. This involved analyzing recently discovered manuscripts buried in a tomb from 300 BCE in what is now Hubei Province. He has written two books on this subject that were published by Oxford University Press. They are entitled *Guodian: The Newly Discovered Seeds of Chinese Religious and Political Philosophy* (2009) and *The Quest for Ecstatic Morality in Early China* (2013). Right now, he is writing his third book, which will employ the model he developed based on recent excavations to shed new light on the development of Buddhism in China.



Dr. Wei-Chen (Miso) Lee is a health services researcher and adjunct assistant professor at University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, Texas, the USA. Her research focuses on examining health disparities in racial minorities and rural populations and identifying strategies to address disparities found. She is a native Taiwanese who lived in Taipei before she came to the US thirteen years ago.

**Recognizing our differences as one of the ways to
embrace interfaith harmony
with our loved ones and community**

Talk by Prof. Dr. Huey-Ming Tzeng (RN, FAAN)

**Odelia Brown McCarley Endowed Professorship in Nursing
The School of Nursing
The University of Texas Medical Branch, Galveston, Texas,
USA**



Thank you, Tracy, for the kind introduction. I go by Ming, a Chinese, growing up in Taiwan. I immigrated to the United States in 2006. It is my great honor to be part of today's conversation and share my journey to embrace interfaith harmony with you. I will also talk about interfaith harmony, focusing on how my father and I get along with each other when we two pursue a very different spiritual life.

As a professor of nursing, I thought you might enjoy a documentary called "Motherland". This is the director's synopsis: "taking us into the heart of the planet's busiest maternity hospital, the viewer is dropped like an unseen outsider into the hospital's stream of activity". At first, the people are strangers. As the film continues, it is absorbingly intimate, rendering the women at the heart of the story increasingly familiar.

"When people's stories are recognized, it does something: It creates a possibility." (by John A. Powell)

"For me, every hour is grace. And I feel gratitude in my heart each time I can meet someone" (by Elie Wiesel)

Source: Email Campaign Archive from A Network for Grateful Living. Accessed January 31, 2022. From: <https://us10.campaign-archive.com/home/?u=ebb9f9f588051c1f7a7fc8f09&id=c606570b82>



Galveston, Texas, USA

utmb Health

Working Together to Work Wonders

I found these words inspiring as they reflect my journey to engage people with diverse backgrounds or spiritual beliefs. These quotes are from A Network for Grateful Living, Word for the day. "When people's stories are recognized, it does something: It creates a possibility." (By John A. Powell, an expert in civil rights, and

Professor of Law and Professor of African American Studies and Ethnic Studies at the University of California, Berkeley School of Law) “For me, every hour is grace. And I feel gratitude in my heart each time I can meet someone…” (By Elie Wiesel, a Romanian-born American writer)



Maribel Bhojani, DNP, MS, BSN, RN, story as a family caregiver of her mother-in-law:

As a nurse of the Catholic faith for more than 30 years, I have been passionate about helping older adults stay independent and stay in their own homes as long as they are able and want to.

I have been a family caregiver for my mother-in-law, who lives with me, and a virtual family caregiver for my mother, who has lived in the Philippines with one of my sisters for over 20 years. My mother-in-law is a Muslim growing up in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

Understanding her (my mother-in-law) belief and cultural practice related to self-care, such as preventing falls at home, is important for me to be an effective family caregiver.

utmb Health Working Together to Work Wonders

I would like to first share Dr. Maribel Bhojani’s story. Maribel is a great friend of mine.

As a nurse of the Catholic faith for more than thirty years, I have been passionate about helping older adults stay independent and stay in their own homes as long as they are able and want to. I have been a family caregiver for my mother-in-law, who lives with me, and a virtual family caregiver for my mother, who has lived in the Philippines with one of my sisters for over 20 years. My mother-in-law is a Muslim, growing up in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Understanding her (my mother-in-law) belief and cultural practice related to self-care, such as preventing falls at home, is important for me to be an effective family caregiver.

My father's view about interfaith harmony...

- 殊途同歸: People with different religions/spiritual beliefs should be able to get along with each other as people with different religions seem to seek the same end—to live with peace.
- We need to embrace inclusion (包容) and support an inclusive society.



utmb Health

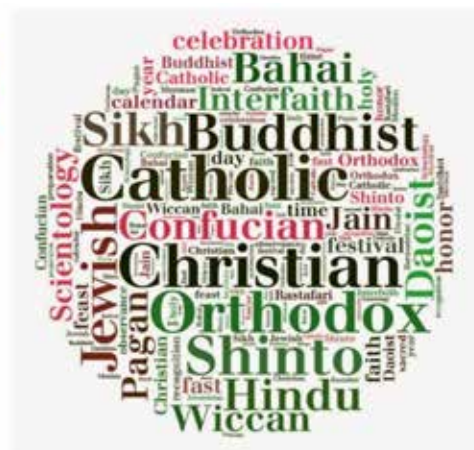
Working Together to Work Wonders

When I asked my father who is currently living in Taiwan, about interfaith harmony in our community and home, the conversation lasted about two hours. I am a Christian, and my father is a more than 50-year-long meditation practitioner. My mother has traditional folk belief and practices folklore worship. My father is about 86 years old.

Two main things I learned from the conversation with my father are: First, people with different religions/spiritual beliefs should be able to get along with each other as people with different religions seem to seek the same end or goal—to live with peace with our loved ones and the community-at-large such as our co-workers. Second, we need to recognize that we are different and determine to embrace inclusion and support an inclusive society.

My father's view about interfaith harmony...

- 星雲大師法語十修歌
- 一修人我不計較
二修彼此不比較
三修處事有禮貌
四修見人要微笑
五修吃虧不要緊
六修待人要尊重
七修心內無煩惱
八修口中多說好
九修所交皆君子
十修大家成佛道
若是人人能十修
佛國淨土樂逍遙
- 做好事 身做好事就會平安
說好話 口說好話必能吉祥
存好心 心存善念財富自來
若為回向 曾惠明
- 一九八二年二月
- 曾惠明 弘發願啟



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Working Together to Work Wonders

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backgrounds is based on genuine friendship building. I have attended several events held by the Institute for Spirituality and Health at the Texas Medical Center in Houston. I also have attended a few seminars in early 2022 held by one of the local Christian churches that initiated a dialogue with spiritual leaders from various backgrounds in the nearby community. These spiritual leaders include a Tibetan Buddhist, a leader from an Islamic Center, and two Rabbis from Jewish congregations.



Signage from one local Christian Church at Galveston, Texas, reads: "First Baptist Church LOVES Galveston." I was touched when I saw this signage.

Recognizing our differences as one of the ways to embrace interfaith harmony
with our loved ones and community



During the COVID-19 pandemic, I visit my friends in my local community. I attended African American and Hispanic friends' or their family members' funeral services held in the Christian and Catholic churches and at the gravesides. The picture on the left is a dear friend of mine, who passed away last year at 90 years old. I am committed to learning the cultures of people with diverse backgrounds and spiritual beliefs, especially the needs of people with dementia and their caregivers. As an Asian woman, I could be the only Asian in a group. I am OK with that.



In conclusion, it does take a whole village to embrace inclusiveness for people with different spiritual beliefs. It takes patience and willingness to listen and to seek understanding.

Thank you for your attention. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Dialogues between questioner Mr. Stanley Chung and Prof. Ming:

Stanley: Thank you for the introduction, Tracy. For your talk, I am just really honoured to learn that the two main things that you received from your conversation with your father, which we all have the same goal of peace and love. Yet the path to it can be very different for everyone and they really resonate with John Paul's quote that you put on which to recognize other people's story. My question is that what initiatives can we take to first recognize other people's stories or pass before we rejecting them with our stereotypes?

Prof. Ming: Thank you very much Stan. Instead of answering your questions, I am going to ask you to share with me that what you shared with me on another day about my father's copy of 'the sound of ten practices' by Master Hsing Yun. I am

going to share the screen again. I am ready to share with Stan as a faculty. We are very good at asking questions. What Stan shared with me about what he perceived and found in this slide. It's very touching. Stan, would you be so kind to share with us, please?

Stanley: Sure. Yeah. When I first saw this copy of calligraphy tracing, I realized that there are certain words that were not being traced such as the one that is to the very left. There are a few characters like 'somebody needs it'. That is 'the disciple of the Triple Gems'. It's kind of striking me that, oh, your father might not be a Buddhist. But however, he takes these ten practices from a Buddhist monk and put it in practice in daily life. That is really striking, you know, the interfaith harmony is really in him. The other thing that I recognize is that on the third column and other characters there would not be traced. It talks about wealth and the for the last four characters is 'no keep coming'. It gave me a sense that Ming's father, half the conscience that all I should not be greedy to, to have these to ask for wealth. Come continuously that can think so. There is such a sense of self-discipline that I see from his writing, based on the copying of the 'ten practices' by Grand Master.

Prof. Ming: Thank you very much. You all can see that Stan was sharing some readings from my dad given to me was really touching. I hope that you feel the same way too. I would say that your questions are so important. How can we start on learning about the other people's spiritual life and how we can embrace diversity? I am still at the beginning of my journey and seeking to understand is always a good start. That would be my response. Thank you again.

Stanley: Yeah, we are all student of life. Thank you for your answer.

Bio

Prof. Dr. Huey-Ming Tzeng (RN, FAAN) is currently based at the School of Nursing, the University of Texas Medical Branch, Galveston, Texas, the USA. She owns Odelia Brown McCarley Endowed Professorship in Nursing with a focus on care quality and patient safety for older adults, especially the ones with dementia. Her mantra is 'love', an action verb. Her vision is to embrace holistic health through aging research.



Mr. Stanley Chung is a Quality Control Specialist working in the biotech/gene therapy industry for the past sixteen years, but he has been doing QC work his entire life. Stanley has been a Buddhist for almost twenty years in this life. He cherishes every day and every interaction with anyone because it offers an opportunity to learn from others and about myself.

Session Two

Purifying the Multitude: Modernist Buddhist Communalism at Fo Guang Shan

Talk by Dr. Jens Reinke

**Assistant Professor, Department of Religious Studies
Director of the Institute for the Study of Humanistic Buddhism
University of the West, USA**



Let me just jump right into my presentation by starting my talk with a quote:

“Yet why is Shakyamuni Buddha only found inside the monasteries or mountain forests instead of in families and society? The only path to the righteous faith is for all Buddhists to establish their faith in the founder—the great Buddha. Stemming from such thoughts, I therefore vowed to bring Buddhism out of the mountains and into society, to ensure that monastics interact with lay Buddhists, and to take Buddhism from temples into homes.”

The quote originates from Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s recent book, but it describes his thoughts back in the time when he started out at his journey as a Buddhist monastic. During the Republican Era in China, Buddhism was by many perceived as a tradition that is removed from society. People thought of it as a religion that is practiced in the solitude of the mountains, in mountain monasteries, and even in mountain caves.

One of the big visions of Venerable Master Hsing Yun was, and continues to be, is it to make Buddhism applicable to the modern world, by bringing it into our modern and urbanizing society. Thus we can see that modernization is here specifically linked to urbanization. Within this context, practicing the Dharma includes an emphasis on communality. If we consider Fo Guang Shan’s Philosophy for example, what we can see is that there is a strong focus laid on ethical behaviour. Ethics are really at the center of this project to modernize Buddhism. This is quite interesting because it differs from how modern Buddhism is thought of in other Buddhist traditions, particularly outside of Asia. Buddhists of European heritage, for example, often stress that it is individualism and a focus on meditation that is the main characteristics of modern Buddhism. Fo Guang Shan on the other hand offers a huge variety on Buddhist cultivation practices, but ethics play a central role. Ethics, of course, link the individual to the group.

Again, this is quite different from understanding a secularized approach to meditation as the only “real” way of practicing the Buddhist tradition, an understanding we can find in some studies on modern Buddhism in the West. At Fo Guang Shan most cultivation practices are done in a group setting. People can go to a particular temple or practice center, they may take precepts or participate in a one day retreat, or take part in a Dharma assembly. Even if they go to a meditation class, meditation is practiced within a communal setting. Practitioners go to the temple and practice with fellow practitioners, it’s communal or gongxiu practice.

There are many cultivation activities available to Fo Guang Shan Buddhists, some have a long history, and others are more current innovations, such as baby blessings. Some ceremonies require the use of all kinds of modern technology, they use lights or music, and they may even incorporate dance and performance aspects. But the focus of all these is to practice as a group. Similarly, cultivation of the Buddhist Dharma at Fo Guang Shan is also not thought of as something that needs to be secularized in order to be modern. If a practitioner participates in one of these activities, one of their motives to do so is to collect merits, for themselves but also for their deceased family members. Thus we can see that modern Buddhism does not necessarily has to be individualistic or secularized. Instead modern Buddhism, as modernity itself, comes in multiple forms.

Another aspect that exemplifies the modern character of Fo Guang Shan is the high degree of standardization. Wherever in the world a practitioner enters a Fo Guang Shan temple or practice center they know what to expect. For example if we look at Dharma assemblies. They take at the weekend instead of following the lunar calendar. Dharma assemblies will probably happen on a Sunday and will end after two hours. The particular texts recited and the version of the reciting manuals are

the same. Temple activities are therefore highly accessible for people who work during the week. They don't have the time to participate in a Dharma assembly that takes place over many weeks.

Even within the context of Dharma assemblies, we find this very strong focus on ethics. At Fo Guang Shan, the focus on ethics is linked with other Buddhist cultivation practices. Similar to the Five Harmonies that Tracy mentioned in her introduction, campaigns such as The Three Goods (do good deeds, speak good words, think good thoughts) are contemporary actualizations of traditional Buddhist ideas and practices. Fo Guang Shan's modern reformist endeavors thus do not signify a departure from the Chinese Mahayana doctrine or tradition, quite the opposite, they very much continue to be embedded in Mahayana doctrine.

As Dr. Holloway said in his presentation in regards to pre-modern forms of practicing Chinese Buddhism, the lines between Buddhism and Taoism and Confucianism were often blurred in history. Inclusivity has always been the strength of the Chinese Mahayana tradition. Fo Guang Shan on the one hand engages with the trend of the modern era to consider issues of orthodoxy, but it still maintains the inclusive spirit of the Chinese Mahayana tradition. This mode of linking tradition with modernity is also apparent when we see that faith continues to be a very important for Fo Guang Shan. Faith here includes, as we saw in the quote at the beginning, the faith in the founder of the Buddhist tradition Shakyamuni Buddha, but also faith or trust that if one participates in a Dharma assembly, it will produce good karma on my behalf.

A very important role for this emphasis on this and communality plays the Buddha's Light International Association (BLIA). The BLIA provides the institutional framework for lay Buddhists to engage in Fo Guang Shan's modern Buddhist

communalism. The BLIA is organized in a way that people meet and interact with other people who live in the same area. Thus, it moves away from traditional or historical models, where people meet at one particular temple no matter if they live close by or not. This parish model is derived from Christianity of course. People meet with other like-minded people who live in the same community while also having a strong connection to a specific temple.

To summarize, my argument here is that Fo Guang Shan's approach to Humanistic Buddhism is a very modern yet at the same time highly communal and non-secularized one. It thereby represents an example that differs from common understandings of modernist Buddhism, many of which take Euromerican Buddhism in the US as the sole standard for how Buddhism may be modernized. This is very much linked to a departure from an understanding of modernity as a uniform entity that has emerged in Western Europe and that over time expanded over the world. Instead, we should think of modernity as something that is multiple and that has at its core the increased global connectivity and interaction that have shaped the last centuries. Thank you very much.

Followed by questions given by Ms. Jessica Nguyen:

Thank you Dr. Reinke for the great presentation. It was very informative about the impact of ethical and communal practices in Buddhism and how it affects modern day Buddhist practices. My question is with the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a lot of talk about mindfulness and meditation for mental health, and since mindfulness and meditation are Buddhist practices. Do you think that more aspects of Buddhism are becoming more secularized in today's society?

Dr. Reinke: Yes, thank you so much for the question. I think that we should move

away from these dichotomies. They were always secularized forms of practicing Buddhism even before the modern period. Definitely there are many forms of secular Buddhist practice today. But at the same time, there are non-secular forms of practice that are modern. For example, practices such as mindfulness and meditation are moving into the secular realm, but we can also see the opposite trend and we should be careful not to oversimplify the picture. Modernist Buddhism as a lived tradition is very complex and we can detect different trends at the same time. Assessing the current development of Buddhism, we should consider a global lens and move away from these highly Euro-centered perspective. Thank you very much.

Bio

Dr. Jens Reinke is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies and the Director of the Institute for the Study of Humanistic Buddhism at University of the West, the USA. His research explores modern and contemporary Buddhism as practiced by ethnic Chinese all over the globe. Taking into consideration the dynamics of colonialism, globalization, and ethnic Chinese migration, he is particularly interested in exploring the manifold ways ethnic Chinese employ and adapt Buddhist ideas and practices to the contemporary era. His recent book *Mapping Modern Mahayana: Chinese Buddhism and Migration in the Age of Global Modernity* (published by De Gruyter) presents a multi-sited ethnography of Fo Guang Shan temples in Taiwan, Los Angeles, South Africa, and the People's Republic of China.

Ms. Jessica Nguyen is a graduate student in computer science at University of Texas at Dallas, the USA. She is also the Co-President of Buddha's Light International Association Youth Adult Division Dallas.

Talk by Mr. Fadel Soliman

Director of Bridges Foundation, London, UK



Talk By Mr. Fadel Soliman
Director of Bridges Foundation, London, the UK

May peace be upon those who are guided.

I pray that you are all safe and sound and in good health.

What I concluded from the universal crisis which we all experienced in last two years is that we must be humble.

In the last 20 years many voices claimed that because of the progress achieved in medicine and in pharmacology, people do not need a God anymore, they just need a good doctor.

However, in the last two years, the corona virus has invaded every single country, including countries with the most sophisticated hospitals and medical centres. Almost 6 million people have died until today, already.

On the individual level: Many people have shown great compassion and unity, irrespective of their differences. This is why I believe that, even in these unprecedented times, coronavirus can be a revival for intellectual and spiritual awakening, because what was really lost during the pandemic is peace of mind.

On a governmental level: We have seen people stealing the medical aid from each other. Transiting Planes which landed to just fuel was searched for hospital ventilators and were looted.

It is, as if, we still did not learn the lesson.

The Almighty said in the Qur'an:

O humanity! It is you who stand in need of God, but God alone is the Self-Sufficient, Praiseworthy.

Coronavirus should have made us all, by now, realize that we are far removed from being self-sufficient and that We are very limited. And that our very existence and our ability to function are dependent on almost an infinite number of things that we cannot control and have no power over.

We must tell people about the importance of faith. People must have faith in the One whom they depend upon for their very existence. We are not self-sufficient, and many people now can see that a good doctor is not sufficient. We need much more than that.

An unseen creature turned the whole world upside down. Economies are on the verge of collapse and health systems are overwhelmed. This should teach us an important lesson: We must be humble.

Human beings being self-sufficient is a delusion, human beings should be

humble and should not try to control each other or force their beliefs or practices on others.

Thank you!

Bio

Mr. Fadel Soliman is an electronics engineer, international speaker, orator, film maker and presenter of Islam. He is the director of Bridges Foundation, based at London, the UK, with the aim of connecting people from different backgrounds, especially bridging the gap between Muslims and non-Muslims after 9/11.

Talk by Mr. Tanveer Hussain Shah

CEO and Founder of Silver Sand Properties, Pakistan
Member of Parliament of the World's Religions
Ex-member of Amnesty International, UK



مَی جَرَلَا نَمَّ جَرَلَا لَلْ اِمْسَب
مُکْنِیْلَ عُمَالْ سَلَا

Greeting and very good day to all attendees, speakers and audience. Thanks to the organizers of the event who gave me an opportunity to say few words on the inter-faith harmony organized by the United Nations.

My name is TANVEER HUSSAIN SHAH, Member of Parliament of World's Religions, ex-member of Amnesty International UK, and a businessman from Pakistan. This is matter of immense pleasure for me and my country.

Much has been said in session one on the subject, I would like to start my speech with stanzas from Bulle Shah (a Sufi poet)

نِیواھد سویی ک وت یری م دجسم
ون ردنم ناروت سویی ک یم
ون ردنا ےد ےچود کیا، ےئھڑپ ےک ےب نیود اج ا
اد ردنم دجسم اندناج ین چک یو جا سوگن او نایدس
ون رجنخ ےری م ےری ت انگل اری م اری ت ےت ومل
ون دجسم یری م نیھکی و ردنم وت ےرک بر
ون ردنم ےری ت ناھکی و سوگن او دجسم یم ےرک مار

“Why shall you demolish my mosque, why may i raze a mandir;

Let us sit and read together, the insides of each other”.....

I believe that all Humans are descendants of Hazrat ADAM (a.s) or children of Hazrat ADAM (a.s) We are members of a global family. All of should come forward to make this world worth living, to ensure, strengthen unity and solidarity among multi-religions communities for sustainable and peaceful co-existence of the humans thus society.

Pakistan appeared on the world in 1947, founded by Quaid e Azam, who expressed his concerns and emphasized in his speech of 11 August,1947 that “You are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or any other place of wor-

ship in the state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion, cast or creed which has nothing to do with the business of the state.”

But He died soon after creation of a new country and with the passage of time religionism got stronger and crept into the state affairs. Unfortunately, many cases of hatred and discrimination took place in past, one of the most terrible incidents took place in Sialkot a city of Pakistan in which A Sri Lankan man Priyantha Kumara was charred/lynched by a mob on the allegation of blasphemy. Infact it was very saddest incident and was condemned by 90% of the civil society. Our sympathies and hear goes to his family. Religionism is creeping into the state affairs, but state is bringing legislation to contains intolerance in the country.

Imran Khan a famous cricketer became the Prime Minister of Pakistan who is trying hard to bring moderation enlightenment to the country through legislation. But the religionism is still powerful.

I have been endeavoring to brainwash the hard liners and my struggle is on its way until I achieve this goal which is prime “WISH” of my life.

Upshot of this debate is how to overcome religion-based conflicts?

In my point of view the following steps are needed to be taken without delay.

- 1) Appointment of ambassadors of peace in countries where the problem ration is higher.
- 2) Visits/conferences be held in such countries for the promotion of global peace and brotherhood.
- 3) Educate the folks about religion harmony through different media.
- 4) Bound the countries to ensure zero tolerance policy on discrimination/hatred based on religion, cast, origin or creed.

I believe that all Humans are descendants of Hazrat ADAM (a.s) or children of Hazrat ADAM (a.s)

We are members of a global family. All should come forward to make this world worth living, to ensure, strengthen unity and solidarity among multi-religions com-

munities for sustainable and peaceful co-existence of the humans thus society.

I would like to end my speech the very famous letter of Hazrat Ali (a.s) written to Malik e Ashtar the then Governor of Egypt. The words are “Remember that the citizens of the state are of two categories, they are your brothers in religion or your equal in creation.”

Thank you so much!

Bio

Mr. Tanveer Hussain Shah is the CEO and Founder of Silver Sand Properties based at Pakistan. He is also the member of Parliament of the World's Religions for three years and nine months and the ex-member of Amnesty International UK.

Appendices

Invitation Letter

10 February 2022

Dear ***,

We would like to extend a warm invitation to you to attend the upcoming **United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week** online forum on 19th February 2022.

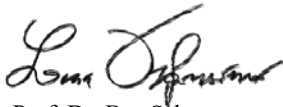
The UN World Interfaith Harmony Week is an annual event promoting mutual understanding, harmony, and cooperation between all people regardless of their worldviews, religions, and faiths.

Over the last two years, the world has been fighting a pandemic, and this has tested the faith of many. In 2020, we discussed the 'Five Harmonies' and how to heal the mind, while in 2021 the topic was finding inner joy, in what we hoped would soon be a post-pandemic world. This year, we will focus on how to create interpersonal harmony and honour our shared diversity.

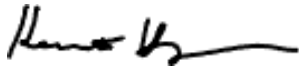
We are excited to join different communities across the world and to be part of the wider conversation with people from diverse worldviews and faiths. We hope that you would be able to join with us. Please check the Zoom link in the poster.

Looking forward to seeing you at this event!

Yours Sincerely,



Prof. Dr. Bee Scherer
Chair of Buddhist Studies,
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands



Dr. Kenneth W. Holloway
Levenson Chair and Associate Professor,
Department of History,
Florida Atlantic University, USA



Venerable Dr. Miao Lung
Instructor
OLLI at UTMB Health
The University of Texas Medical Branch, USA

2022 UN World Interfaith Harmony Week

VIP Invitees:

Prof. Dr. Bee Scherer

The Chair of Buddhist Studies

The Rector of the Buddhist Seminary

Free University (VU) Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Dr. Kenneth W. Holloway

Levenson Chair and Associate Professor

Department of History

Florida Atlantic University, the USA

Prof. Dr. Huey-Ming Tzeng, RN, FAAN

Odelia Brown McCarley Endowed Professorship in Nursing

The School of Nursing

The University of Texas Medical Branch, Galveston, Texas, the USA

Dr. Jens Reinke

Assistant Professor, Department of Religious Studies

Director of the Institute for the Study of Humanistic Buddhism

University of the West, the USA

Mr. Fadel Soliman

Director of Bridges Foundation, London, the UK

Mr. Tanveer Hussain Shah

CEO and Founder of Silver Sand Properties, Pakistan

Member of Parliament of the World's Religions

Ex-member of Amnesty International UK

Mr. Yen Ting Low

Traditional Chinese Localization Specialist, San Francisco, California, the USA

Youth Volunteer for translation and interpretation at Fo Guang Shan

Dr. Wei-Chen (Miso) Lee

Research Fellow, Department of Internal Medicine-Endocrinology

Associated Faculty Member, Department of Preventive Medicine and Population Health

Adjunct Assistant Professor, Department of Pediatrics

University of Texas Medical Branch, Galveston, Texas, the USA

Mr. Stanley Chung

Quality Control Specialist, the USA

Ms. Jessica Nguyen

Graduate Student in Computer Science,

University of Texas at Dallas, the USA

Co-President of Buddha's Light International Association Young-Adult Division Dallas, the USA

Ven. Dr. Miao Lung

Instructor, OLLI, The University of Texas Medical Branch, Galveston, Texas, the USA

Dharma Teacher, IBPS Dallas (Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Order, TX Branch)

Ms. Xin Ying (Tracy) Liu

Ph.D. Candidate in Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge, the UK

Prof. Dr. James Laidlaw

William Wyse Professor of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge, the

UK

*Ex-head of Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge
Director of Max-Planck Cambridge Centre
Fellow of Kings College Cambridge*

Dr. Yunxia (Ella) Wu

*Ph.D. in Religious Studies, Lancaster University, the UK
Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology, Sun Yat-Sen University, Guangdong, PRC*

Ms. Cindy Lin

Chairman of Buddha's Light International Association Dallas, the USA

Ms. Dali Wu

*Ph.D. Candidate in Study and Practice of Arts
University of Quebec in Montreal, Canada*

Ms. Haiying Ni

Ph.D. Candidate in Anthropology, University of Kent, the UK

22 Participants (mainly from the USA, others are from the Netherlands, the UK, Canada, and Pakistan):

- Organisers:
 - Prof. Dr. Bee Scherer
 - Dr. Kenneth W. Holloway
 - Ven. Dr. Miao Lung
- Event Facilitator and MC: Ms. Tracy Liu
- Event Volunteers:
 - Ms. Jeanette Kew
 - Ms. Eugenia Vedhra
 - Ms. Sheng-Yi Hsiao (poster designer)
 - Mr. Alan Lau (report arts and design)
- Speakers:
 - Prof. Dr. Bee Scherer
 - Dr. Kenneth W. Holloway
 - Prof. Dr. Huey-Ming Tzeng
 - Dr. Jens Reinke
 - Mr. Fadel Soliman
 - Mr. Tanveer Hussain Shah
- Questioners:
 - Mr. Yen Ting Low
 - Mr. Stanley Chung
 - Dr. Wei-Chen (Miso) Lee
 - Ms. Jessica Nguyen
- Others:
 - Dr. Yunxia (Ella) Wu (Lancaster, the UK)
 - Ms. Dali Wu (Montreal, Canada)
 - Ms. Cindy Lin (Dallas, the USA)
 - Ms. Bao Ling (Huston, the USA)
 - Ms. Chen Mingzhi (Dallas, the USA)
 - J.T. Ramelis (Michigan, the USA)
 - Helma Ton
 - Samantha Chao



Credit

With special thanks to Sheng-Yi Hsiao for the art design and Alan for compiling this booklet.

