



# **Information, Knowledge and Wisdom**

## **The Role of Humanistic Buddhism**

Jian Li, Ph.D

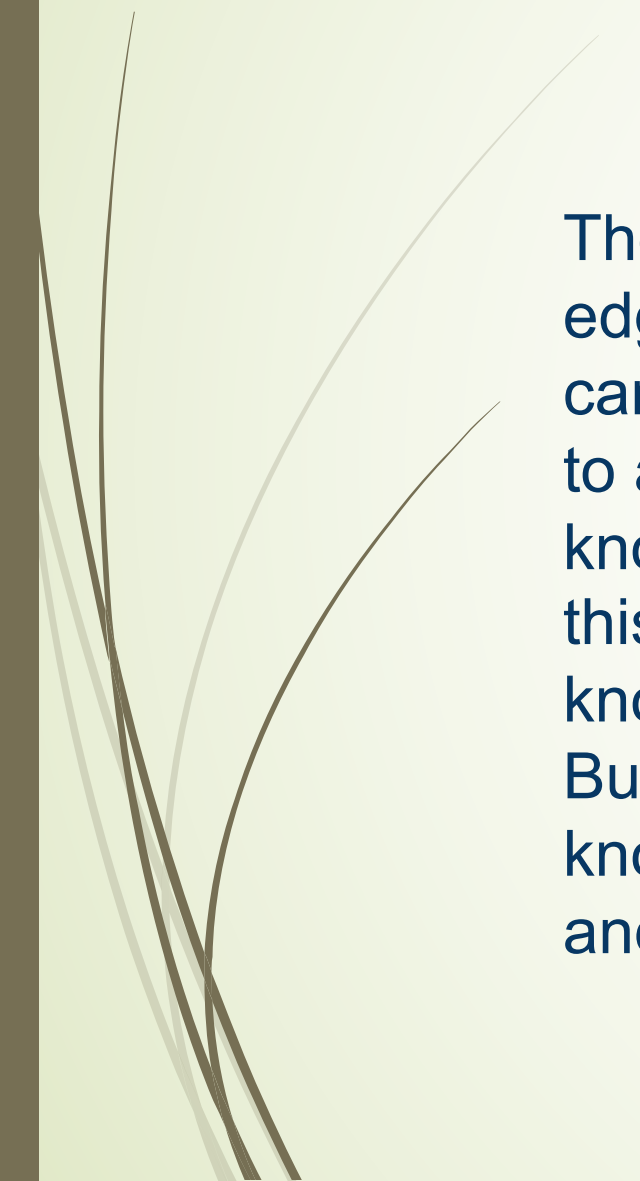
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# Information, Knowledge and Wisdom

## The Role of Humanistic Buddhism



The explosion of information since the 20th century is a double-edged sword: On the one hand, google searches and ChatGPT can provide instant information to almost any question we want to ask, on the other hand, we are not becoming more knowledgeable and wiser with the abundance of information. In this talk, I will present the distinctions between information, knowledge and wisdom, and argue that wisdom from Humanistic Buddhism may shed light on the paradoxes of information and knowledge, and how it may help us to become more enlightened and fulfilled.

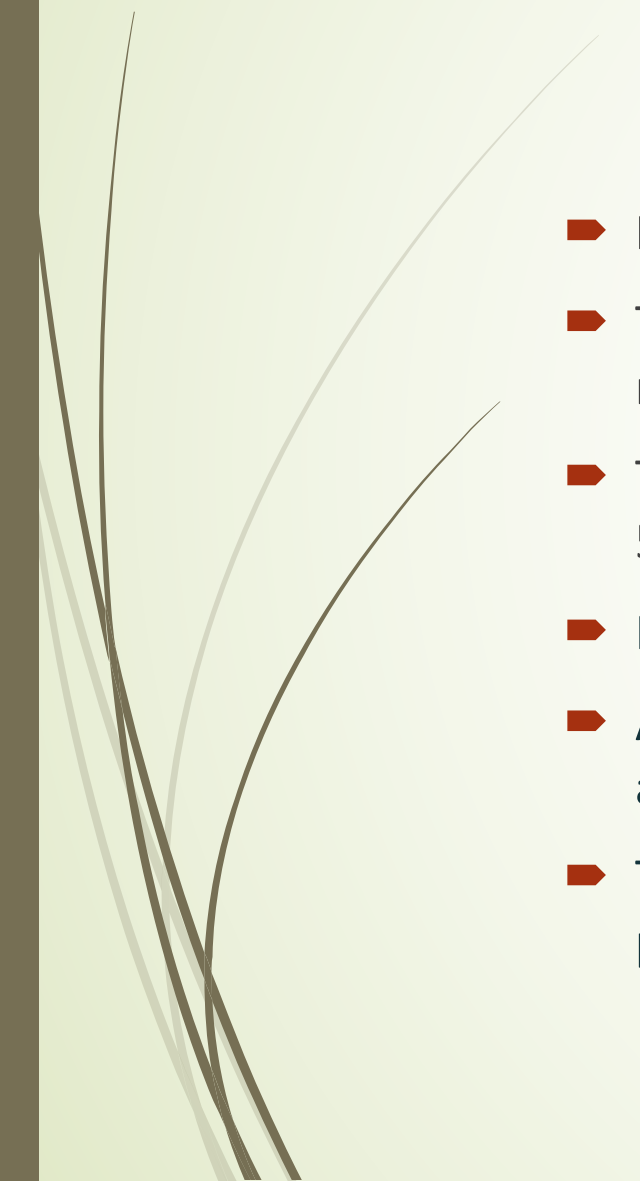


# What Is Information?

- Data or facts that have been organized, structured, and presented in a meaningful way. (Q: Meaningful by who? To whom?)
- It's the raw material from which knowledge and understanding are derived.
- Information can be collected, stored, transmitted, and processed, but it doesn't necessarily imply understanding or context.
- In the digital age, we have access to vast amounts of information, but it's the interpretation and application of this information that leads to knowledge.
- An example: ChatGPT: provides information or knowledge?

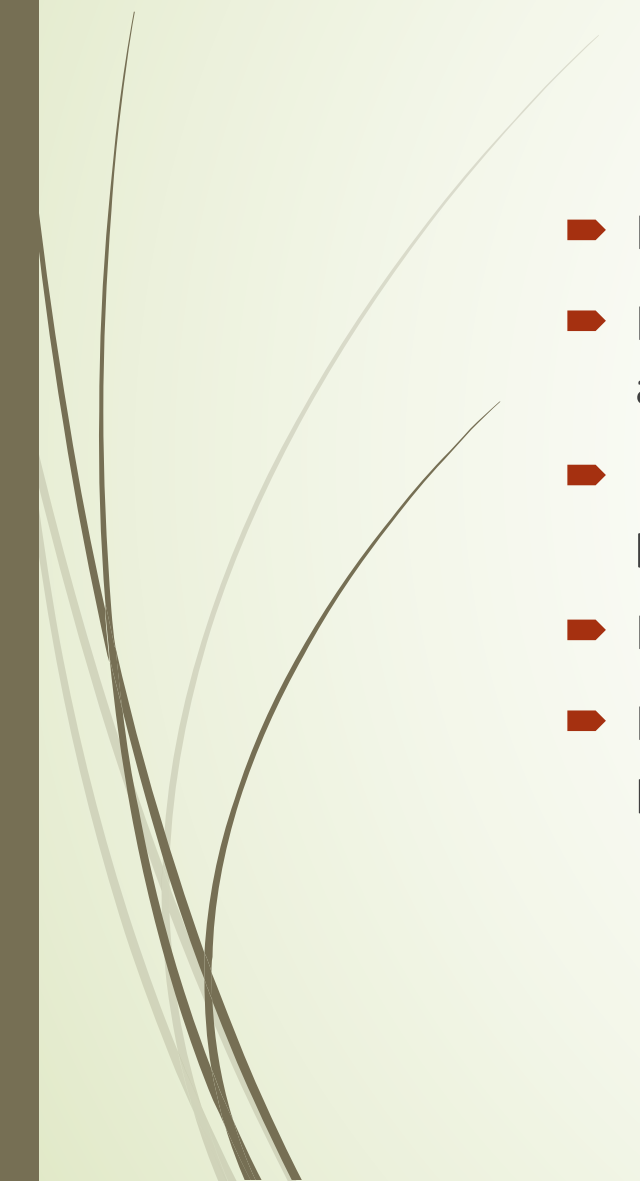


# Limitation of Information

- More than eight-in-ten Americans get news from digital devices
  - Top five most popular news websites: 1. Yahoo news, 2. New York Times, 3. CBS news, 4. NBC News, 5. Fox News (CNN, Google news, MSN news)
  - Top five social media apps: 1. Facebook, 2. Instagram, 3. Snapchat, 4. Pinterest, 5. LinkedIn
  - Profit driven media coverage that skews the information
  - Americans' views of what makes a news story trustworthy vary by party affiliation, demographic characteristics, and news consumption habits;
  - The erosion of trust in media is one of the most significant signs of deepening polarization in America (fake news, conspiracy theories. ...)
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# What Is Knowledge?

- Knowledge goes beyond mere information.
  - It represents **the awareness and understanding** of the relationships, patterns, and connections between various pieces of information.
  - Knowledge is often acquired **through learning, experience, and cognitive processing.**
  - It involves making sense of information and recognizing its significance.
  - Knowledge is a more structured and organized form of understanding, and it provides a foundation for decision-making and problem-solving.
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# Limitation of Knowledge

- Knowledge based on the limitation of the information sources;
- Trust in media (Gallup Survey): just 7% of Americans have "a great deal" of trust and confidence in the media, and 27% have "a fair amount";
- Echoing chamber of information and knowledge;
- Negative bias: Humans have a natural tendency to pay more attention to negative than positive stimuli;
- Emotional response: Negative news often elicits a stronger emotional response than positive news;
- Evolutionary adaptation: Some researchers suggest that our attention to negative information is an evolutionary adaptation that helped our ancestors survive in dangerous environments;



# Testing Your Knowledge of the World Today

- Are majority of the people in the world live longer today than 50 years ago?
- Are majority of the people in the world better off economically today than 50 years ago?
- Are majority of the people in the world healthier today than 50 years ago?
- Are there more or fewer wars and military conflicts in the world today than 50 years ago?
- Are majority of the people in the world have higher quality of life today than 50 years ago?



# **Surprising Findings from Steven Pinker**

Canadian-American cognitive psychologist, psycholinguist, popular science author, and public intellectual. An advocate of evolutionary psychology, and the computational theory of mind

**Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress, 2018**








# Progress? Indicators of Quality of Life

- Question: Are our lives better now than 100 years ago or since the end of the WWII (78 years ago)?
- Indicators of the quality of life
  1. Life expectancy
  2. Public health
  3. Poverty and economic well being
  4. Education and literacy
  5. Violence reduction



# Life Expectancy Trends

- ▶ At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, global life expectancy range from the mid-30s to the mid-40s (high mortality rate and infectious diseases)
  - ▶ 1930s to 1950s: global life expectancy range from the 50s to 60s (development of vaccines and antibiotics)
  - ▶ 1960s to 1980s: global life expectancy continues to rise, many developed countries saw life expectancies in the 70s and 80s
  - ▶ 2000s-2020s: global life expectancy continues to rise, many developed countries saw life expectancies exceed 80s
  - ▶ Recent trends: The Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on life expectancy in 2020 and 2021, with a temporary decline in certain regions. However, this is expected to be transitory
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# Public Health Trends

- ▶ 1900s-1920s: Infectious diseases were not effectively controlled: tuberculosis, typhoid fever, and influenza
- ▶ 1930s to 1950s: wide use of vaccines that reduced many infectious diseases, efforts to reduce smoking and tobacco reduced lung cancer
- ▶ 1960s to 1980s: Expanded access through government programs like Medicare and Medicaid in the United States. The WHO launched the Expanded Program on Immunization in 1974 to increase global vaccine coverage
- ▶ 2000s -2020s: Improvements and challenges: advancements in vaccines, genomics and precision medicines; rise of new infectious diseases such as SARS, H1Ni influenza, Ebola, and Covid 19... Some other NCDs, such as heart diseases, diabetic, and cancer on the rise; health disparities. ...




## Poverty and Economic Well Being (U.S.)

- ▶ 1900s-1920s: Poverty rates were relatively high despite periodic of economic growth in industrialized societies
- ▶ 1930s: the Great Depression led to the widespread poverty and unemployment prompting the government to implement the New Deal programs to address economic hardships
- ▶ 1940s to 19650s: The post WWII era witnessed a strong economic recovery; the expansion of the middle class and increased homeownership. ...
- ▶ 1960s to 1970s: Civil Rights Moments and Social Programs: such as Medicare, Midicaid, and food assistance program have helped to reduce poverty rates
- ▶ 1980s-1990s: Shifts in economic policies including tax cuts and deregulations



## Poverty and Economic Well Being (U.S.)

- ▶ 1980s-1990s: Shifts in economic policies including tax cuts and deregulations have contributed income inequality...
  - ▶ 2000s to 2020s: Economic fluctuations, including the global financial crisis of 2008-2009, dot-com bubble in the early 2000s
  - ▶ The 2020 COVID 19 pandemic had significant economic and social consequences leading to job losses and income disparities
  - ▶ Addressing poverty and economic well being in the US remain key policy priorities, with debates surrounding the adequacy of safety net programs and the minimum wage.
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# Strength and Limitations of Enlightenment Now by Steven Pinker

## Strength

- By using historical data, information, and knowledge as a social scientist
- By valuing reason, science and humanistic value

## Limitations

- Data bias
- Skewed information and knowledge

## Beyond data, information and knowledge

- Why wisdom?
- What does humanistic Buddhism have to offer ?



# Global Issues Demand Wisdom from Humanistic Buddhism

- ▶ Global level
  - ▶ Environmental issues
  - ▶ Rise of AI and technological disruptions
  - ▶ Nuclear threat
- ▶ National level
  - ▶ Polarization of political views
  - ▶ Social equity issues
- ▶ Personal level
  - ▶ Stress
  - ▶ Alienation



# What Is Wisdom?

- Wisdom is a higher-level concept that involves the ability **to apply knowledge and experience judiciously** to make sound judgments and decisions.
- It's about understanding the deeper implications of actions and choices, **considering long-term consequences, and applying ethical and moral principles.**
- Wisdom is often associated with practical and thoughtful decision-making that **benefits not only the individual but also others and society as a whole.**
- It often requires **reflection, empathy, and a broader perspective on life.**
- An Example of wisdom: **Humanistic Buddhism and Thich Nhat Hanh**





# Humanistic Buddhism

- It focuses on the **practical aspects of Buddhism** and its potential to address the challenges and needs of contemporary life.
- **Engagement** with the World: Contributing positively to the well-being of others and the environment.
- **Compassion and Altruism** - to alleviate suffering and promote well-being.
- **Social and Ethical Responsibility**: to uphold moral principles and contribute positively to social harmony and justice.
- **Inclusivity and Universalism**: It emphasizes the universal applicability of Buddhist teachings.
- **Environmental Stewardship**: This perspective is grounded in the recognition of the interconnectedness of all life.
- **Mindfulness and Meditation**: tools for self-awareness, inner transformation, and cultivating a clear and compassionate mind.

# Thich Nhat Hanh

## Turn Suffering into Wisdom

- Thích Nhất Hạnh 1926 - 2022
- Vietnamese Buddhist monk, peace activist, prolific author, poet and teacher – exiled from Vietnam in 1966, returned to Vietnam in 2018
- In 1967, Martin Luther King nominated him for a Nobel Peace Prize
- Created the “Order of Interbeing”, historically recognized as the main inspiration for “engaged Buddhism”.
- Known as the "father of mindfulness"
- Major influence on Western practices of Buddhism (Example: Dallas Meditation Center )



**Thich Nhat Hanh**



# The Heart of Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation, by Thich Nhat Hanh

"Buddha was not a god. He was a human being, like you and me, and he suffered just as we do. If we go to the Buddha with our hearts open, he will look at us, his eyes filled with compassion, and say, "Because there is suffering in your heart, it is possible for you to enter my heart." by Thich Nhat Hanh

## The Four Noble Truths:

- Understanding the nature of suffering (what)
- Causes of suffering (why)
- Cessation of suffering (how)
- Path to liberation and enlightenment (wisdom).

## The Noble Eightfold Path:

Right View, Right Thinking, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Diligence, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration

**Wisdom: Understanding, Practicing, and Compassion**



# Four Vows of Awakening Beings

## Closing chant of Community of Mindful Living

- Countless beings, we vow to free;
- Ceaseless afflictions, we vow to end;
- Limitless truth doors, we vow to open;
- The deepest paths of awakening, we vow to realize.

### Wisdom starting from

- Seeking understanding before judgement
  - Be an ambassador for peace
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# Road to Wisdom and Enlightenment

- Wisdom involves not just understanding and applying knowledge but also considering the **broader context** and making choices that align with **ethical and moral principles**.
- Humanistic Buddhism and the Legacy of Thích Nhất Hạnh
  - Interbeing and compassion
  - Practicing mindfulness
  - Transforming suffering into empathy and compassion
  - Engaging with family and friends, local community and the world with empathy, understanding, and love



**Let's be ambassadors to Peace!**

**Q & A**