Promoting Buddhism through Modern Sports: The Case Study of Fo Guang Shan in Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

In the past, traditional Buddhism in China focused on chanting and meditation that detached itself from the society. However, after generations of strenuous efforts to promote ‘Humanistic Buddhism’, several Masters have been encouraging religion to engage more in daily lives. One of the proponents was Master Hsing Yun, who was born and raised in mainland China and subsequently moved to Taiwan along with the ‘Monk Rescue Team’. It was in Taiwan that Master Hsing Yun founded Fo Guang Shan, one of the most sacred Buddhist sites on the island. At the beginning, he started the place from scratch, setting up basketball courts for the followers to take part in basketball games. Upholding the notion that Buddhism needs to engage the public, Master, therefore, has a unique way of combing religion with modern sports in an attempt to let more people get in touch with religion. Accordingly, basketball, soccer, gymnastics, and other sports were promoted and sponsored under the auspices of Fo Guang Shan, which certainly topples public stereotypes around sedentary Buddhism. In the end, Master hopes that, in the future, sports can unite healthy Fo Guang followers worldwide and bring honor to Taiwan.

KEYWORDS

buddhism, Master Hsing Yun, Fo Guang Shan, Taiwan

According to a U.S. State Department report entitled 2009 Report on International Religious Freedom (United States Department of State, 2009), of the population in Taiwan (approximately 8 million people) deemed themselves Buddhists. However, this number may overlap with the population of Taiwanese folk beliefs including Daoism, Confucianism, or others. The major Buddhist sects are Pure-land Buddhism (Jingtu zong), Zen Buddhism (Chan zong), and non-sect Buddhism. According to the scale of Buddhist groups, the five most influential of the all are the Tzu Chi Foundation, Fo Guang Shan, Dharma Drum Mountain, Ling Jiou Mountain, and the Chung Tai Monastery. They are also regarded as the “Five Great Mountains” in Taiwan.

The founder of Fo Guang Shan is Shi Hsing Yun, who was born and given the civilian name Li Guoshen in 1927 in Jiandu, Jiangsu, China. He is known as Master Hsing Yun (‘Master’ in the following paragraphs) and is the heir of the forty-eighth generation of Linji lineages of the Chan school. In 1949, he organized a “Monk Rescue Team” and followed the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) troops moving across the Stratis to Taiwan. Fo Guang Shan, originally a wild mountain place,
was founded in 1967. He led his disciples to hack their way through difficulties and build it up, little by little. Now it has become one of the most famous sacred places, with the largest amount of followers in Taiwan. Fo Guang Shan is the biggest Buddhist monastery in Taiwan, with grand temple architecture, and also contains a Buddhist institute in order to promote Buddhism.

Traditional Buddhism laid emphasis on monasticism, celibacy, and withdrawal from society. On the contrary, Master proposes Humanistic Buddhism, one stream of modern Mahayana, which focuses on “Buddhism for laymen” and actively walks toward common folks. Venerable Master Tai Xu (1890-1947) advocated the idea of “Human Realm Buddhism” when the Republic of China has just been founded. Mentor Yin Shun (1906-2005) acquainted himself with this ideology, modified it into the current status, and came up with the thought of “Humanistic Buddhism”. Later on, modern Buddhist Masters, like Master Cheng Yen and Master Hsing Yun, put it into practice. Many Buddhist doctrines are neither impractical nor illusory. They can be applied to modern daily life, instead of thoughts for detaching or retiring from the world. Therefore, Humanistic Buddhism emphasizes going into the world rather than detaching; it values altruism rather than self-interest; it highlights the need for comforting living people rather than those who are dead (Li 2000, Master Manyi 2005, Shi 2001, Xue, 2005).

When Buddha was in the secular world, he and his saint disciples laid stress on practicing Buddhism in life. However, the later generations turned the Buddhist doctrines into complicated theories, becoming thoughts of mystery and obscurity inaccessible to the masses. Thus, Buddhism hermitcd itself within woods during the Ming and Qing Dynasties – this had great impact on Buddhists, who were to be conservative and obstinate, and the religion appeared to be a spent force.

“Practice what you preach”; if not, how can you teach people? Therefore, Master expressed his opinion with “How To Be a Man of Fo Guang – The Seventh Speech”:

The main reason of the decline of Buddhism is that too many Buddhists merely prefer to talk about the impractical and mysterious theories. In this way, people gradually forget the teaching about benefiting people and providing for our society in the doctrines. Consequentially, people look down on Buddhism as normal mental theories or pessimistic thoughts that will not be able to guide the world or to reform spirit (Foguang shan zongwu weiyuan hui 1997, p. 546).

After moving to Taiwan, Master used various methods, such as television broadcasts, Buddhist chanting teams, etc., to align with trends and to cater to people’s current preferences to promote Buddhism. Compared to other Buddhist groups, the most significant contribution made by Master was his advancement of religious beliefs through modern sports. Combining theory with practice, enlightened by Master, Buddhism in Taiwan was much closer to laymen and was able to meet people’s needs.

**Master Hsing Yun: A basketball-loving master**

Master was born in Jiandu, Yangzhou, a city surrounded by canals; his home was located just on the bank of a canal. At the age of three he learned swimming, the first exercise with which he

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2 The philosopher Liang Shuming first studied intensely Buddhism, but turned to Confucianism and later became a representative figure of Confucianism. Once Venerable Master Tai Xu invited him to give a lecture in the Sino-Tibetan Institute; Liang wrote six words on the blackboard, "this time, this place, this person", to severely criticize the indifference of this concept in Buddhism (Master Hsin Yun 1998, pp. 184-185).

3 During the Ming Dynasty, only two Buddhist sects – Zen Buddhism and Pure-land Buddhism – existed in China. However, when it came to the Qing Dynasty, the situation became worse. Except believing in Lamaism, the Yongzheng Emperor intentionally suppressed Zen Buddhism and promoted chanting the name of Buddha as the Dharma-gate from Pure-land Buddhism. So, until the late Qing Dynasty and early stages of the Republic of China, all the Buddhist sects in China focused themselves on chanting the name of Buddha, asserted ideas about forsaking the secular world (Saha World) and pursued the concept of “detaching from the world”, seeking the Pure Land after retiring from the human life. As a result, it was very easy for people to neglect real work in this life (Yang 1991).
became familiar. By that time all household necessities were bought on the other side of the river. However during the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), no one would risk ferrying people over there in order to earn additional pennies. Being a dutiful son, Master volunteered to swim to the other side of the river and took the responsibility for the purchases. The water was so rapid that people were not willing to swim across the canal. But Master, a ten-year-old boy by then, always took off his shirt and tied it on his head and then jumped into the water. He never failed to come home safely and bring back those items for the family. Therefore, for him, swimming was not only a way to strengthen the body, but also a solution to the family’s need for daily necessities. After converting to Buddhism, monks were not allowed to swim; so he turned to basketball, which became his favorite exercise and reminded him a lot of sweet memories throughout the years (Fu 2006a, p. 34, Luo 2006, Zeng, June 26 1997).

While pursuing a traditional Buddhist education in China, Master, a basketball lover, once chopped off two dead trees and made a basketball frame himself even though the conservative-minded teachers, who insisted on static chanting and meditation to allow them to detach from the everyday world, were not in favor of students playing basketball, which belonged to the secular world. He then nailed a board on the frame and traded twenty sheaves of branches for a hoop, and also paved the ground with gravel to set up a temporary basketball court. Finally, he persuaded classmates to collect money to buy a basketball. They often played basketball by taking turns to watch for teachers. Sometimes they were so absorbed in basketball that instructors often caught them playing. As a leader of the plot, Master was almost expelled from school. Even so, he did not give up his love for this exercise; on the contrary, he made up his mind to “promote the religion through basketball” (Fu 2006b, p. 568).

After arriving in Taiwan, Master felt proud of building basketball courts in Fo Guang Shan, which had allowed people to join the exercise and strengthen their bodies. While negotiating the various impediments to build Fo Guang Shan, he decided to set up a basketball court in Dong Shan. Though it was equipped simply, and was not fancy at all, it was his favorite spot. Now there are two basketball courts in Fo Guang Shan, one located in the Tsung-lin Monastery and the other at the Women’s Buddhist College. Other than these, another two courts were built in Pumen Senior High School outside Fo Guang Shan. All courts are excellent places for monks to work out. Whenever three-on-three basketball tournaments are held in Pumen, monks can always be seen playing games with their robes. They will tell you: “We play basketball, so we are healthy” (Hu, June 22 2001).

Basketball courts always draw many monks from the Tsung-lin Monastery to gather in this place and having ball games every afternoon. Everyday, students from Africa, Malaysia, and America, as well as local students, form teams to have games after their classes at 4 pm. Games go in all styles – mostly are three-on-three, but two-on-twos, four-on-fours or even five-on-fives can also be spotted. These monks are skillful players: from their posture to their passing, dribbling, and shooting. Yet they are comparatively milder in jump balls than the ordinary players. When there are nice plays, rapturous cheers and applause from the court are louder than those from outside. But when it comes to the result of scores, no one really cares. Here people feel free to enter or leave; no one records the scores and no referee blows the whistle for fouls. People join the squads to cheer, or join the game to present their skills. They have kept this nonstop habit for more than twenty years no matter what the weather is. The post-game gathering was preaching time for both teachers and students that became beautiful memories in “Basketball Experience” (Fu 2006b, p. 569, Luo 2006).

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4 When Master Hsin Yun was nine years old, his beloved pigeon vanished without a trace. The heartbroken Master, in an attempt at suicide, threw himself into the river. Yet his outstanding swimming skill enabled him to swim across to the other side without the slightest scratch (Fu 2006a, p. 37).
Analogy of sport and buddhism

Master once put down this in a diary: “Buddhism has its tradition to emphasize the importance of exercise, such as traditional Mountain Visit (chaoxiang), routine walk after dining like Temple Walk (paoxiang), and devoting to practical labor works as Outside Labor (chubo). These are all good ways to work out and strengthen one’s body” (Luo 2006, p. 88). An engaged view like this enables exercise and sport to be applied to religion, which more or less echoed the notion that occurred during the late nineteenth century when the British promoted “muscular Christianity” through which sports and athleticism would produce Christians who were more fit for civic duty. Based on the gentleman-amateur ethos found in public schools, these adventure-seeking males sought fulfillment on the frontiers of the British Empire (Holt 1989, pp. 74-117, Mangan 1998, Money 1997), or escaped from domesticity, as opposed to the warmth of the family hearth (Marshall 2009).

Master elaborated that basketball is a way not only for physical training, but also for practicing the philosophy of Bodhisattva. Players in the game must cooperate with team members instead of only seeking individual performance, need to pass the ball to other team members, and need to create chances for them to shoot. These actions correspond to “Benefit Others” in Buddhism. During the game, following the rules is the top principle; if one fouls, he must raise hand and admit his mistake. This shares the same spirit with “Control and Keep Ethic” and “Repentance”. Moreover, in a competitive game, collision is inevitable, so it becomes necessary to learn tolerance, for one cannot attack others only because of his unhappiness. This is a lesson to practice “Tolerance for Humiliation”. In order to achieve higher performance in the game, people should know that practice makes perfect, but should not work by fits and starts (Luo 2006).

Master later came out with “Philosophy of Basketball Buddhism”. He mentioned that games require players to highly cooperate with each other, to follow the rules, to grasp the time, and to apply strategies; this corresponds to the Dharma: Charity (dāna), Control and Keep Ethic (śīla), Improvement (vīrya), and Sagacity (prajñā). “This is the Dharma of Life!” he said. Though monks should stay calm and solemn, they should still follow the custom and culture when playing games. In addition, players are not allowed to hurt others or take revenge in the game – which means “Mercy”. One needs to apologize when breaking the rules – which stands for “Repentance”. The team needs to produce chances for its members – which is “Benefit Others” and makes “Karma”. Members need to do their best to seize the timing – which teaches “Improvement” in the religion. Besides applying skills in the game, it is more essential to figure out strategies to win the game wisely – this is “Sagacity”. These are all instances of Dharma, and therefore playing basketball can be part of practicing Buddhism (Liang 1994).

Accordingly, Master encourages youngsters to join basketball games because they will not only be able to learn teamwork but also be brave to sprint. Even when the team is losing the game, players should still hold on to the last minute; in sports, participants never give up until after the game is over. He believes that we will need to “love our enemies” in basketball games. Without the opposite team, there is no match. Thus, before the game starts, we must salute the opposite team to appreciate them for joining and making the game happen. “A game seen to be normal lies great philosophy of Buddhism”, expressed by Master (Luo 2006).

Master also refers sports to life – life is like a ball game. For children, parents are like the basketball that everyone wants to grab, because kids all desire attention and care from parents. But when parents grow old, they become the ping-pong ball that everyone wants to push away. When they become even older and sick, they will be like the soccer ball that children are eager to kick to each other (Shi 1997).

In 1997, four baseball teams of the Taiwan Major League came together to Fo Guang Shan to join the Dhyana courses of mental refreshment. Master educated the players that baseball games are like our life. One should be brave to move forward or backward when he needs to catch fly balls. However, problems occur when one fails to keep his principles and faith. Players need to follow their
“heart” when playing games. Any perception conveyed by the speed of light or sound is no faster and more direct than the feeling of our hearts. One can only behave and decide by following our heart rather than seeing from our eyes and hearing from our ears. Players need to carry ambition, courage, flexibility and, most of all, practice in order to play well (Wu1997).

Fo Guang women’s basketball teams

In Taiwan after the mid-1990s, many basketball teams were dismissed. One called Tera Mars was seeking a buyer because the original company was undergoing a financial crisis. Zhao Liyun from the Sports Affairs Council thus went for Master, who was known as a big lover of basketball. At first he was interested; however, he realized it was a professional team and considered this to go against the faith of Fo Guang Shan, a nonprofit organization. Yet this connection led to the consequence that the coach of Tera Mars, Zhong Zhimeng, volunteered to join the Fo Guang women’s basketball team, and took charge of arranging the training and seeking talented players to form the team (Wang 2001).

Not until 2001 did Fo Guang Shan start their women’s basketball team for the Corporate Basketball League (CBL). Zhao Liyun was a key person because of her adequate experience with sports affairs in Taiwan. She suggested that Master form a sports team involving the favorite sport of teenagers in order to appeal to the youngsters to get in touch with Buddhism. Having a strong love for sports and basketball from childhood, Master was in favor of this suggestion. Therefore, the idea led by Zhao to form a women’s basketball team bore fruit. Besides, members in Fo Guang Shan were mostly women. For administrative reasons and convenience, it was a good way to train the players in Fo Guang Shan by forming a women’s team there. The goal was not only to become elites in Taiwan, but also to attend games in southeast Asia, Europe and the United States for the purpose of promoting Buddhism. Their ambition was to challenge the university teams in major cities in the United States, and later, to play with the teams in the WNBA to make the Fo Guang Women’s Basketball Team a renowned name in the western world. Unfortunately, due to the membership issue and a boycott threat from other clubs in the Presidential Cup, it was dismissed only four months after its launch (Gong & Li 2001).

Thus, Fo Guang Shan gave up joining the CBL and changed its policy to develop student players and focus on campus competitions. From March 2003 to July 2004, women’s basketball teams of both junior and senior divisions from Pumen High School were formed and started attending national high school basketball games. In 2007, the first group of students from the team graduated and entered Fo Guang University. Until then the three-level training system of Fo Guang Women’s Basketball Team had been completed. This was also the first team to have the most comprehensive training system from high school to university provided by the same institution (Fo Guang Shan). In 2007, Fo Guang University won the championship of Division Two in the University Basketball Association (UBA) and were promoted to Division One. In 2008, the team polished their skills and started to pursue Master's ideal – “play on the international stage of sports and connect to the world to let people know our country and know Buddhism”. The team was registered with the CBL of the Chinese Taipei Basketball Association, becoming the first corporate team to be supported by a religion institution on the island.

The head coach of the team, Lee Hyung-suk, had an impressive background. She was an outstanding player on the Korean national women’s basketball team as a point guard, who had won the

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5 When initially founded, the Fo Guang Team recruited players who had been discarded by other clubs. However, when Fo Guang Team went to register for tournaments, they found that, as the players left the original team, all of them had signed a “lifelong contract”, which meant there was a chance that these players would be boycotted by previous clubs.

6 In their first season in the CBL, Fo Guang had a dismal record of no wins and 21 losses. But Fo Guang was the only team that was comprised of rookie university students, compared to the more experienced corporate players from the other four teams.
1984 Olympic silver medal, and was famous by her accurate three-pointers. She began to stay in Taiwan, devoting herself to coaching the Tai Yuan women’s basketball team for 12 years. Lee led the senior high women’s basketball team of Pumen High School to their first ever championship of the National High School Basketball League (HBL) in 2009. In the crucial game for the championship, the president of Pumen, Lin Qingbo, the board chairman, Master Hui Chuan, the general secretary of Buddha's Light International Association (BLIA), Master Cheuh Pei, and the captain of Pumen cheer squad, Master Yung Guan, all came to watch the game and cheer for the team who was in the finals for the very first time (Yan 2009). Outstanding players from Pumen High School were given the opportunity to enter Fo Guang University, directly majoring in public affairs, management, and communications. Head coach Lee also transferred to Fo Guang University to continue coaching. Fo Guang’s women’s basketball team had a distinguished record soon after it launched, and within six months had qualified as the top eights in the UBA games.

In addition, the cheerleading squad of Pumen High School is a special highlight on the court. Compared to other cheer squads comprised of young students, the aging members of Buddhist followers produced sound and energy that was far more immense during the game. Led by the masters in systematic methods, Pumen applied its own distinct style to cheer while the team was on offense, defense, or during halftime and timeouts. Even for a free throw, cheerleaders would start their psychokinesis and mantra of dispelling calamities and lengthening life from Medicine Buddha to enhance the performance of the team. Their acts certainly drew many people's attention on the court (Rao 2009, Yan 2009).

The senior high women’s basketball team of Pumen focused not only on technique but a lot more on player virtues, who were incidentally at puberty. One day coach Lee encountered problems and asked Fo Guang Shan’s masters for advice. With the approval of masters, she had players practice meditation and chanting with masters to cultivate physically and mentally, and to release their pressure. Young players responded very well, and even volunteered to practice meditation everyday for 30 minutes before sleeping. Their parents had also felt the change of their daughters’ characters. Therefore, meditation and chanting of Heart Sutra became characteristic of the women’s basketball team of Pumen High School. Lee said with contentment, “our players are very good girls and very obedient” (Li 2007).

**Fo Guang Shan gymnastics team**

The Pumen High School women’s gymnastics team was established earlier than its women’s basketball team. In 1994, after Dashu Elementary School, in the neighborhood of Fo Guang Shan, had won the championship of National Gymnastic Game, the team members were about to graduate and they confronted the problem of a lack of a consistent training place. After having a hard time seeking a suitable place, the gymnastics coaches, Wang Pingyi and Huang Zongrui, were attracted to a small-sized auditorium belonging to Pumen High School on the fifth and sixth floors of Da Ci Preschool, Fo Guang Shan. By filling in protective sponge pits and spring mattresses in the bottom layer of the floor, it could become an ideal training place for gymnastics. First, both Wang Tinger, president of Pumen High School, and Fo Guang Shan had investigated the issue and agreed to their request. Subsequently, the F.G.S. Foundation for Buddhist Culture & Education, along with the King Car Education Foundation and the Dashu Association, raised the funds and launched construction. Furthermore, they persuaded the Sports Affairs Council and the Zuoying Training Center to support a complete set of gymnastics equipment. Thus, a standard gymnastic training field was put into place (Luo 2006).

Although Master Hsing Yun only had little understanding about gymnastics, he knew that a solid foundation in grassroots is needed to cultivate talented athletes. Especially for those young players that had won medals in national games, it was important to grab the timing and keep providing training for them in order to build up a consistent training system without training gaps or player dropouts. Therefore, Master agreed to the request of the two coaches for providing plans for players to
enter junior and senior high school, and approved funds supporting their training and education for more than ten years.

With the full support of Fo Guang Shan, the gymnastics players had lived up to expectations. In the last four years, not only have they won many gold medals from the National Women’s Artistic Gymnastics in the junior and senior high divisions, but they have also been picked for the national team several times. Moreover, many players were offered opportunities to enter college and majoring in sports-related subjects.

The gymnastics team of Pumen High School also finished with outstanding records in the National Artistic Gymnastics and Hong Kong Artistic Gymnastics, and donated those trophies to the county government. The county mayor, Yang Qixing, showed his admiration for the terrific performance and the “head-to-toe” training of Pumen. He then promised to sponsor them with 3 million New Taiwanese Dollars (NT$) for the renewal of gymnastic equipments and another 300 thousand NT$ for training costs. The president of Pumen, Lin Qingbo, said they have 34 players and 7 coaches on the gymnastics team, which is the largest in scale in Taiwan; players not only receive enhanced training for skill, but are also educated to emphasize both morality and academic achievements, with the ultimate goal of winning honors for the country (Wang 2007).

The head coach, Wang Pingyi, expressed that “head-to-toe” training was a consistent style of cultivation from kindergarten to senior high school. He said contently, “due to the long-term training and the devotion of our coaches, the team was able to win many national champions and runners-up; besides, many our players were selected as national players.” He took charge of the set-up of a gymnastics institute in Pumen High School looking for talented players from kindergarten to elementary school in Dashu village right below Fo Guang Shan. Players receive strict and intensive training with only three days off a year. In April 2009, the women’s gymnastics team won championships in junior and senior high divisions in National High School Athletic Games, and continued the success by winning the championship in the National Sports Games. Impressed by their wonderful results, Master promised that, should they win a gold medal in the 2010 Asia Games held in Guangzhou, he would take them on a world tour (Wang 2008).

"Filhos de Buda" soccer team

In 1992, Fo Guang Shan established the Zu Lai Temple in Brazil in order to not only promote Humanistic Buddhism through culture, education, charity, and group meditation in South America, but also to carry out the plan of “The Sons of Zu Lai” (Filhos de Buda, or Children of Buddha) in Brazil. Due to this plan, more than 200 children and young people, who used to beg, steal and take drugs on the streets, were adopted as “The Sons of Zu Lai”. They were given US$20 and a bag of rice and vegetables every week in order to let them concentrate on studying and practicing Buddhism. Besides, the plan also provided them with vocational training, such as cooking, agriculture, and farming, which could help them earn a living with professional skills in the future (Luo 2006).

At that time, to improve children’s clothing, Master Jue Cheng arranged to collect shoes and clothes from the public. On the eve of the open ceremony of Zu Lai Temple, due to the need for students to take part in the performance, a member of the council who worked as a manufacturer of sports clothing promised to provide them a simple uniform in order to form a rhythmic gymnastics team. The applications for “The Sons of Zu Lai” kept rising, leading to thousands of children from the
ages of 6 to 18 to register. Master Jue Cheng came up with a wonderful plan for accepting more children and stated that,

If what the students need to learn is rhythmic gymnastics, there will not be enough teachers and places. Therefore, I think, while Brazilian children like soccer so much, why not set up a Fo Guang Soccer Team? As to the practicing place, we borrowed an open space belonging to the government next to slums (Wang 2008, p. 12).

In the beginning, the soccer team was a “Barefoot Soccer Team” because Zu Lai Temple could not afford to buy sneakers for them, while a generous volunteer initially sponsored their uniforms. Master Jue Cheng recalled with a smile, “the uniform was a yellow T-shirt that went with a pair of shoes in unmatchable ones.” Because someone donated a bunch of shoes in different sizes, the children could only find those that fit their size coupled with the T-shirt of an incongruent fashion.

Besides playing soccer, different masters would be arranged to go in turn to educate the children on the field. They explained the basic principles of being a human, and had each member of The Sons of Zu Lai follow the Five Percepts, the school discipline. Master Jue Cheng understood that educating children with a disciplined philosophy is the only way to protect them from being confused by the complicated world outside. After all, “Abstain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and intoxication” is the foundation of being a person and the basis of becoming a Buddha (Wang 2008).

The ex-abbot of Zu Lai Temple, Master Jue Cheng, indicated that the motif for establishing the “Zu Lai Fo Guang Soccer Team” came from a saying in Buddhism - “Arouse their interests first and then lead them into Buddha’s wisdom” (xianyi yu gouyin houling ru fozhi) – which means, if you hope that others will believe in Buddhism, lead them into the religion with things they are fond of. Every Brazilian child likes soccer and is good at playing it. Through soccer, “The Sons of Zu Lai” coming from the slums were able to be educated in Buddhism and morality. It is expected that they would be inspired and affected gradually by the Dharma, and therefore to have influence upon their parents to quit the life of taking drugs or gambling (Luo 2006).

Master Hsing Yun attempted to gather some vigorous but poor children in Brazil to play soccer. He kept hoping that if one day the issue of nationality is resolved, those Brazilian “Sons of Zu Lai” could wear the Taiwanese national team shirts in international soccer games; or at least, they could play for the Kaohsiung County in domestic competitions (Zhongguo shibao 2007).

**Fo Guang Shan-sponsored sporting events**

Buddha’s Light International Association once held a friendly match in 1994 called “Exercise of Mental Purification with Seven Commandments”\(^8\), in which monks competed against legislators. While the monks were not as experienced and strong as the opponents in their debut competition, they still drew the audience’s attention and made people applaud for their swift movement and skillful passing, dribbling and shooting. Even the famous broadcaster Fu Daren shouted out, “There will never be another game more meaningful than this one in my experience of broadcasting more than a thousand games!” (Luo 2006, p. 89). Although Fo Guang Shan eventually lost the game by two points, they did show the public that Buddhists were able to be both calm and agile in perfect balance.

In the same year, movie star Eric Tsang assembled a Hong Kong Star Team with Alan Tam, Nat Chen, Teddy Robin Kwan, and other entertainers to play against the “Fantasy Basketball Team”, consisting of entertainers from Taiwan. The Hong Kong Star Team, who was better in soccer, lost the game at the end. This charity game was initiated by Buddha's Light International Association. Wang Jinping, the Vice President of the Legislative Yuan and also a pious Buddhist, utilized his influence to encourage colleagues to join this game. The broadcaster bantered that, “another place to see so many bald heads is in the NBA” (Liang 1994). After the game, the two basketballs used in the game were

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\(^8\) The Seven Commandments Campaign means to quit smoking and drugs, porn, violence, theft and robbery, gambling, excessive drinking, and bad words.
sold for two hundred thousand NT$, and Alan Tam’s jersey was sold for fifty thousand NT$ to excited fans.

Moreover, Fo Guang Shan extended their efforts for certain sports in Africa. In 2000, the Nan Hua Buddhist Temple in Africa cooperated with Buddha's Light International Association to carry out “Project Hope in Africa”. Two plans were in operation. One was the establishment of the Sunday School, providing clothing, foods, and toys to 47 children from the ages of seven to sixteen. Additionally, to develop the children’s musical and physical talents, the school held activities in singing, dancing, painting, and so on. Meanwhile, the school organized the “Nan Hua Soccer Team”, providing regular training, games with other teams in the sporadic friendly matches. While Master visited the African Buddhist Seminary, he found that African people were good at long-distance running and indicated they could take part in marathons in the name of Fo Guang Shan to promote the religion (*Foguang shiji* 2001).

In addition to modern sports, Fo Guang Shan also valued static domestic exercise; for example, sponsoring the annual Buddha Light Cup of Chinese Chess. Chinese Chess, an important media to bring people together, is a necessary entertainment in the traditional life of Chinese people. Having the chess contests can not only polish people’s skill but also promote this traditional cultural activity, so as to maintain and develop the valuable cultural heritage of the past. In this way, Master’s ideal – to promote Humanistic Buddhism and educate the world with Dharma through cultural events – was completed. Besides, it is an alternative way to relieve tremendous stresses at schools for every youngster (*Zhonghua minguo xiangqi wenhua xiehui* 2008).

**Conclusion**

The founder of Fo Guang Shan, Venerable Master Hsing Yun, made a grand vow in his youth – to spread Buddhism to every corner of the world and to organize religious television stations, religious newspapers, and universities. After his efforts of several decades, these wishes all came true. There are even overseas universities founded under the auspices of Fo Guang Shan. However, success did not come easy. Master and his disciples finish a five-day workload in one day, and were busy flying back and forth across the globe every year promoting the religion. They are the best models of the proverb “Where there is a will, there is a way.”

Beside the deed of practicing Buddhism, Master had another accomplishment people love to mention, that is promoting sports. Master, ahead of his times, always has his unique way to get in touch with people to generate interest in the religion. While playing basketball, he realized that fitness was not the sole purpose of sport, and static meditation was not the only method of practicing Buddhism, either. Since people obtain insight of the Dharma through cooking, doing laundry, Temple Walking, and Outside Labor, it is also possible to practice the philosophy of Bodhisattva through modern sports. In the past, he used sports to topple public stereotypes about Buddhism; in the future, he hopes, people can honor Taiwan and Buddhism by means of sports.

Recently, Fo Guang Shan has been promoting the “Three Good Practices Campaign”: do good things, say good words, and think good thoughts. Accordingly, The Three Good Sports Association was founded by Fo Guang Shan and officially approved by the Ministry of Interior in 2009. Its aim is to promote nationwide sports competitions and purify the social climate, thus attracting youth to learn more about Buddhism via a variety of sports events (*Foguang shiji* 2010). Sun Chao, the general secretary of the Three Good Sports Association, pointed out the core value of the association with simplest words, “The establishment of the Three Good Sports Association is to aim at practicing Humanistic Buddhism through sports.” The association focuses mainly on women's basketball games.

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9 Fo Guang Shan now has one cable television channel, Beautiful Life Television, one print newspaper, Merit Times, three universities, Nan Hua University and Fo Guang University located in Taiwan, and the University of the West located in Los Angeles, USA, and other online bulletins and information centers.
to fulfill Master’s ideal, which is “to unite healthy Fo Guang followers worldwide by international competition through which the Buddhist mission can be carried out” (Li 2010).

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