

# **Contribution of Buddhism to Humanitarian and Social Development in the Post-COVID Era**

Ven. Qing Yuan

## **Abstract**

In the post-COVID era, Buddhism, as one of the oldest and most global regions, can contribute to social and humanitarian development by exploring three aspects. The first is to strengthen the care for life and spiritual comfort. Buddhism is able to offer a broad interpretation of life and the universe based on causality, compassion, and cosmology, help people in misery to eliminate fear, let go of hatred, seek freedom from affliction, generate wisdom, and purify their minds. The second is to focus on life experience and cultural perceptions. It is imperative that the dissemination paths of Buddhist culture continue to be explored, the dissemination methods expanded, the dissemination forms enriched, and the unique spiritual nourishment and lifestyle of Buddhism provided to the public, with a new perspective and unremitting efforts. The third is to promote humanitarianism and social harmony, address the concerns of people, serve society, and should due social responsibilities. It is the responsibility of Buddhists to uphold the Buddhist spirit of compassion and altruism, promote humanitarianism for the benefit of living beings, improve environmental sustainability, foster harmonious interpersonal relationships within society, and contribute to world peace.

**Key word:** care for life, life experience, humanitarianism

## **Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only caused harm to countless people, but has also severely impacted global economy, social development, and international communication. Buddhism, as one of the oldest and most global regions, needs to reflect upon how it can contribute to social and humanitarian development in the post-COVID era. The following three suggestions are offered:

I. Strengthening the care for life and spiritual comfort

Humans have long been excessively self-centered, killing wildlife wantonly and disrupting ecological balances to satisfy their appetites. Buddhist wisdom and compassion teach that all things are capable of feeling. As much as we cherish our own lives, we must also respect the lives of others in order to maintain the diversity and harmony of nature's ecosystems.

The modern society, characterized by a highly developed material civilization, intensively exploits and uses natural resources, causing extensive environmental damage. The law of cause and effect dictates that nature cannot endure the over-exploitation and destruction caused by humans, which in turn will affect the survival of humankind. A sudden disease or catastrophe can cause people to experience anxiety and fear. While the pace of life fastens and the pressure increases, people experience unprecedented mental tension and emotional emptiness, and their hearts have no place to rest in the hectic and depressing life. Buddhism is able to offer a broad interpretation of life and the universe based on causality, compassion, and cosmology, help people in misery to eliminate fear, let go of hatred, seek freedom from affliction, generate wisdom, and purify their minds.

## II. Focusing on life experience and cultural perceptions

The continuous development of society has resulted in an increase in people's expectations of life experience and cultural perceptions while satisfying their material needs. The stress of life and the epidemic over the last few years have fueled people's desire to escape reality. People are increasingly longing for a return to a simpler, minimalistic, natural, and quiet lifestyle. As Buddhism encourages a simple and contented way of life, monasteries have become increasingly popular for people to visit. The practice of Chan meditation allows people to detach from the hustle and bustle of the outside world, let go of worries and distractions, clear away inner pollution and purify their bodies and minds. Buddhism encourages frugality, thrift, and appreciation of blessings, opposing excessive possessions, extravagance, and waste, which is similar to today's social advocacy for green consumption.

Chinese Buddhism has not only developed its own unique Chan culture, but also infused the Chinese tea culture with the concept of purity, righteousness, harmony and grace. These two cultures have now merged, resulting in Chinese tea and Chan culture as a whole. Chan practice directly points to the mind to allow practitioners to know the mind and see its nature. Tea, cold in nature, is most suitable for those who practice frugality and virtue. The combination of the two allows one to appreciate the wonderful use of the Noble Truth of Suffering in daily life. Tea is not only a means of cultivation and health preservation, but also a way to understand Buddhism and demonstrate its principles, helping people to realize that undisturbed mind is the Way. With the concept of "tea and Chan are of one taste", Buddhist culture has already imperceptibly been integrated into people's lives. This allows people to appreciate life through tea and experience Dharma joy through the discussion of the Way.

In the post-epidemic era, Buddhist disciples should continue to explore the dissemination paths of Buddhist culture, expand the dissemination methods, enrich the forms of the dissemination, and so as to provide unique spiritual nourishment and lifestyle of Buddhism the public.

### III.Promoting humanitarianism and social harmony

We all live in an interconnected world. As the Agama sutra says, "This exists, therefore that exists. This arises, therefore that arises. This does not exist, therefore that does not exist. This extinguishes, therefore that extinguishes." According to the Samyuktagama-sutra, "With the convergence of causes and conditions, the world exists. Causes and conditions are the origin of the world. With the convergence of causes and conditions, the world perishes. The causes and conditions are the perishment of the world." The Buddhist theory of dependent origination reveals the interdependence of all things in the world. Nothing can exist without causes and conditions. Every individual is closely related to other sentient beings. This is called "unconditional loving-kindness and great compassion born of oneness ". Compassion is the root of Buddhism and the mind of all Buddhas. It is the unshakeable mission of Buddhism to alleviate suffering and bring happiness to all sentient beings. Compassion is the spirit that guides Buddhists to care for all sentient beings, benefit

society, and assist individuals in combating various mental ailments caused by the epidemic, in order to be able to settle their minds and improve their lives. It cultivates a peaceful and dedicated attitude towards life, establishes a harmonious social relationship of "one for all, all for one", and contributes to a community with a shared future for mankind.

Buddhists should strive to address the concerns of the people and serve society. It is incumbent on them to repay the fourfold kindness and relieve the suffering of beings in the three miserable realms, as well as to fulfill their social responsibilities. As Buddhists, we must uphold the Buddhist spirit of compassion and altruism to promote humanitarianism for the benefit of living beings. We must also do our best to improve environmental sustainability, foster harmonious interpersonal relationships within society, and contribute to world peace.