

# The Heritage of Taixu: Philosophy, Taiwan, and Beyond

Bart DESSEIN\*

## Abstract

Much scholarly attention has been devoted to the way the Chinese intellectual world tried to formulate an answer to the challenge posed by European modernity, as well as to the way European political thinking (nationalism, socialism, communism, anarchism) impacted traditional Chinese political thinking. In contrast, very little attention has been devoted to the way these same political philosophies also influenced the Chinese Buddhist answer to European modernity. This article discusses the ways in which the 'reform of Buddhism' proposed by the famous Venerable Taixu (1889–1947) was shaped by both the political and military events that determined the history of China in the first half of the twentieth century, and by his genuine determination to modernize Buddhism.

**Keywords:** Taixu, *Sanmin zhuyi*, socialism, anarchism, cross-strait relations

## Taixujeva dediščina: filozofija, Tajvan in onkraj

### Izvleček

V stroki so veliko pozornosti posvečali načinu, s katerim je želel kitajski intelektualni svet zasnovati svoj odgovor na izzive evropske modernosti, ter načinu, kako je evropska politična misel (nacionalizem, socializem, komunizem, anarhizem) vplivala na tradicionalno kitajsko politično misel. V nasprotju s tem pa so zelo malo pozornosti posvetili temu, kako so te iste politične filozofije vplivale na odgovor kitajskega budizma na izziv evropske modernosti. Članek obravnava način, kako so na »reformo budizma«, ki jo je predlagal slavni Častitljivi Taixu (1889–1947), vplivali tako politični in vojaški dogodki, ki so zaznamovali zgodovino Kitajske v prvi polovici 20. stoletja, kakor tudi njegova pristna odločenost modernizirati budizem.

**Ključne besede:** Taixu, *Sanmin zhuyi*, socializem, anarhizem, čezožinski odnosi

\* Bart DESSEIN, Ghent University, Belgium.  
Email address: bart.dessein@ugent.be



## Introduction

That China's confrontation with European economic and military supremacy in the nineteenth century invoked a period of self-criticism among Chinese intellectuals is well documented. While some groups advocated a radical Confucianism that would go back to the times prior to the unification of China under the Qin 秦—a movement that, in this respect, explicitly referred to the return to the Classics that had characterized Europe's Age of Enlightenment, other intellectuals advocated the complete overthrow of the Confucian system, and still others had a more pragmatic attitude (Hon 2014).<sup>1</sup> Giving expression to the latter, Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962), one of the most important intellectuals of that period, summarized the problem of his time in the following words:

The problem is: How can China adjust herself so that she may feel at home in that modern western civilization which has become the civilization of the world? The problem suggests three possible ways or solutions. China may refuse to recognize this new civilization and resist its invasion; she may accept the new culture wholeheartedly; or, she may adopt its desirable elements and reject what she considers to be non-essential or objectionable. The first attitude is resistance; the second, wholesale acceptance; and the third, selective adoption. (Hu in Walker [1956] 1967, 138)

Less attention has been paid to how not only the secular world redefined itself in the post-Opium War (1839–1842), post-Taiping Rebellion (1851–1864), and post-World War I global order, but how Buddhism also for the first time saw itself confronted with the need to adjust itself to the contemporary world (Jiang 1992, 4). Buddhism had to: 1) find an answer to anti-Buddhist feelings that came along with the idea of modernity and secularization; 2) present an alternative to the Christian challenge, a faith to which some of the new intellectuals converted, and the introduction of which had, in China, degraded traditional beliefs and faiths to the domain of superstition (Goossaert and Palmer 2011, 62; Bourdieu 1971, 304–5, 308–9); and 3) overcome what it perceived as a spiritual decline within its own ranks (Pittman 2001, 1–2, 34–40). It is this challenge to Buddhism—a challenge that echoes the statement by Hu Shi quoted above—that the following pages are devoted to. The focus will more precisely be on the person of the Venerable Taixu 太虛 (1889–1947), whose proposals for a reform of Buddhism oscillated between (revolutionary) socialism and nationalism, and

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1 Nineteenth-century Japan also witnessed the activities of such oppositional groups (see Nakajima 2018).

whose ideas, notwithstanding the fact that he himself declared his reform of Buddhism to have been a failure,<sup>2</sup> have had a lasting impact on Buddhism, both in mainland China and Taiwan.

## Historical Background

Taixu 太虛 (1889–1947; original name Lü Peilin 呂沛林) was born in the village of Chang'an 長安 in Haining 海寧 county of northern Zhejiang 浙江 province. After his father died when he was only eight months old and his mother remarried, he was taken care of by his maternal grandmother. A devout Buddhist, she made sure that Lü Peilin not only received a decent classical education, but also took him along to Buddhist temples and made sure that he read Buddhist texts and visited Buddhist monasteries. In this way, he became familiar with the fundamentals of Chan 禪, Tiantai 天臺, Huayan 華嚴 and Faxiang 法相 Buddhist thinking and practice.<sup>3</sup> After the death of his mother and facing health problems of his own, at the age of fourteen he decided to renounce lay life and join the Xiao jiuhua Temple (*Xiao jiuhua si* 小九華寺) in Suzhou 蘇州.<sup>4</sup>

In the spring of 1908, when Taixu (as he was now called) was eighteen years old, the reformist monk Huashan 華山, who hailed from Wenzhou 溫州 in Zhejiang province and who had gained fame through his knowledge of the Buddhist monastic code, came to the Xifang Temple (*Xifang si* 西方寺) in Jiangsu 江蘇 province, where Taixu was then residing (Taixu 2005m). According to Don A. Pittman (2001, 67), Huashan was impressed with Taixu, and he “[t]old him about those working for revolutionary political and social changes within China,

2 See Taixu 2005j, where he states that “My failure is admittedly partly due to the profoundness of the obstruction by opposing forces, but it is also due to my own weakness and, overall, because I have overstressed theory and neglected practice. The initiative may have been skilful, but [I was] incompetent [in my] command. Therefore, [my] command was of no avail in practice.”

(我的失敗，固然也由於反對方面障礙力的深廣，而本身的弱點，大抵因為我理論有餘而實行不足，啟導雖巧而統率無能，故遇到實行便統率不住了。)

3 See Taixu 2005k, where he states that “I started to be conscious of things when I was five years old. [...] My earliest memory and image are a lamp in coloured glass in front of a niche for Guanyin (Avalokiteśvara).”

(我從五歲有知識起 [...] 我最早的意識和想像，是庵內觀音龕前的琉璃燈。)

Also see Deng 2000, 23.

4 See Taixu 2005l, where Taixu recalls his arrival at Xiao jiuhua Temple in Suzhou with the following words: “It vividly came to my mind how I, in the Autumn of the year I was nine years old, went to Jiuhua Mountain (Jiuhua shan 九華山) with my grandmother, and entered the temple to burn incense. Why would I not renounce lay life in this very temple?”

(猛然想起九歲那年的秋天，隨外婆朝九華山，曾經入寺燒香，遂思何不就在此寺拜求一師父出家。)

Also see Deng 2000, 22; Pittman 2001, 65.

asserting that the monastic order itself must modernize and promote educational reform”.<sup>5</sup>

In his autobiography, Taixu mentions that he was at first uncertain about Huashan’s ideas and about the way such a modernization process could possibly be realized. As he wrote:

When I first heard his (i.e. Venerable Huashan’s) words, I did not approve of them [...] I also was of the opinion that what he said could never be in line with the [level of the] scientific thinking of China.

我乍聞其說，甚不以為然，[...] 我亦覺其所言多為向來的中國學術思想不曾詳者。(Taixu 2005m).

However, as he also states, he became convinced of Huashan’s ideas after reading works such as Kang Youwei’s 康有為 (1858–1927) *Datong shu* 大同書 (*The Book of the Great Community*), Liang Qichao’s 梁啟超 (1873–1929) *Xinmin shuo* 新民說 (*On New People*), Zhang Taiyan’s 章太炎 (1868–1936) *Gao fo dixi shu* 告佛弟子書 (*Letter to Followers of the Buddha*), Yan Fu’s 嚴復 (1894–1921) *Tianyan lun* 天演論 (*On Evolution*), and Tan Sitong’s 譚嗣同 (1865–1898) *Renxue* 仁學 (*An Exposition on Benevolence*)—books that had all been recommended to him by Huashan (Taixu 2005m; Pittman 2001, 67–68).

Soon after having made his acquaintance with Venerable Huashan, Taixu also met Venerable Qiyun 棲雲, a monk who had studied in Japan where he had joined the ‘Revolutionary League’ (*Tongmeng hui* 同盟會) founded by Sun Zhongshan 孫中山 (1866–1925) in 1905 (Yu 2005, 84). An iconoclastic spirit, Qiyun was intent on overthrowing the Qing government. Through Qiyun’s influence, Taixu further read Zhang Taiyan’s *Min bao* 民報 (*People’s Journal*) and Liang Qichao’s *Xinmin congbao* 新民叢報 (*New People’s Review*), and learned about Zou Rong’s 鄒容 (1885–1905) *Geming jun* 革命軍 (*Revolutionary Army*), a patriotic novel that was infused with ideas of Republicanism and social Darwinist racial theories, and which had been published in Shanghai in 1903 (Taixu 2005m). It was, however, the political program of Sun Zhongshan, known as the “Three People’s Principles” (*San min zhuyi* 三民主義), that particularly intrigued Taixu.<sup>6</sup>

In his autobiography he states:

5 According to Yinshun (1973, 33), Huashan was actually the first person to start modernizing the Saṅgha.

6 The “Three People’s Principles” are 1) nationalism (removing the Qing); 2) power of the people (introducing Western-style democracy in three phases: military dictatorship; guided democracy; full democracy with a “trias politica”); 3) wellbeing of the people (social-economic program).

At first, it was not my standpoint that I could save the world with the Buddhist doctrine. I was only of the opinion that after a political revolution in China, Chinese Buddhism would have to go through a revolution as well.

但我初不稍移我以佛法救世的立場，只覺中國政治革命後，中國的佛教亦須經過革命而已。(Taixu 2005m)

It thus appears that Taixu may have become convinced of the necessity and possibility of broad political and social reforms, but that he postponed the modernization of Buddhism to a separate and later moment. Don A. Pittman (2001, 67–68) describes Taixu’s mindset as follows:

[c]ommitted to both political reform for the nation and religious reform for the Buddhist community, he formalized a special alliance of friendship with Huashan and began to consider how in practical terms a “new Buddhism” could be created in China to parallel the creation of a new nation.

It may therefore not come as a surprise that Taixu’s ideas on the reform of Buddhism were intricately connected with the political events that determined the end of Imperial China and the founding of the Republic. Indeed, in the revolutionary atmosphere that preceded the declaration of the Republic of China in 1912, Taixu had not only cultivated close relationships with members of the “Tongmeng hui”, but also with important socialists, anarchists, and revolutionaries in the southern province of Guangdong 廣東. With them, he engaged in reading and studying the works of Karl Marx (1818–1883), and those of revolutionary authors such as Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), Peter Kropotkin (1842–1921), Mihail Bakunin (1814–1876), Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809–1865), and Kōtoku Shūsui (1871–1911) (Taixu 2005m). Having become familiar with the political doctrines of anarchism, socialism, democracy, and constitutional monarchy, he met the revolutionary monk Zongyang 宗仰 (1861–1930?) in Shanghai in 1911. Zongyang was a close associate and supporter of Sun Zhongshan. It was also while in Shanghai that he learned about the Military Revolt of Wuchang (*Wuchang Qiyi* 武昌起義) of 10 October 1911, which resulted in the fall of the Qing dynasty and the installation of Sun Zhongshan as provisional President of the Republic of China (Pitman 2001, 72–73).

In what follows, it will be shown how Taixu’s acquaintance with socialism and nationalism, as well as his knowledge of the fact that some monks had actually organized monastic troops—so-called *seng jun* 僧軍—to support and participate in

the military overthrow of the Manchus at the time of the 1911 revolution (Taixu 2005n), encouraged Taixu's political thinking to oscillate between (revolutionary) socialism and Sun Zhongshan's form of nationalism.<sup>7</sup>

## The Early Republic and the Advancement of Buddhism as a Universal Religion

After Sun Zhongshan had been inaugurated as provisional President of the Republic of China, Taixu travelled to Nanjing 南京. Loyal to his “commitment to both political reform for the nation and religious reform for the Buddhist community”, and answering Venerable Huashan's appeal to reform monastic education, Taixu managed to transform the Jinshan Monastery (*Jinshan si* 金山寺) in the vicinity of Nanjing, a traditionally conservative monastic institution, into a modern school for monks and the headquarters of the Association for the Advancement of Buddhism (*Fojiao xiejin hui* 佛教協進會) with the support of members of the Socialist Party (Taixu 2005n; Pittman 2001, 74–77). The short rule of Sun Zhongshan also saw the establishment of the Chinese General Buddhist Association (*Zhonghua Fojiao zonghui* 中華佛教總會) in Shanghai in April 1912. The charter of this newly established association, with which the earlier established Association for the Advancement of Buddhism merged, was approved by Sun Zhongshan in his role as provisional President of the Republic. The Association's stipulation that it “would not sanction activities beyond the religious sphere proper to Buddhism” (Wei-huan 1939, 153; Dongchu 1974, 1, 102) indicates that Taixu apparently saw political and social reforms on the one hand, and religious reform on the other, as two separate endeavours.

The replacement of Sun Zhongshan by Yuan Shikai 袁世凱 (1859–1916) as President of the Republic of China in 1912 had an important impact on Taixu's political thinking. “Democracy” and “science”—Chen Duxiu's 陳獨秀 (1879–1942) famous Mr. Science (賽先生 *Sai xiansheng*) and Mr. Democracy 德先生 (*De xiansheng*)—became important elements of the revolutionary movement. This explains why the journal *Xin Qingnian* 新青年 (*New Youth*) that had been founded in September 1915 in Shanghai under the editorship of Chen Duxiu and that had inaugurated China's New Culture Movement (*Xin wenhua yundong* 新文化運動), developed from being “a vehicle for radical intellectuals anxious to counteract what they saw as retrogressive forces in politics and culture which were growing stronger as the experiment in republicanism faltered under the presidency of Yuan

7 See Pittman 2001, 72–73. As Welch (1968, 157) states, Taixu is “probably the closest thing to a ‘political monk’ during the Republican era” imaginable.

Shih-k'ai", to being a journal in which anarchists "developed the reform utopian vision to stress revolutionary struggle to destroy social inequality and Confucian ritualism as the means to personal happiness and social utopia" (Furth 2002, 87). Against this background, the successful experience of the Russian Revolution was another great source of inspiration. Communist ideas thus spread among Chinese youth in general, and communism was increasingly advocated as an alternative approach for the erstwhile Confucian society (Jiang 1992, 6).

Another historical fact that is important to understand the development of Taixu's thinking and the reform of Buddhism he proposed is the obvious failure of the Republic in the 1919 Versailles Treaty, leading to the famous May Fourth Movement (*Wu si yundong* 五四運動). With respect to the Versailles Treaty, *Xin Qingnian* had welcomed the fourteen points President Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924) had formulated in a speech to the American Congress on 8 January 1918. These were set out to end World War I and were seen as a sign of the advance of Western democracy and science, and that the Allied victory in World War I put an end to the imperialist encroachments on Chinese territory. It was expected that the Versailles Treaty would at least return the German possessions in Shandong 山東 province to China. However, the Allied forces did not feel obliged to follow Wilson's "fourteen points", and many of them were not realized. As is well known, the German possessions were not returned to China, but transferred to Japan (Furth 2002, 92–93). Assessing the impact of World War I, Benjamin A. Elman (2006, 225) states that, "a turning point had been reached, and the dark side of what New Culture enthusiasts called 'Mr. Science' had been exposed. Behind it lay the colossal ruins produced by Western materialism".

In their assessment of the impact of World War I on the New Culture Movement, John King Fairbank and Merle Goldman (1992, 267) state:

The creativity of the New Culture Movement is fully visible only in its historical context. The great World War of 1914–1918 disclosed the barbaric potentialities of Europe's arrogant civilization. The empires of Austria-Hungary, of the Russian tsars, and finally Germany all collapsed. Woodrow Wilson proclaimed great principles of self-determination for all peoples and open diplomacy among them. Ideas of several kinds of socialism, of the emancipation of women, and the rights of labour versus capitalists swept around the globe and flooded into Republican China. China's scholar-elite, still a tiny top crust of their ancient society, instinctively took on the task of understanding and evaluating this revolutionary outside world at the same time that it struggled to reevaluate China's inherited culture.

To the same degree that Chen Duxiu had enthusiastically called for the entry of “Mr. Science” and “Mr. Democracy” in China, the First World War also showed the negative side of capitalist modernity. As pointed out by Taixu’s disciple Yinshun 印順 (1906–2005), Taixu felt devastated by the outbreak of the war, and in 1914 went into three years of solitary meditation (*biguan* 閉關) on Putuo Mountain (*Putuo shan* 普陀山), a period during which he read the works of Zhang Taiyan and Yan Fu, both of whom were interested in Buddhism and the works of whom he was already familiar with through his earlier contacts with Venerable Huashan. According to Yinshun, it was during these years of solitary meditation that Taixu “blended socialism with Buddhist teachings” (Yinshun 1973, 76). This development is likely to have been fostered by the thinking of Venerable Huashan and Venerable Shanhui. Recalling this period of solitary meditation and his writings of that time, Taixu notes that:

Inwardly, these treatises of mine were rooted in the Chinese Buddhist religion, system, and history; but outwardly, they conformed to the guidelines of the democratic citizens of that time. [...] It is a pity that the homeland transition from the imperial system to warlordism as well as the victory of the Russian Revolution and the establishment of communism and its confrontation with fascism occurred only later. [This explains why] these treatises lack an economic and political foundation.

我此論，內根中國佛教教宗、教制、教史的推演，外適當時民主國民的機宜 [...] 惜其後國內因帝制變成軍閥分爭，國際因俄國革命勝利成共產與法西斯的對峙；此論致失經濟、政治的基礎。(Taixu 2005o)

In the journal *Haichao Yin* 海潮音 (*Sound of the Sea Tide*), Taixu also advocated combining Buddhism with socialism. This journal, a monthly publication aimed at the exploration of models for the organization and education of “new monks” (*xin seng* 新僧), was established by Taixu after the May Fourth Movement, supposedly after he had heard “the sound of the sea tide”, i.e., the Buddha’s voice (Pittman 2001, 61, 93). The journal was the successor to *Jueshe Congkan* 覺社叢刊 (*Collection of the Association for Awakening*), the periodical of the Association for Awakening (*Jueshe* 覺社) that Taixu had published together with Zhang Taiyan (Dessein 2000, 1233; Taixu 2005p). The journal’s ideological position is evident from articles such as “*Nongchan gongchan*” 農禪工禪 (Peasant’s Chan, Worker’s Chan), “*Fuwu shehui*” 服務社會 (Serving Society), “*Zishi qi li*” 自食其力 (Support Oneself by One’s Own Labour), and “*Heshang xia shan*” 和尚下山 (Monks Descending from the Mountain). In his text “*Seng zizhi shuo*”



僧自治說 (Explanation of Self-governance of Monks) of 1921, Taixu proposes that “under a voluntarily communism” Buddhist disciples must see agricultural work, labour, medicine, education and the arts as all for the cause of becoming a Buddha, and that one can be a police officer, lawyer, official, servant or merchant in what he called *quanmin zhuoyi* 全民主義 (peaceful civilianism) (Jiang 1992, 6). This position was echoed in his appeal to monastic and lay communities to “reorganize and reorient themselves for the radical demands of the *bodhisattva* path in the modern world”, as well as in his call “for an engagement with, rather than a withdrawal from, the issues of the socio-political world”, whereby he saw “compassionate social service both as a necessary result of and as a means to an experience of complete enlightenment” (Pittman 2001, 60). This demand for social engagement met with resistance from those monks who feared that social engagement would contradict their religious vows and threatened to obstruct their religious goals (Dessein 2000, 1233). Taixu, however, counters this objection by claiming that: “The political perspectives of anarchism and Buddhism are very close; beginning from the stage of democratic socialism we can make gradual progress towards anarchism” (無政府主義與佛教為鄰近，而可由民主社會主義以漸階進) (Yinshun 1973, 64).<sup>8</sup>

Socialism was thus seen as a step towards anarchism—the latter arguably being a political goal with at least some resemblances to the Buddhist attitude towards politics. Socialism and Buddhism, so Taixu contended, “similarly advocate human equality and social welfare, and he was impressed with the principle that people ought to contribute to society according to their abilities and receive according to their needs” (Pittman 2001, 182).

Although Taixu had advocated a blend of Buddhism with socialism, the devastation of World War I, the further history of the Soviet Union after the Russian Revolution, and the apparent shortcomings of Western culture in general, made him averse to politics, and revalue religion. In a lecture he delivered in Xiamen

8 Likewise, when Taixu organized the first ‘East Asian Buddhist Conference’ in Tokyo in 1925, Venerable Shanhui 善慧 (1881–1945), a monk who was born in Taiwan but who had been ordained on the mainland and who had, upon his return to Taiwan, established a temple near Keelung 基隆 (see Welch 1968, 160–73), delivered a talk in which he claimed that the monastic system corresponded to the Marxist idea of a classless society, but did not have to resort to violence. Buddhism, so he claimed, could therefore help bring about world peace and egalitarianism (see Sengcan 1981, 2). For more information on the conference itself, see Welch 1968, 56, 166–67. It should be remembered here that 1925 was also the year in which Sun Zhongshan died and communist elements were removed from the Guomindang. 1925 also was the year in which Liu Shaoqi 劉少奇 established the All-China Workers Association (*Zhonghua quanguo zonggonghui* 中華全國總工會), the year of strike in Shandong and of the student protests in Shanghai against Japan, in which 11 students were killed and several tens were wounded in the so-called “atrociousness of Wusa”. All these events fostered the communist movement (see Jiang 1992, 22).

夏門, Fujian 福建 province, in 1930, he reflected on the possibility of religion playing a role in the contemporary world in the following words:

Contemporary people have come to regard religion as a relic of the past and as unsuited for the civilized world of today. [...] As far as I observe the countries in the West [however], the foundation of their social cohesion is nothing but the power of religion. [...] The Communist Party [of Russia] only believes in its communism. It discards religion in name, but adopts the reality of religion. When it appeals to communism to unify the thinking of the people, this is in order to accomplish the feature of their Communist Party rule. The intention of the Socialist Party is the same. Therefore, when the Socialist Party and the Communist Party call to overthrow religion, this merely is [an expression of] their wish to destroy the old-style religion and to establish a new religion. None of the contemporary movements can do without religion. This is even true for extreme anarchism. [...] In reality, mankind is social [...]. Therefore, individualist anarchism is a dead end, it leads nowhere. Mankind cannot live together without the formative power of mutual social cohesion even for one single day. In other words, mankind cannot be without the uniting force of religion for even one single day.

現在的人們，完全把宗教看做過去的東西，不適宜於今日文明的世界。[...] 依我所觀察到的西洋各國，其社會團結的基礎，完全是宗教的力量；[...] 共產黨是信其唯一的共產主義，去宗教的名而取宗教的實，依共產主義為號召以集中人民的思想，以完成其共產黨治的形式。社會黨的意義，也是這樣。故社會黨、共產黨所喊出打倒宗教的聲浪，這不過是要打破舊式的宗教，建立新的宗教罷了。現在各種運動中，真能無須宗教，算是極端的無政府主義[...]其實、人類這樣東西，究竟是社會性的，[...]故個人勿政府主義是一條斷港，行不通的東西。倘是人類共同存在一天的話，那末、社會彼此團結集中的制量力，一日不可無，也一日不會消失。換言之，就是團結的宗教中心力，一日不可無，也一日不會消失的。(Taixu 2005g)

The gist of this 1930 lecture had in fact already been expressed in a lecture Taixu had held in Taiwan in October 1917, and in which he proposed Buddhism as an alternative to Christianity (which was associated with the West):

Buddhism is representative of East Asian civilization. At this point, Christianity, that is representative of contemporary Western civilization, has already lost its religious power in Europe and in America. Europeans

and Americans have thus lost their basis for a secure life and for the fulfilment of their destiny. This is the reason why the great World War is now taking place. We should proclaim our East Asian good word of peace and universally spread Buddhism throughout the world in order to change their murderous perversions and in order to save all beings from great disaster.

『佛教為東洋文明之代表。今代表西洋文明之耶教，已失其宗教功用於歐美；歐美人皆失其安身立命之地，故發生今日之大戰局。吾輩當發揚我東洋之和平德音，使佛教普及世界，以易彼之殺伐戾氣，救脫眾生同業相傾之浩劫』。(Yinshun 1973, 92)

On another occasion, Taixu expresses the “universal” possibilities of Buddhism as follows:

We have to spread the Buddhist doctrine to mankind now. Regardless of whether it concerns England, Russia, Germany, France, Japan, or America, we have to propagate the Buddhist doctrine, to create a Buddhist doctrine that is social and universal, and to enable mankind to experience its advantage. The Buddhist doctrine therefore is not devoid of the masses of the people or an independent science. All politicians, lawyers, educators, scientists, philosophers, authors, farmers, workers and merchants all need to study it. It is not necessary to leave lay life to study Buddha.

現在則須將佛法普及於人類，不論英、俄、法、日、美、均須有佛法的宣傳，成為社會化與大同化的一種佛法，方能使全人類感受其益。故佛法不是離人群而獨立的學術，舉凡政治家、教育家、科學家、哲學家、文學家、農、工、商等等各種人物，均須研究，不必出家然後謂之學佛。(Taixu 2005i<sup>9</sup>)

### “*Rencheng*” Buddhism, “*rensheng*” Buddhism, “*renjian*” Buddhism, and the Creation of “Buddhist Academies” (*Foxue yuan*)

In 1916, while in solitary retreat at Putuo shan, and a year before he delivered his speech on the possible role of Buddhism as “universal” religion, Taixu coined the term “*rencheng Fojiao*” (人乘佛教): the Buddhism of the “vehicle of ordinary

9 This is an undated document. However, as in the *Taixu dashi quanshu* 太虛大師全書 (*The Complete Works of the Venerable Master Taixu*) ([1956] 2005), it is inserted in between a document dated in the winter of 1928 and a document dated in the fifth month of 1929, we may assume that this text was written in late 1928 or early 1929.

people” (Taixu 2005e). In 1928, focusing on the aspects of 1) transformation of the self and the world, 2) transcending local culture, and 3) harmony with science, he introduced the term “*rensheng Fojiao*” (人生佛教), “Buddhism for the living”.<sup>10</sup> As noted by Hong Jinlian (1995, 137 ff.) the concept “*rensheng Fojiao*” thus comprises elements of Western humanism and scientific optimism, as well as original Buddhist values. According to Taixu, it was Yogācāra Buddhism in particular that had the potential to enhance the modernist programmes of his contemporaries (Pacey 2014, 149).<sup>11</sup> A modern, humanistic, and scientific “Buddhism for the living” had to divert its attention away from death and the afterlife towards the present world of the living; “Buddhism for the living” had to use the teachings of the Buddha to take care of practical issues and help people make progress and improve the world in which they lived (Taixu 2005e; Long 2000, 59).

This worldly orientation of Taixu’s reform movement—it may be remarked here that Confucianism is also directed towards the world—explains the introduction of the concept of “*renjian Fojiao*” (人間佛教), “humanistic Buddhism” or “Buddhism for the human society”, a term he first used in 1933 (Taixu 2005h). As Taixu states:

[The term] “*renjian Fojiao*” expresses that one in no way has to instruct people to leave mankind and become a spirit, or that it would be a Buddhism in which everyone should go forth and become a monk in a temple, on a mountain, or in a forest. [The term] expresses that one should improve society with the Buddhist principles and make sure that mankind makes progress. It is a Buddhism that improves the world. [...] In order to establish “*renjian Fojiao*”, it is therefore necessary to start from the thinking of the common people. [...] When ordinary people believe that *buddhas* and *bodhisattvas* are like spirits, this is a very big mistake!

人間佛教，是表明並非教人離開人類去做神做鬼，或皆出家到寺院山林里去做和尚的佛教，乃是以佛教的道理來改良社會，使人類進步，把世界改善的佛教 [...] 建設人間佛教，要先從普通一般人的思想中建設起來 [...] 普通人信佛菩薩，以為是同鬼神一樣的，這是大錯誤的! (Taixu 2005h)<sup>12</sup>

10 See Taixu 2005e. Pittman (2001, 169) states that “*rensheng Fojiao*” “was a theme that Taixu first began to explore in a 1928 lecture in Shanghai, and [...] was one that he continued to detail until his final lecture on the subject in Zhenjiang in August 1946”. For Taixu’s 1928 lecture, see Taixu 2005b; 2005c.

11 On the “modern” and “scientific” aspect of Yogācāra, also see Li 2003, 22–24, 48.

12 This statement of Taixu’s is reminiscent of the famous saying in *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*) XI, 11: “The Master said: ‘When it is not yet possible to serve the people, how then can you serve spirits’ [...]”

Venerable Yinshun 印順 describes this endeavour of Taixu's as follows:

Taixu had a great resolve to save the world through Buddhism, and he [...] could no longer restrain himself. Turning away from the kind of religious path that seeks to transcend the human realm in order to enter the Absolute, he instead chose to distance himself from the Absolute in order to confront the world of mankind.

大師以佛學救世之宏願 [...] 而不復能自遏，一轉先之超俗入真而為迴真向俗。(Yinshun 1973, 33–34)<sup>13</sup>

For Taixu, this modern form of Buddhism—a superstition-free Buddhism that had to turn the here-and-now into a “pure land”—needed “new monks”, a conviction based on which he also criticized the actual situation of the monastic order and the Buddhist ritual practices as they had come to be since the Ming dynasty (Birnbäum 2003, 129; Pittman 2001, 175).<sup>14</sup>

It was with the aim to create “new monks” that Taixu proposed the construction of so-called “Buddhist Academies” (*Foxue yuan* 佛學院) that would have to offer a curriculum that emphasized the study of *Yogācāra* and *Madhyamaka* texts. These highly logical texts had been neglected in China for some centuries, but were especially appreciated by European academics at that time. This refocusing on the logical tradition of Buddhism—away from the prevailing ritual form—may also

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‘When you do not yet know life, how then can you know death.’ (未能事人，焉能事鬼[...] 未知生，焉知死。) It can also be recalled here that Taixu studied Confucian texts in his childhood, and that he also studied them during his three years of solitary meditation (*biguan*) from 1914 to 1917. (See Ritzinger 2001, 5)

13 Also see Jiang 1992, 13; Pittman 2001, 68.

14 Taixu formulated this challenge as follows: “At present, the Buddhist doctrine is able to establish itself in the world; the only question is whether the Buddhist community is able to maintain itself in the world.” (現在佛法是可以存立在世界上的，惟僧眾能夠保存在世界上與否，商成問題。) (See Taixu 2005d) Zhang Taiyan (1868–1936) and Su Mansu (1884–1918) had also pointed out that “The cause for the corruption of Chinese Buddhists lay not in outer reasons, but in the Buddhists themselves. [...] Although there are many rules and regulations for monks to observe in the temples, the monks are actually lax in discipline. [...] Many monks are not engaged in meditation in accordance with the regulations, but are enjoying a cosy and banal life. They do not preach scriptures, but devote themselves to ceremonies for the dead. When they are entrusted with the cause of *dharmā*, they are only interested in money. The monks have conflicts over property among themselves. They indulge in the offerings from the believers. What they offer as their service just leads to the decline of Buddhism. In fact, they are generally looked down upon. Some fawn upon rich and powerful persons. They claim that they have to rely on good emperors in order to protect the *dharmā*, but they are actually bent on their own interests. [...] They deserve to suffer the government policy of confiscating their property for education.” (See Deng 1994, 146; Bingenheimer 2004, 77–78, 120–25)

be partly explained by the fact that Taixu studied works on Western logic while in solitary retreat from 1914 to 1917 (Ritzinger 2001, 5). For Taixu, such studies had to be complemented with charitable action—very similar to the work Christian missionaries were doing in China (Birnbaum 2003, 130). The first of such “Buddhist Academies” was the famous “Wuchang Buddhist Academy” (*Wuchang Foxueyuan* 武昌佛學院), established in 1922. One of the first disciples in Wuchang was Zhang Zongdai 張宗戴, a native of Sichuan 四川 province who had studied law, literature, philosophy, and Buddhism in the Pingmin 平民 University of Beijing 北京, and had, in 1921, gone to Russia to investigate socialism. Back in China, Zhang Zongdai actively participated in the patriotic student movement and, in Wuchang, founded the journal *Xin Fobua xunkan* 新佛化旬刊 (*New Buddhist Weekly*) that soon changed its name to *Fobua xin qingnian* 佛化新青年 (*Buddhistic New Youth*), a title that is reminiscent of the already mentioned *Xin Qingnian* founded by Chen Duxiu. In the journal *Xin Seng* 新僧 (*New Monks*), the “Wuchang Buddhist Academy” criticized the conservatives within the Buddhist community (Jiang 1992, 17). In this sense, the position of the journal *Xin seng* parallels the creation of a *xin min* 新民 (new people) by the revolutionaries (Pittman 2001, 62).

## Taixu and the Nationalist Party

Taixu’s attempt to engage Buddhist teachings with the modern world brought politics back on his agenda. In a lecture he delivered for the Buddhist association of Siming 思明 district, Xiamen, in the second month of 1933, he thus states that:

Without the state, it would not only be impossible to resist intruders, but people’s lives would be insecure and without peace. It would be impossible to pay respect to our parents or society. We must therefore take patriotism as our presupposition when paying respect to the country! Let us, Chinese fellow citizens, heroic soldiers and fervent heroes, consistently endeavour to build up a glorious nation in China that is currently encircled and attacked by enemies!

若無國家,不但外患無法抵禦, 國內人民的生命也沒有保障, 生活也沒有安寧, 要報父母、社會恩亦無從報起。所以, 我們更要報答國家恩, 大家要以愛國心為前提! 在今日眾敵圍攻的中國, 我們中國的國民, 英勇的將士, 慷慨的豪傑, 應在眾敵環攻之時, 一致奮起建設光榮的國家吧! (Taixu 2005a)<sup>15</sup>

15 Also see Long 2000, 60.

Taixu's disillusionment with the political developments in the wider world brought his political focus back to China and Confucian values, as is evident from his focus on "humaneness" (*ren* 仁) in a statement he made during a lecture he gave to the commercial association of Hankou 漢口, Hubei 湖北 province, in the tenth month of the same year, 1933:

Following other countries is not the method! Some people are of the opinion that China should enter the road of Russia. However, like other nations, Russia also still is in the peril of the "you die and I live" [logic]. Moreover, in no way should China use contemporary Europe's method of opposing European and American capitalism with socialism. China has no capitalism and therefore neither needs socialism. *A fortiori* Russia, that although it claims to have socialism is [actually] developing towards a new imperialism. The road pursued by Lenin and the road of the Soviet Union are not the roads for China. Should China then continue to follow the road of disasters and human calamities? No! As every country has ventured on a road that leads nowhere, it is necessary to change direction. [...] China can open an exit for their roads that lead nowhere. But what is this road? [...] It is changing to the fundamental spirit of Chinese culture, of overcoming oneself and honouring humaneness (*ren*).

故單是跟隨他國走，究不是般法！而另有一些人，以為中國須走入俄國走的路上去，然俄國也尚在各國你死我活中拼命；且中國並不能有此般法，以進代歐洲之有社會主義，即因反對歐美的資本主義而起。中國無有資本主義，亦即不需要社會主義；況俄羅斯雖云社會主義，仍是變相的新帝國主義。列強的路與蘇俄的路，既然都不是中國的出路，然則中國長隨天災人禍等下去麼？不是！因各國走到走不通時，必須改變方向。[...] 中國可為他們走不通之中而開辟一條出路來。然這一條出路是什麼呢？[...] 改變成中國文化根本精神的克己崇仁。(Taixu 2005h)<sup>16</sup>

Taixu's political stance materialized in practical terms in his close ties with Jiang Jieshi 蔣介石 (1887–1975) and his membership of the Nationalist Party (Guo 1997, 3–4). It is, in this respect, interesting to note with Don A. Pittman that

16 Also see Pittman (2001, 182–83), who states that Taixu struggled with the question "whether, within the context of his 'Buddhism for human life', the most effective strategies for ultimate transformation ought to be designed narrowly, for the individual citizen, or more broadly, to include the socio-political structures in which all persons found themselves". For Taixu's idea that "Confucianism's emphasis on 'right conduct' and 'adjusting to circumstances' had paved the way for the introduction of Buddhism to China", see Callahan 1952, 166.

Taixu presented his ‘Buddhism for the human society’ as a complement to and perfection of Sun Zhongshan’s form of nationalism. [...] On occasion, Taixu even referred to his own efforts in terminology that paralleled Sun’s *San min zhuyi*, advocating a “Three-principled Buddhism” (*San fo zhuyi* 三佛主義) that entailed an ideal Saṅgha of Dharma teachers (*fo-seng zhuyi* 佛僧主義), an ideal lay Buddhist order of active *bodhisattvas* (*fohua zhuyi* 佛化主義), and a national culture infused with the spirit of Mahayana Buddhism and reaching out to the entire world (*foguo zhuyi* 佛國主義). (Pittman 2001, 168; see also Taixu 2005g)

The parallel between Sun Zhongshan’s “*San min zhuyi*” and the “Three-principled Buddhism” was even expressed in terms of “Buddhism being the ultimate goal of Sanminism and Sanminism being Buddhism put into practice” (Pittman 2001, 184).<sup>17</sup> As Taixu states:

We depend on Mr. [Sun] Zhongshan’s “power of the people” (*minquan zhuyi*) to establish China, and we simultaneously have to make sure that there is a belief that suits the universe and that is the essence that unites the power of the people. When I observe all religions, it is Buddhism that is best suited [for this aim]. When the masses of the people will have this new universal belief, the power of their faith in [Sun Zhongshan’s] “power of the people” will increase because the spirit of these politics and this religion are fully the same.

我們依中山先生的民權主義建設中國，同時，要使對於宇宙有合宜的信仰，作民力集中的重心。將各宗教觀察起來，還是佛教為合宜；民眾有了這新的宇宙信仰，其對於民權信仰的力量，必有加無已；因為、這政治與宗教的精神，完全是相一致。(Taixu 2005g; see also Pacey 2014, 161–62)<sup>18</sup>

17 Taixu’s orientation towards the Nationalist Party had actually already become established in the mid-1920s, when he began to distance himself from the Communist Party. This may have been the result of his struggle with the role of social conflict in communism.

18 This may explain Taixu’s view, proclaimed in 1947, that there was no need for Buddhists to form their own political party. As he claims: “Once again, Buddhist adherents can be found within the Nationalist Party (*Guomindang*), the China Youth Party (*Qingnian dang*), the China Democratic Socialist Party (*Minzhu shehui dang*), and the Democratic League (*Minzhu tongmeng*). Even in the Communist Party (*Gongchandang*), there are [Buddhist adherents]. There are even more [Buddhist adherents] among [people] without party affiliation. When a Buddhist Party would be formed, they would all have their original standpoints [that align with] some political party or [standpoints which] do not belong to a political party, and it would be impossible to ask them to convert [themselves] into a Buddhist Party. When, alternatively, a Buddhist Party would be established separately, it would deviate from each of them individually. Also among my friends who study Buddhism and



Related to the above, Taixu further acknowledged the two basic principles of “essence” (*ti* 體) and “function” (*yong* 用) in Buddhism. With “essence” he referred to the Buddhist truth as such, and with “function” to the application of Buddhism to meet the needs of human beings (Taixu 2005b; Pittman 2001, 174).

The nationalist inclination of Taixu and his programme for the reform of Buddhism are not unrelated to the Japanese presence in Taiwan. Ruling over the island after the Sino-Japanese war of 1894–1895 and the 1895 Peace Treaty of Shimonoseki, the Japanese saw cultivating good contacts with the Chinese Buddhists as a means of preparing the ground for their eventual takeover of the rest of China. The most important leaders of Buddhism in the Japanese period of ruling Taiwan were united in a Buddhist association that was aligned with Japanese Caodong 曹洞 Buddhism, a school that maintained a close connection between Taiwan and Japan. This school was also active in the mainland Buddhist world and had contacts with Taixu, whose first visit to Taiwan in 1917 had been on their invitation (Jones 1999, 41). It was especially the so-called “Tainan Xilai Hermitage Incident” (*Xilai an shijian* 西來庵事件) of 1915, a widespread anti-Japanese conspiracy that had revealed the importance of good contacts in the Buddhist world and led to the establishment of some important Buddhist associations, such as the Patriotic Buddhist Association, the Buddhist Youth Association, the Taiwan Friends of the Buddhist Way, and the South Seas Buddhist Association (*ibid.*, 66–75).

Notwithstanding the fact that Taixu had for the first time experienced the Japanese Buddhist activities and curricula while in Taiwan (when he established the famous Wuchang Buddhist Academy, in 1922, this academy’s curriculum was inspired by the Japanese model (Jiang 1992, 22)<sup>19</sup>), the Japanese presence had also incited a growing nationalism and left-wing ideas. An important movement in this respect was the Taiwan Culture Society (*Taiwan wenhua xiehui* 臺灣文化協會), a group of young Chinese intellectuals who, during the period of Japanese rule, had studied in Japan (*ibid.*, 24). Among the founding members of this society were the leftist

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[Buddhist] adherents, there are people who [belong to] different political parties and some who do not [belong to a party]. To this have to be added their connections with philosophical culture and charitable tasks, such as setting up cultural education. Every single religious person or non-religious person has many friendly relations. When I would be leading a Buddhist Party, then previously existing relations in all possible domains would be reversed and reduced. That is why Buddhism should not establish a political party.” (復次、佛教信徒是國民黨、青年黨、民主社會黨、民主同盟都有的，甚至共產黨也不是沒有，而無黨無派的人則更多。要是組了佛教黨，他們各有某黨派或無黨派的原來立場，既不能請他們改入佛教黨，而佛教黨已另成一黨，便與他們各別疏隔了。我的學佛朋友及信徒，也是各黨派無黨派的人都有，加以哲學文藝及興般文化教育慈善等之事業的關係，連各宗教或無宗教的人也多交誼。我領導了佛教黨，則原有的各方面關聯，也反減縮，所以佛教不要組黨也。) (see Taixu 2005f)

19 Sheng (2001, 317) in this respect remarks that Buddhism in Japan was confronted with Western sciences earlier, and as such had an important function for Taixu as a model in this context.

Jiang Weishui 蔣渭水 (1890–1931), a Taiwanese physician and activist who was one of the most important figures in the Taiwanese resistance movement against Japanese rule on the island, as well as Lin Xiantang 林獻堂 (1881–1956), who headed the “Petition Movement for the Establishment of a Taiwanese Parliament” (*Taiwan yihui shezhi qingyuan yundong* 臺灣議會設置請願運動). This “Petition” was aimed at securing Taiwanese political representation under Japanese rule. Both Jiang Weishei and Lin Xiantang were members of the Taiwanese People’s Party (*Taiwan minzhong dang* 臺灣民眾黨), whose ideology was the “Three People’s Principles”.<sup>20</sup> Another member of this society was Lin Qiuwu 林秋梧 (1903–1934), who had entered the society in 1921. After a period studying in Taiwan, he went to the mainland where he studied philosophy in Xiamen University (*ibid.*, 22). He returned to Taiwan, but between 1927 and 1930 he studied Caodong Buddhism in Japan (*ibid.*, 31). With Taiwanese intellectuals such as Jiang Weishui and Lin Xiantang, who tried to find a way in which to politically define Taiwan under Japanese rule, and the growing popularity of Sun Zhongshan’s “Three People’s Principles”, Lin Qiuwu opposed the unification of Taiwanese and Japanese temples. This can further be explained by the fact that many monks in Taiwan had come to the island as soldiers in the Nationalist army. Their recruitment had begun in 1936, a period in which Taixu worked closely with Lin Sen 林森 (1868–1943), the chairman of the Nationalist Party.<sup>21</sup> Taking Japanese modernity as example, Lin Qiuwu also advocated a modernization of Buddhism. Dissatisfied with the superstition and corruption in contemporary Taiwanese Buddhism, he states:

Those who develop the *bodhisattva* ideal are the vanguards of social change. Their fundamental aim is to create a paradise on earth, a Western land here and now, to let mankind (expanded to all living creatures) be free from suffering and let them only receive happiness. The world of ultimate happiness mentioned by the Buddha is precisely a description of this happy society.

修菩薩行的，便是社會改革的前衛份子。他們的根本目標，在於建設地上的天堂、此土的西方，使一切人類（再而及於一切生物）無有眾苦，但受諸樂。佛所謂極樂世界，就是描寫著這個快活的社會。（Lin in Jiang 1992, 27）

20 On Jiang Weishui, see Huang 2006; on Lin Xiantang, see Huang 2004.

21 Taixu had convinced the National Assembly to exempt monastic recruits from doing any work that would force them to break their precepts. As an alternative, he proposed that monks would be trained as battlefield medics, to do sanitary work, to be employed in the disposal of bodies, and to perform other compassionate jobs (see Dongchu 1974, 2, 468–69; Welch 1968, 45). However, by the 1940s the government was hard-pressed and apparently no longer willing to grant such concessions; all army personnel had to be prepared to do any kind of work (see Jones 1999, 105–6).

For Lin Qiuwu, there were six points on which Buddhism had to be reformed: 1) superstition and belief in ghosts had to be exchanged for reason; 2) monks were to have a broad education and value social principles; 3) all too rigid rules had to be abolished; 4) in the civil realm, female emancipation and gender equality had to be promoted; 5) it would have to be forbidden for monks to be sycophants; and 6) the unity of Taiwanese Buddhism had to be enforced (Jiang 1992, 278).<sup>22</sup> With respect to the latter, he compiled a three volume work entitled *Taiwan Fojiao de tongyi fang'an* 臺灣佛教的統一方案 (*Program for the Unification of Taiwanese Buddhism*). The first volume of this series was on “The Unity of Monks”, the second “The Unity of Monks and Lay Buddhists”, and the third the “Unity of all Buddhists on the Island” (*ibid.*, 33). Having analysed the work of Lin Qiuwu, Jiang (1992, 33–34) states:

When I analyse the scriptures of Lin Qiuwu, it is however to be seen that there are a lot of references to “President Sun [Zhongshan]’s Three People’s Principles” and to the Guomintang ideologue Dai Jitao. It is probably while he was studying at Xiamen University that he came into contact with the Guomintang or their publications. Another possibility would be that this influence came from the first generation of people such as Jiang Weishui and Lin Xiantang of the “Culture Society”.

但是，我分析林秋梧的文章，發現他多次引用“孫總理”的“三民主義”言論，和國民黨理論家戴季陶的話。可見他有可能在廈門大學就讀時，接觸了國民黨或其刊物；另一可能來源，就是蔣渭水、林獻堂“文化協會”前背的影響。<sup>23</sup>

As mentioned above, Taixu was also, at that moment, combining Buddhism with Sun’s “Three People’s Principles” in his speeches and writings on the mainland.

## The Legacy of Taixu

In 1936, the “Buddhist Association of the Republic of China” (BAROC) was established. Article 5 of the 1936 charter of the Association put it directly under

22 For Lin Qiuwu’s view on gender equality, see Li 1991, 179, and Jones 2000, 83.

23 Dai Jitao (1891–1949) was a journalist and early Guomintang member. When Yuan Shikai replaced Sun Zongshan as President of the Republic he went to Tokyo, where he joined the Chinese Revolutionary Party in 1914. Soon after Sun Zhongshan’s death in 1925, he published a book in which he claimed that Sun’s ideology was fundamentally derived from Confucianism, not from Western philosophical and political thinking. This then became the dominant interpretation of Sun Zhongshan’s legacy within the Guomintang. Dai Jitao served as the first head of the Examination Yuan (*Kaoshi yuan* 考試院) of the Republic of China from 1928 to 1948. On Dai Jitao, see Lu 2004, 144–68.

the oversight of the Ministry of the Interior, and it was this Ministry, along with the Ministry of Social Affairs, that gave Taixu the mandate to reorganize the BAROC in 1945 (Welch 1968, 46, 140–41).

However, after the death of Taixu in 1947, and after the take-over of power in mainland China by the Communist Party, the struggle in Taiwanese Buddhism between the reformers and traditionalists continued (Jones 1999, 110). With many monks who had been educated in Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces and in the city of Shanghai, i.e., areas in which Buddhism was the most active and vibrant, the reform faction was victorious at first (ibid., 111; Welch 1967, 246–52). One of these reformist monks is the already repeatedly quoted Venerable Yinshun. In his *Jingtu xin lun* 淨土新論 (*New Treatise on Pure Land*), a text he wrote on the basis of a few lectures he had given in the winter of 1951 in Hong Kong, he criticized the Pure Land practice to take Buddha-recitation as the sole form of practice for all people, even for those with the intelligence and leisure to undertake true *bodhisattva* practice. Yinshun judged this as a degradation of Buddhism (Yinshun 1985, 20; Jones 1999, 131; Bingenheimer 2004, 77–78, 120–25).

Yinshun's proposal—a secularization of Buddhism that went further than that proposed by Taixu—elicited a campaign against him, launched by traditionalists, mainly represented by Baisheng 白聖 (1904–1989). Yinshun's books were burnt in the city of Taizhong 臺中 (Yang 1991, 23), and some within the BAROC even used their influence within the government to have certain Nationalist Party officials issue a statement that Yinshun's writings were infected with communist ideas (Jones 1999, 132). The final outcome of the controversy was that Venerable Baisheng succeeded in giving the traditionalists back the control of the BAROC. In 1960, not long after this controversy, Baisheng was elected as president of the organization and traditionalists have remained in control of the BAROC ever since.

After the controversy died down and tempers had cooled, however, Yinshun, along with other members of the reform faction, were able to gain acceptance of some of Taixu's ideas about a modern reformulation of Buddhist ideals. With Yinshun as an example, a younger generation of Buddhists further developed “*renjian fojiao*” in Taiwan: Hsing Yun 星雲 (1927–) of Foguang Shan 佛光山, Sheng Yen 聖嚴 (1930–2009) of Fagu Shan 法鼓山, Wei Chueh 惟覺 (1928–2016) of Chungtai Shan 中臺山, and Cheng Yen 證嚴 (1937–) of the Tzu Chi 慈濟 movement.<sup>24</sup>

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24 As religious institutions, Foguangshan and Ciji aim to reach a larger audience than the Taiwanese polity. Ciji, in particular, harbours the hope of developing “great love” across the Taiwan Strait. The fact that it appears “untainted” by collaboration with the KMT or the DPP must serve it very well (see Laliberté 2006, 77).

This social engagement of Taiwanese Buddhism came to stand in surprising contrast to Taiwanese Buddhist political conservatism (Jiang 1992).

## Taiwanese Buddhism and Democratization

An important outcome of the political developments in the mainland was that many perceived Taiwan as the “repository of Chinese traditions”. Many conservative monks in this respect appreciated the politically conservative climate that characterized the first decades of Guomindang 國民黨 rule as a guarantee for the safeguarding of the Buddhist faith (Jiang 1992, 251–320). Many monks on the mainland also perceived Taiwan as the repository of Chinese traditions. This made them very cautious towards any attitude of modernization or secularization that might appear in Taiwan (Laliberté 2006, 63).

The political evolution in Taiwan of the last few decades—the lifting of martial law in 1987 and the first free elections in 1992—has shown that the Guomindang’s conservative leanings were not necessarily incompatible with democracy. Rather than the Guomindang itself, it appears that it was instead many Buddhist leaders for whom democracy appeared to be problematic (*ibid.*, 69). This is evident from the critique that was voiced by the leaders of the BAROC in 1982 against the lifting of martial law, and the possibility of forming political parties. This attitude can be explained by the fact that the BAROC benefited considerably from the corporatist structure imposed by the Guomindang, making the establishment of any other Buddhist institution outside of the BAROC’s authority illegal (Jones 1999, 179–80). A decline in the power of the Guomindang was thus perceived as raising the risk of the BAROC losing power as well. This also helps to explain why BAROC leaders asked for more control by the central government over religious affairs, in the hope of strengthening their weakening position within the Buddhist community. This attitude of maintaining their role as custodians of the faith stands in sharp contrast to the view that prevailed in the times of Taixu (Laliberté 2006, 61–62). The Buddhist organizations in contemporary Taiwan can, in the words of André Laliberté (*ibid.*, 55), therefore best be described as:

[i]ndifferent to politics, in general, and to the process of democratization, in particular. Buddhist leaders have avoided opposing the government since the Nationalist Party (the Kuomintang, or KMT) established its control over Taiwan in 1945 and they have maintained that attitude toward the Democratic Progressive Party (Minjindang, or DPP) government.

This political conservatism of Taiwanese Buddhism also helps to explain why, in the People's Republic of China, mainland Buddhism has come to be portrayed as the politically more democratic form, and why Taixu (Taixu's "socialist period" can be referred to here) has been compared to none other than Martin Luther (see Deng 2000, 22–33). This explains why those Buddhists in Taiwan who have joined other actors in the consolidation of democracy since the beginning of political reforms in the mid-1980s are looking for closer relations with their mainland brethren. "*Renjian Fojiao*" has thus developed to be more than just a religious bond between the mainland and Taiwan, and has also been given a political meaning.

The fear that cross-strait violence might have devastating effects for Buddhism in Taiwan explains why Taiwanese Buddhist organizations have never openly supported Taiwanese independence, but instead align with those political forces that favour the *status quo* in cross-strait relations. Harking back in history, it can even be claimed that Taiwanese Buddhist leaders align with Sun Zhongshan, for whom "national freedom" was more important than "individual freedom" (see Svensson 1995, 7).

## Conclusion

An analysis of the writings of Taixu, the great reformer of Buddhism, shows that his proposals for a modernized Buddhism are intricately connected with the political and military events in China and the world at large. The modernization of Buddhism that was at first seen as an undertaking that had to come after the political and social reform of China was gradually fused with socialist, communist, and anarchist ideas. Whereas the development of Russia after the revolution and the devastation of World War I brought about a disillusionment with modernity, Japanese aggression in China caused a reappraisal of religious values and of Chinese identity. Taixu thus developed to be an advocate of Sun Zhongshan's "Three People's Principles", which he saw as complementary with his concept of a "Three-principled Buddhism". His alignment with Chinese nationalism inevitably had ramifications in the period after the Communist Party had assumed power in mainland China. It may be the cynicism of history that the fundamental rupture in the Chinese Buddhist community between traditionalists on the one hand, and reformers on the other—a break that was caused by Taixu's initiatives—has, under the peculiar political developments in mainland China and Taiwan, led to a state of affairs in which, in the People's Republic of China, mainland Buddhism is seen as the more progressive form. For both reformers and traditionalists

alike, however, Buddhism is regarded as an element that may be conducive to national unity.

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