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太虚法師

Buddhism in the Republican Era and the Lasting Importance of Taixu

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Research Group: 'East Asian Culture
in Perspective: Identity, Historical
Consciousness, Modernity'

Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962):

“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”.

Taixu 太虛 ([1956] 2005). *Taixu dashi quanshu* 太虛大師全書 (The Complete Works of the Venerable Master Taixu). 20 Vols.

<http://www.nanputuo.com/nptlib/html/200707/1812143485802.html>

Taixu 太虛 (1889–1947)

-original name Lü Peilin 呂沛林

-born in the village of Chang'an 長安 in Haining 海寧 county of northern Zhejiang 浙江 Province

-taken care of by his maternal grandmother: classical education + Buddhism

-renounced lay life in the Xiao jiuhua Temple (*Xiao jiuhua si* 小九華寺) in Suzhou 蘇州 at the age of 14

“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。).

(“Taixu zizhuan” 太虛自傳 (Autobiography), ‘Shengzhang zai nong gong dao shang du de xiangzhen’ 生長在農工到商讀的鄉鎮 (Growing up in a village of farmers and workers, merchants and literati) in *Taixu dashi quanshu* 太虛大師全書 (The Complete Works of the Venerable Master Taixu). Vol.19 Wencong 文叢 (Literary Collection), Part 3 Zizhuan 自傳 (Autobiography), nr.2)

“It vividly came to my mind how I, in the Autumn of the year I was nine year 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。)

(“Taixu zizhuan” 太虛自傳 (Autobiography), ‘Chujia yu shoujie dujing’ 出家與受戒讀經 (Going forth and Accepting the Precepts and Reading Scriptures) in *Taixu dashi quanshu* 太虛大師全書 (The Complete Works of the Venerable Master Taixu). Vol.19 Wencong 文叢 (Literary Collection), Part 3 Zizhuan自傳 (Autobiography), nr.3)

“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 zizhuan” 太虛自傳 (Autobiography), ‘Xin xue he geming sixiang de qinru’ 新學和革命思想的侵入 (New Learning and the Invasion of Revolutionary Thinking) in *Taixu dashi quanshu* 太虛大師全書 (The Complete Works of the Venerable Master Taixu). Vol.19 Wencong 文叢 (Literary Collection), Part 3 Zizhuan 自傳 (Autobiography), nr.5)

“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 zizhuan” 太虛自傳 (Autobiography), ‘Xin xue he geming sixiang de qinru’ 新學和革命思想的侵入 (New Learning and the Invasion of Revolutionary Thinking) in *Taixu dashi quanshu* 太虛大師全書 (The Complete Works of the Venerable Master Taixu). Vol.19 Wencong 文叢(Literary Collection), Part 3 Zizhuan自傳 (Autobiography), nr.5)

“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 America. Europeans and Americans have thus lost their basis for a secure life and for the fulfillment 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』).

(See Yinshun 印順 (1973, 92). *Taixu dashi nianpu* 太虛大師年譜 (Chronological Biography of the Venerable Master Taixu). Taipei: Yinshun wenjiao jijinhui (Originally published in Hong Kong in 1950)

“The name ‘socialism’ was used by the eighteenth-century Englishman Robert Owen in his treatise on social transformation, and later also by Saint Simon and others. [...] Although the origin of socialism is a reaction to machine production, it was also derived from the idea of religious fraternity and equality, and therefore, the Christian Saint-Simon [should be considered as] the first one to speak about socialism, with his idea that all people should have equal access to all property, that there is no need of the classes of rich, poor, high and low. Later, there was Marx who made use of science [...]” (“社会主义之名词，在西历十八世纪有英国人欧文使用于所作之社会改造论中，后圣西门等沿用之[...]社会主义之起源，虽由机器生产之反动，而亦从宗教博爱平等的思想之导生，故基督教之圣西门，即为最初之讲社会主义者，以一切财产人人应有平等之享用，不应有贵贱贫富之阶级。后有应用科学之马克思出 [...])

(“Taixu zizhuan” 太虚自传 (Autobiography),. ‘Yi Fofa piping shehuizhuyi’ 以佛法批评社会主义 (Criticizing Socialism with Buddhism) in *Taixu dashi quanshu* 太虚大师全书 (The Complete Works of the Venerable Master Taixu). Vol.13 Zhen xianshilun zongyonglun 真现实论宗用论 (Discussion on Actuality and the Use of Religion), Part 9 Shehui 社会 (Society), nr.11)

“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. [...] Therefore, when the Socialist Party and the Communist Party instigate to overthrow religion, this merely is [an expression of] their wish to destroy the old-style religion and to establish a new religion [...] 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”. (现在的人们，完全把宗教看做过去的东西，不适宜于今日文明的世界。[...] 依我所观察到的西洋各国，其社会团结的基础，完全是宗教的力量；[...] 共产党是信其唯一的共产主义，去宗教的名而取宗教的实，[...] 故社会党、共产党所喊出打倒宗教的声浪，这不过是要打破旧式的宗教，建立新的宗教罢了。[...] 人类共同存在一天的话，那末、社会彼此团结集中的制量力，一日不可无，也一日不会消失。换言之，就是团结的宗教中心力，一日不可无，也一日不会消失的)。

“*Taixu zizhuan*” 太虛自傳 (Autobiography), ‘*Minguo yu Fojiao*’ 民國與佛教 (The Republic and Buddhism) in *Taixu dashi quanshu* 太虛大師全書 (The Complete Works of the Venerable Master Taixu). Vol.13 *Zhen xianshi lun zong yong lun* 真現實論宗用論 (Discussion on Actuality and the Use of Religion), Part 9 *Shehui* 社會 (Society), nr.15

“We have to spread the Buddhist doctrine to mankind now. Regardless of whether it concerns England, Russia, 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 benefits. 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” (现在则须将佛法普及于人类，不论英、俄、法、日、美、均须有佛法的宣传，成为社会化与大同化的一种佛法，方能使全人类感受其益。故佛法不是离人群而独立的学术，举凡政治家、教育家、科学家、哲学家、文学家、农、工、商等等各种人物，均须研究，不必出家然后谓之薛佛。)

(“Taixu zizhuan” 太虚自传 (Autobiography), ‘Fayang shehuihua de Fofa’ 发扬社会化的佛法 (Advocating a Social Buddhism), in *Taixu dashi quanshu* 太虚大师全书 (The Complete Works of the Venerable Master Taixu). Vol.18 Jiangyan 講演 (Lectures), nr.63)

“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! [...] it is necessary to change directions. [...] But what is this road? [...] It is changing to the fundamental spirit of Chinese culture of overcoming oneself and honoring 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的拼命；且中國並不能有此般法，以進代歐洲之有社會主義，即因反對歐美之資本主義而起。中國無有資本主義，亦即不需求社會主義；況俄羅斯雖是社會主義，仍是變相的新帝國主義。列強的路與蘇俄的路，既然都不是中國的路，然則中國長隧天災人禍等下去麼？不是！[...] 必須改變方向。[...] 開辟一條出路來。[...] 改變成中國文化根本精神的克己崇仁。).

“[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 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 zizhuan*” 太虛自傳 (Autobiography), ‘*Zenyang lai jianshe renjian Fojiao*’ 怎樣來建設人間佛教” (How to Establish Buddhism for the Human World), in *Taixu dashi quanshu* 太虛大師全書 (The Complete Works of the Venerable Master Taixu). Vol.14 *Zhilun* 支論 (Supporting Treatises), nr.6)

“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 rather 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 印順 1973, 33-34.

“Without the state, it would not only be impossible to resist intruders, but people’s life 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 endeavor 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 zizhuan” 太虛自傳 (Autobiography), ‘Xue Fo xian cong zuo ren qi’ 學佛先從做人起 (Studying Buddhism Starts from being a True Person) in *Taixu dashi quanshu* 太虛大師全書 (The Complete Works of the Venerable Master Taixu). Vol.2 Wu cheng gong xue 五乘共學 (Joint study of the five vehicles), Part 2 Yishi 義釋 (Explanation of the Meaning), nr.10)

“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。).

(“Minguo yu Fojiao” 民國與佛教 (The Republic and Buddhism) in *Taixu dashi quanshu* 太虛大師全書 (The Complete Works of the Venerable Master Taixu). Vol.13 *Zhen xianshi lun zong yong lun* 真現實論宗用論 (Discussion on Actuality and the Use of Religion), Part 9 *Shehui* 社會 (Society), nr.15)