Modern Chinese Buddhism

Vincent’ *The Religious Question in Modern China*, and Brooks’s Recovering Buddhism in Modern China sort out some issues of modern Chinese Buddhism comprehensively. In the process of modernizing Buddhism in China, the corruption of the empire was one of the destructive events that occurred during the Taiping Rebellion in late Qing dynasty. The Taiping Rebellion adopted a new religion combining Christian doctrine with traditional Chinese culture, proclaiming its leader, Hong Xiuquan, as the Son of God and a disciple of Christ. During the Taiping Rebellion, Buddhism suffered severe repression, with many temples destroyed and monks killed.

In addition, Qing government official Zhang Zhidong initiated the movement of appropriating temple property for school. Zhang believed that the land and property resources occupied by China's religious temples could be used to build modern schools, which could improve China's modernization process and release the burden on the poor. The implementation of the movement was successful in some places but also faced opposition from local officials, monks, and people in other areas. Overall, it caused serious damage to Buddhism, and this policy continued into the Republican era.

During the Republican era, some Christian missionaries, social elites, and reformers criticized Chinese religion and Buddhism as superstitious, unscientific, and backward. Some of them also took the opportunity to criticize the economic issues of Buddhist temples and the moral decline of monks, calling for the reform and cleaning of temples to promote the modernization of Buddhism.

In the early stages of China's encounter with foreign cultures, there were many reflections and debates on Chinese indigenous culture. Buddhist scholars and monks also had many discussions and attempts on how to combine traditional Buddhism with modern science and philosophy as mentioned in Hammerstrom's article. As a result, some people started many Buddhist magazines to explore various topics related to Buddhism and modernity.

Faced with the crisis of monastic corruption, institutional conservatism, and the lack of monastic education, Yang Wenhui worked to establish modern Buddhist colleges and scripture printing offices for the printing of Buddhist scriptures. Yang Wenhui's student Taixu worked to promote the revival of Buddhist colleges, including both Theravada and Tibetan Buddhist traditions, in order to redevelop the Chinese Mahayana Buddhist tradition. Despite the challenges of modernization, outstanding monastic leaders worked in the late Qing and Republican periods to revitalize Buddhist Sects in the traditional way and attracted many followers.

Pittman and Jones provide a more detailed account of Taixu's life, such as his reform of Buddhism and construction of the concept of the Pure Land on Earth.

Ven. Taixu absorbed the ideas of the Enlightenment Movement into Buddhism, incorporating Western concepts into his understanding of Buddhism. He interacted with socialists and anarchists, read a great deal of relevant writings, and was deeply influenced by them, so he had a certain radicalism. With this background, Venerable Tai Xu reshaped the Maitreya faith, combining the transcendental realm of Buddhism with the ideal of utopia. By combining it with Western thought, Taixu exhibited anarchist radicalism in his Buddhist thought, which is specifically described in Ritzinger's book. He believed that infusing religious elements into these projects could reignite hope for the realization of a perfect society and build consensus to solve problems.

In order to actively promote Buddhist reform, establish a Buddhist college and train monks, they proposed to transform Jinshan Temple into a Buddhist college. However, it finally failed under the opposition of the conservative party. His plan to reorganize and shrink the monastic order became a highly controversial topic, and although his efforts to modernize temple education gradually gained acceptance, many Buddhist leaders continued to actively discourage students from attending Taixu's Buddhist colleges.

Later, Tai Xu left anarchism and turned to support specific projects, he was inspired by anarchism, but had moved away from the original ideological context, which was most vividly presented in his re-imagining of Maitreya faith. Tai Xu's radical writing can be organized around three common themes: utopia, the understanding needed to achieve it, and the means to achieve it. This approach first combines anarchism and Buddhism, blending society and metaphysical egalitarianism by equating the realization of the Datong and the unity of all things.

In practicing the theoretical construct of the Pure Land on Earth, Taixu emphasizes the connection between the practice of the Bodhisattva Way and the construction of a perfect society. Through self-improvement and social perfection, the relationship between Buddhism and secular society is integrated. One cannot just chant for rebirth in the Western Pure Land, but focus more on social transformation and political participation, so that traditional practices can take their rightful place alongside social and technological progress as a way to solve current problems. Ven. Tai Xu's "Buddhism of Life" is also intended as a criticism of the traditional Buddhism that focuses too much on death and Buddhist rituals, which can be described as a contradiction between reformists and traditionalists. "Buddhism of Life" should be centered on human beings, and in this way it should respond to the spiritual, social and political crises of society.

People often think of Taixu as a representative of modernity, but this in fact erases his traditional side.

Jones' translation of Venerable Taixu's work "On the Establishment of the Pure Land in the Human Realm" actually shows Venerable Taixu's adherence to the traditional concept of Pure Land and the originality of Buddhism. In short, as Pittman mentions, Venerable Tai Xu's influence on later generations of Buddhism was profound.

In the People's Republic of China there is renewed interest in his career, despite his close ties to the Guomindang government, and in Taiwan important masters such as Yinshun, Xingyun, Shengyan, and Zhengyan have all advanced dimensions of his modernization. Taixu may have felt that his "Buddhist revolution" failed, yet his work remains the basis for intellectual, humanitarian, and missionary-minded expressions of the religion around the world. He was a dreamer who wanted to create a bright future where justice and equality ruled, a pure land on earth. He believed in people's ability to achieve buddhahood, and wanted to make Buddhism more modern and even transcend its limits.

Hammerstrom studied the influence of the first Buddhist monastic school called **Huayan University** in China after the imperial system fell. Founded by Master Yuexia, the school was destroyed shortly after its establishment, but was later continued in Hangzhou. Graduated students spread the teachings to various regions, leaving a profound impact. These programs formed a network that still exists today, united by their common educational background. Hammerstrom used many Buddhist texts and magazines to prove that Huayan had a big impact on Chinese Buddhist beliefs and practices. The history of Huayan adds complexity to stories about modernization and revival of Buddhism in the 20th century.

After the outbreak of the War of Resistance Against Japan, Xue Yu’s book introduced many details of historical documents during the period of the war, elaborating on how Buddhism survived during the war. Some temples left the war zone, while those that staied behind were often looted and destroyed by the Japanese army. Faced with the domination of the Japanese army, some temples had to cooperate with them to survive, such as helping the Japanese army to perform rituals for the dead. It is worth mentioning that some who were too close with the Japanese army often faced punishment after the war. Another important topic is how Buddhist monks behind the front lines discussed the relationship between nationality and religion, whether they should go to the front lines to kill the enemy because it involved breaking the Buddhist precepts. However, history has shown that many Buddhists took off their robes and supported the front lines, or engaged in logistics activities to avoid killing. Taixu used various opportunities and resources to carry out a large amount of Buddhist and anti-Japanese propaganda. He initiated an anti-enemy and disaster relief organization of the Buddhist community, calling on everyone, especially Buddhists, to donate money and materials to support the War of Resistance Against Japan.

Faced with the war at the country or foreseeing the fall of the Kuomintang, some Buddhists migrated outside the country to carry out their Buddhist work. The first Buddhist linked to the renjian Buddhist reform project in Southeast Asia was Cihang 慈航, who settled in Malaysia for some years before moving to Taiwan. Meng-Tat’s book also mentions Yen Pei 演培 in Singapore where he became a key figure in the reformation of Buddhism in the city state. The Minnan Buddhist College was a leading Buddhist College in Republican China under the leadership of Taixu. It offered comprehensive training in Buddhist studies and research, and was known for its radical ideas of Buddhist reform. The significance of the Minnan Buddhist College lies in its contribution to the education and training of young monks in Buddhist studies, and its role in promoting Buddhist reform in China.

In addition, Xue Yu also studied Buddhist contribution to the socialist transformation with the example of Ven. Juzan. encouraged other Buddhists to cooperate with the Communist leaders and how he explained government policies on Buddhism by changing the meaning of Buddhist beliefs. Xueyu also suggests that this process prepared the groundwork for the later persecution of Buddhism during the Cultural Revolution.

Besides the example of venerables who moved to the South-east Asia countries, another big destination of the venerables from mainland China is the Taiwan area. Charles Brewer’s Buddhism in Taiwan presents a more complete history of Buddhism in Taiwan from the Ming and Qing dynasties to modern times.

Among early Taiwanese Buddhist figures, there were those who followed the teachings of Ven. Yin Guang and Ven. Yuan Yin, like the lay people Li Bingnan who also made significant contributions to Taiwanese Buddhism and had a deep impact. This group is relatively traditional, while the reformist Ven. Yin Shun was more influenced by Ven. Tai Xu. However, there are also many differences between Ven. Yin Shun and Taixu’s views on Humanistic Buddhism or the construction of Buddhist thought.

Taixu accepted the various schools of Chinese Mahayana as representing the true teachings of Sakyamuni, while for Yinshun only the Agama sutras and early Madhyamika represented the Buddha's true teachings. Yinshun considered Taixu's views to be in the tradition of later corrupted Mahayana, which had undergone a process of deification and oversimplification. Sinicized Buddhism often implies an interpretation of the uniqueness of Indian Buddhism, a process that unconsciously weakens the Indian lineage. So he argues more that we should return to the so-called more original and pure Indian Buddhism, hence leading to the controversial topic of the so-called "Mahayana's being not Buddhas teachings". In terms of classification of teachings, there are great similarities between Yinshun and Taixu, but of course they also show different emphasis. This demonstrates that Ven. Yinshun's approach is relatively more academic and historical.

Laliberte mainly talks about the Taiwanese Buddhism and politics, choosing the Buddhist Association of the Republic of China (BAROC), the Foguangshan monastic order, and the Ciji as samples.

During the period of Kuomintang rule, BAROC was the only legal Buddhist organization. Interestingly, BAROC aimed to organize and collaborate with other Buddhist groups, but in fact, as the community developed, various groups under it competed with each other and were often more successful and influential than the official association. So, with the emergence of some star-like groups of venerable masters and sangha, it gradually hinted at the decline of BAROC. After the lifting of martial law in 1987, Buddhism in Taiwan gained more freedom to develop. Venerable Hsing Yun of Fo Guang Shan is relatively more concerned and involved in politics, while the Zhengyan in Ciji takes more of an avoidance attitude and is focused on charitable work, thus showing the different political attitudes of Taiwan's Buddhist groups. In this free competition situation, the author also suggests that often the personal charisma of the leader is crucial.

Chandler's work focuses on Foguang Shan as a case study of how Venerable Xing Yun practiced Humanistic Buddhism and his modernized vision of temple management. With his personal investigation, the author describes how Fo Guang Shan built the entire mountain into a Buddhist Disneyland and how Venerable Xing Yun handled the means of politics, so we can learn that Foguang Buddhism does not regard "this-worldly" pursuits as a threat and instead views them as expedient means for self-cultivation.

With the development of the economy, the expansion of globalization and the emergence of migration, Buddhism in Taiwan has also tried this overseas development. Among them, groups such as Ciji and Foguangshan have established their own monasteries or centers around the world, spreading Buddhism and practicing the concept of Humanistic Buddhism or Buddhism into the world in different ways.

With the development of the economy, the spread of globalization and the increase of immigration, Taiwan's Buddhism has also attempted to expand overseas. Organizations such as Ciji and Foguangshan have established their own Buddhist centers all over the world, spreading Buddhism and practicing the idea of Humanistic Buddhism in society through different means. Prof. Reinke focuses on three of Fo Guang Shan's different monasteries around the world to examine how a particular modern Buddhist religious faith has entered the global context, and also to explore the social, cultural and religious structures behind globalization.

With regard to the theme of Humanistic Buddhism, in addition to Pittman and Jones' elaboration from the perspective of Venerable Taixu, which we mentioned above, Ritzinger addresses it from the perspective of the anarchism contained within it. Buddhist doctrinal interpretations have been influenced by such ideological formations as scientific theory and technological innovation, Marxism, anarchism, and democracy, as well as by an emphasis on rational thought and an anthropocentric belief in the ability of humans to move the course of history without the assistance of deities or theology. This fervor manifested itself in the pursuit of utopian goals by other intellectuals in the realm of socialism or under the sign of the "Three People's Principles". The Pure Land Buddhism founded by Venerable Taixu was influenced by these ideas and the utopian writings of early Chinese reformist thinkers, resulting in a new modern doctrine, Humanistic Buddhism. This doctrine added a strong element of anarchism, reflecting the scientistic tendencies of Master Taixu's time. Master Yinshun identified similarities between the utopian world and socialism, and similar to Master Taixu, he pointed out that in the Pure Land on Earth, some aspects could be achieved through technological progress.

Humanistic Buddhism should go back to being human-centered, but rather wishing to be reborn in the Pure Land after death, and that the goal of the Pure Land can also be achieved right here on earth after efforts in the present life. Buddhism should be universal, it can be compatible with Western thought, and with modern society. And Buddhism can benefit society and adapt to it through charity, morality, medical care, education, and environmental work. In connection with local Confucianism, Buddhism also has many moral concepts that are in line with Confucianism, such as the Five Precepts, which are in line with Confucian moral standards, and Buddhism also advocates treating parents as living Buddhas. Buddhism absorbs Confucian values while at the same time transcending and refining them. Buddhist practice can also be reflected in Confucian values, and this is expressed in Tai Xu's beliefs. By understanding the emptiness and non-self of Buddhism and embodying them in daily life, one contributes to the realization of the Pure Land on Earth.

This expedient approach, however, led to non-Buddhist ideas exerting a transformative influence over Buddhist ones. This is also the reason for the emergence of many criticisms of Humanistic Buddhism's over-secularization in modern times. Some scholars have also tried to analyze how Buddhism on the mainland has transformed itself to fit in with the CPC by discussing this topic, such as some discussions of Zhao Puchu.