

A Brief Report on the International Symposium, Multi-Faith Centre, Nathan Campus, Griffith University 2005

This International Symposium was held from the 10th to the 13th of August 2005 in the Multi-Faith Centre of Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia. It was jointly organized by the Multi-Faith Centre and the Pure Land Learning College of Toowoomba, Queensland, Australia, which also fully supported the symposium. This event was supported by UNESCO; various UNESCO national commissions, field offices and centres; faith, interfaith and civil society organizations; and educational institutions. The theme of this conference was “Cultivating Wisdom and Harvesting Peace.” It was hoped that the delegates would reach resolutions and proposals to help create an “Education for a Culture of Peace through Values, Virtues and Spirituality of Diverse Cultures, Faiths and Civilizations” and to create a contemporary education for a culture of peace.

The conference was opened with a welcoming ceremony and multi-faith prayer service. Venerable Master Chin Kung was invited to give the keynote speech, “Cultivating Moral Values Education, Harvesting World Peace.” The conference was divided into nine dialogue sessions and two interfaith circles discussing topics related to the main theme of this symposium. In the dialogue sessions, experts and scholars were able to talk about their findings and experiences in a panel discussion, while audience members were given the opportunity to interact with the speakers. In the interfaith circles, participants were

further divided into groups of five or six to discuss the various topics in a more engaged and personal level.

There were over one hundred twenty symposium participants from twenty-five countries. Almost all attendees were experts and faith leaders from various peace-related fields. There were forty-four main speakers and nine moderators for the main dialogue sessions including Reverend James Hair, president of the National Council of Churches in Australia; Professor Azyumardi Azra, rector of Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University of Indonesia; Archbishop Fernando Capalla, President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines; and many world-renowned educators, religious leaders and leading peace workers. Over one hundred attendees represented almost all regions of the world and the symposium had faith affiliations with the major Christian denominations, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Taoism, indigenous spirituality, and Baha'i. This symposium received the highest number of institutional and faith supporters and endorsers of any other international conference in many decades. Mr. Ye Xiowen, the Director of The State Administration for Religious Affairs of China and three others members from SARA and the lead consulate of China, Ms. Liu Fei, in Queensland also attended this symposium. Mr. Ye gave a presentation on the topic of "Winds of Harmony Coming from East, Breeze of Accord Presenting West."

In his keynote speech, Master Chin Kung talked about the foundation of Chinese traditional moral and virtuous education:

1. The principle of Chinese education is to affirm what Confucius said: "human nature is intrinsically good."

The purpose of education is to help people return to their true nature by transforming evil to goodness, ending delusion and attaining enlightenment, and attaining liberation from pain and attaining true happiness.

2. The social position and purpose of education for our life, our society, and our world, is to resolve conflict and to eventually help us to attain the perfect harmony within one's body and mind, in the natural environment, and in our world. The Book of Great Learning says: "From the emperor to an ordinary person, self-cultivation is the foundation. To see nations and the world in harmony and peace, education is of utmost importance."
3. The main principles and content of education are the Five Moralities and the Ten Honours. Combined, they are filial piety, fraternal love, loyalty, trustworthiness, courtesy, righteousness, honesty, honour, humanity, love, and equality. To practice them in real world, Standards for Being a Good Student and Child, a Confucian text; and the Ten Virtuous Deeds Sutra, a Buddhist text, would be excellent references.
4. The most effective educational policy and method is to hold short-term seminars and organize "model learning areas." Concurrently, the content of the seminars could be translated into the six major languages, and satellite television and the Internet could be utilized to rapidly spread these teachings. Invitations would be extended for all representatives to the "model learning areas" to give feedback?? and advice.

Throughout the four-day symposium, experts and scholars expressed both their joy and sorrow in their lines of work. Often the audiences were transfixed by the frustration, horror, delight, and joy shared by the speakers. There were enthusiastic responses from the participants toward the end of the symposium. Mr. Arief Rachman, Executive Chairman Indonesian National Commission for UNESCO, talked about how Indonesia is currently implementing peace education in accord with Master Chin Kung' s vision. Archbishop Fernando Capalla also talked about starting a regional project of actualizing peace education in schools.

In general, the main areas of interest can be categorized as follows:

1. Promotion of peace through non-governmental bodies; the continuation of education towards peace among people of varied backgrounds; the roles of different religious organization in building a non-violent social environment.
2. How religious bodies could contribute to provide educational resources and strategies to combat poverty and injustice in a compassionate and rational manner; how regional problem are reflected on a global scale.
3. For the past decade, the issue of environmental pollution and destruction has been increasingly acknowledged as the most serious problem of our world. These problems were amplified by various man-made disasters. How could various organizations play a role in maintaining a sustainable environment for future generations?

Education and religious teachings that use values that sustain our living environment were discussed.

4. Human Rights. The perspectives and practices of different faiths, religions, and organizations that contribute to the betterment of human rights.
5. The key role of the interfaith dialogue movement. A wealth of experiences was shared by experts of different faiths, religions, and organizations on the topic of promoting better interfaith dialogue through education.
6. How different faiths, religions, and organizations were contributing to the promotion of cultural harmony in schools and communities, and at different social levels.
7. How inner peace and the growth of spirituality were achieved through cultivation and education. How different organizations tackle this problem.
8. UNESCO involvement and initiatives.
9. How educational institutions and various agencies contribute to the process of peace.

This successful conference was ended with participants in high spirits. Everyone hoped that the end of the symposium would mark only the beginning of the implementation of the recommendations made by the participants of this gathering. At the closing ceremony, Master Chin Kung, Pro Vice Chancellor of Griffith University Sharon Bell, and UNESCO representatives were asked to sit on the stage and formally receive representatives from the nine discussion groups who individually delivered their final recommendations. This was

followed by the official presentation of their recommendation documents to Master Chin Kung. In the closing remarks, Pro Vice Chancellor Sharon Bell and Toh Swee Hin, Director of the Multi-faith center repeatedly expressed gratitude to Master Chin Kung, the Pure Land Learning College, UNESCO, various faith leaders and peace workers for their support and contribution.

In his closing address, Master Chin Kung encouraged and shared with everyone that working as true peace workers, we must all begin the initial task of creating peace by creating it within ourselves. He also announced that a new project for building a multi-faith, multicultural centre was almost at its completion in his home town, Lujiang in Anhui province, China. This centre has been established to put into practice what all the participants of this symposium hope for. The centre will serve as a springboard for training future teachers in moral values education, and will prepare a new generation of educators who will foster sincere love and value for their students.

Plans are underway for building a series of institutions from kindergartens to university level concentrating on teaching moral values education. Teachers from the centre will reach counties and villages of Lujiang, and even visit people's homes to share these teachings so that the citizens of this district will learn the essence of moral values education and practice what Laozi, the Taoist founder said: "...small countries with scarce populaces would each love their home-grown food, beautify their own clothing, find comfort in their own homes, and be joyful about their own customs. Neighboring countries, although located only within viewing and shouting

distance, coexist in perfect harmony, people do not feel the need to travel far in their lifetime. Those who know how to govern are not as well received as those who know how to teach. People fear good leaders, yet good teachers are welcomed with warmth.”

The aim of the centre is to dedicate its resources to people living in this particular district. It is hoped that the peaceful society of Yao and Shun, where “doors are not closed at night and belongings left on the road are not touched” would reappear in this region. It would thus become a good model for the whole world to see. Master Chin Kung pledged to implement all recommendations made by this symposium to the curriculum of the centre wherever possible. He also welcomed all participants of this symposium to visit and give their thoughts and even lectures in the centre in the future. The international symposium ended with warmth and much encouragement.

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