would wither and vanish. For Chinese Buddhism to achieve its historic mission, its monastic and lay communities needed to reorganize and reorient themselves for the radical demands of the bodhisattva path in the modern world. As an ethical pietist, Taixu called for an engagement with, rather than a withdrawal from, the issues of the socio-political world. Emphasizing the moral demands of bodhisattvahood, he called for compassionate social service both as a necessary result of and as a means to an experience of complete enlightenment.

It may be argued that Taixu manifested what has been termed a "utopian propensity."[117] That is, he hoped through his teachings to encourage within the Buddhist community a new measure of religious imagination, to provoke an exploration of things that had never been but that could be. Indeed, he was often so intently focused on shaping Buddhism's future that he appeared to be insensitive to and dismissive of its present and its past. Like all utopian thinkers, Taixu repudiated much of his tradition's contemporary expression in his desire to outline a more ideal, perfect future way. He was confident that his modernist Buddhist perspectives were in harmony with processes of religious evolution that would ultimately lead all sentient beings to Buddhism and beyond, and that would one day make of this very world a pure land.

Despite the many disciples who followed and revered him, the reformer's views were not widely accepted within the sangha. Taixu had many ardent detractors. According to Weihuan, most established masters would not let their students go to Taixu's Wuchang Buddhist Institute for fear that they would become "new monks" and return to "revolutionize their old life."[118] It has been said that "utopians are almost always tragic or tragicomic figures who die unfulfilled."[119] This was indeed Taixu's ultimate fate. He died thinking that he had been a failure. What he tried to accomplish, how he hoped to defend and advance the Dharma, where he thought the future was leading, and why he thought himself a failure are the subjects of the chapters that follow.

CHAPTER 2

# THE SOUND OF THE TIDE FOR A NEW CHINA

To understand the mental universe of many religious leaders, it is important to know something about the fabric of their lives. In such cases, interpretation requires a sense not only of the person's historical context but of how he or she experienced and engaged it. Thus biographical accounts and autobiographical reflections are crucial to appreciating the diverse forms of piety represented by spiritual guides such as Augustine (396–430), Nichiren (1222–1282), Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786), Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948), Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945), and the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902–1989). The modern Buddhist reformer Taixu was also such a figure.

The Chinese monk lived and taught in a time of revolution and renaissance, a complex and turbulent period of change for China and the entire world. During Taixu's lifetime, the Chinese people experienced the end of dynastic rule and the beginning of a republican experiment. They entertained grand dreams for the country's future and suffered the grim nightmares of social, political, and economic upheaval. They engaged in bitter civil strife and were enveloped in a devastating global war. Taixu sought to serve as a transformative agent within that context. He heard "the sound of the sea tide" (i.e., the Buddha's voice) calling for a new Buddhism for a new China. He

firmly believed that the propagation of that modern form of Buddhism held the keys not only to the salvation of his country but to the emergence of a just and peaceful global civilization. Accordingly, he commended to the Mahāyāna community an ethical form of piety that centered bodhisattva practice not on exercises of religious philosophy, sitting meditation, or ritual observance but on expressions of enlightened social responsibility within the world. Highlighting the reformer's religio-historical context, Frank Millican once commented:

> To understand Taixu we need to see him as a lad among a group of droning priests at Tiantong Monastery, situated in the seclusion of the beautiful hills of Zhejiang, near Ningbo city. Here he lived under the shadow of the images of Buddha and the many Buddhist worthies and learned to chant his prayers, make his prostrations, and share in the daily routine of a typical monastery. There must have been in his veins some blood different from that of his fellow priests, or, to speak in the language of the school of thought in which he was trained, the person of a previous existence whose "karma" was reborn in him must have lived a life which merited much, that he alone of hundreds should have risen above the humdrum existence of his fellow priests and have emerged as interpreter of Buddhism to this age.[1]

There were, of course, many other influential and competent voices within the Chinese sangha interpreting the Dharma in relation to the challenges of the modern world. Yet because of the force of Taixu's charismatic personality, the breadth of his academic interests, the timeliness of his ecumenical concerns, and the scope of his vision for a reenergized and missionary form of Buddhism, he left a lasting impression on many both within and outside of his own religious community. Just as the firebrands of the late Qing and early Republican years called for a thoroughgoing political revolution and the creation of a "new people" *(xin min)*, so in a parallel manner did Taixu call for a "Buddhist revolution" *(fojiao geming)* and the creation of "new monks" *(xin seng)*. To achieve this end, he proposed a reorganization of the sangha through broad structural, educational, and economic reforms, called for closer ties between the monastic and lay communities, and proposed new measures of cooperation in global



mission. Sometimes his ideas were rejected; sometimes what was rejected was Taixu the man. His critics perceived not only errors in judgment but personality flaws; his disciples rarely acknowledged either.

Taixu's story, therefore, consists of both ideas and events, concepts and confrontations, opinions and opponents. Despite the fact that Taixu was never recognized as a brilliantly original Mahāyāna theoretician, the contours of his map of the bodhisattva path in and through the modern world continue to inform the practice of many Buddhists in East Asia and around the world. Taixu is remembered most for his unique embodiment of one compelling perspective on what it might mean to be a Chinese patriot, a Buddhist devotee, and a global citizen.

## SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND EARLY EDUCATION

Taixu (original school name: Lu Peilin) was born in the village of Chang'an in the Haining county of northern Zhejiang province on January 8, 1890, in the fifteenth year of the Qing emperor Guangxu's reign. His father was a bricklayer who died when his son was only a year old. Two years later, when his mother remarried into the Li family, he became the responsibility of his maternal grandmother. A devout woman who was well versed in poetry and literature, she cared for the young boy and introduced him to Buddhism through frequent visits to nearby temples. Although Taixu suffered from remittent fevers and was frequently ill, his maternal uncle, a local schoolteacher, made certain that he received a sound primary education in the Chinese classics.

When Taixu was eight, his grandmother began to take him on pilgrimages to some of the more famous Buddhist centers in the sacred mountains of east-central China. He was fascinated with the rituals performed by the monks of Anhui's Jiuhua Shan and the large and impressive Jin Shan monastery near Zhenjiang in Jiangsu prov-



**VENERABLE MASTER TAIXU**

*Source:* Yinshun Cultural and Educational Foundation (Yinshun wenjiao jijin hui), Xinzhu County, Taiwan.



ince. Eventually he also accompanied his grandmother to the famous Buddhist center on Putuo Shan on the coast of Zhejiang, as well as to the Yuwang (Asoka) and Tiantong monasteries near Ningbo. These religious pilgrimages were formative journeys during which Taixu began to develop an interest not only in Buddhism but in the ideals and daily rhythms of the monastic life.

In 1901, Taixu accepted a business apprenticeship in Chang'an, but this was soon interrupted by the unexpected death of his mother and further health problems of his own. Although in time he returned to his duties as a shop clerk, recurring illnesses presented considerable difficulties for both his professional responsibilities and personal study. According to Yinshun, in 1903, for the very first time, Taixu "began to long for the carefree life of the Buddha's way."[2]

Just a year later, in the spring of 1904, as the impoverished Qing government was authorizing the confiscation of monastic property to support new educational ventures, Taixu was actively contemplating joining the sangha. At the age of fourteen, influenced by his grandmother's piety, grieved by the death of his parents, and anxious about his physical health and stamina, he decided to renounce lay life. His original plan was to travel by river boat to Putuo Shan via Shanghai. However, when he realized that he had mistakenly boarded a boat heading to Suzhou, he got off at Pingwang and walked to the nearby Xiao Jiuhua si, which he and his grandmother had visited briefly when on a pilgrimage to temples near the city of Zhenjiang, at the intersection of the Grand Canal and Yangzi River.[3]

Judging his karma to be in harmony with his ultimate aim, Taixu presented himself to Master Shida, the prior of the monastery *(jian yuan)*, and explained his intent. The prior received him, but because the Xiao Jiuhua si was a public monastery *(shifang conglin)* that was not permitted to tonsure and train novices, he soon arranged to conduct the young man's tonsure ceremony at a small hereditary temple in Suzhou. There Shida gave him the Dharma name Weixin (Mind Only). Remembering the occasion at a later date, Taixu confessed, "I renounced the lay life, longing for the supernatural powers of the immortals *(xian)* and Buddhas *(fo)*." In fact, he noted, "still not dis-

tinguishing between the immortals and the Buddhas, but thinking of attaining their supernatural powers, I entered the sangha."[4]

Several months later, Shida escorted the novice to meet the Buddhist Master Zhuangnian, who was the head monk of the Yuhuang temple near Ningbo. It was Master Zhuangnian who gave the young monk the style or courtesy name Taixu (Supreme Emptiness) to forever remind him that he "existed in the midst of supreme emptiness."[5] The elderly master also provided the herbal medicines that finally helped cure the novice of his persistent fevers. In the late fall of 1904, Zhuangnian accompanied Taixu to the Tiantong si at Ningbo, where he officially took the Buddhist precepts and was ordained under the revered old Chinese master and poet Jichan, also widely known as Eight Fingers (Bazhi Toutuo).[6]

In light of Taixu's intellectual promise, Eight Fingers soon recommended that he begin studies with the respected Buddhist master Qichang, abbot of Ningbo's nearby Yongfeng si. Master Qichang undertook to instruct Taixu in meditational disciplines using the *hua tou* ("critical phrase") method of Chan, posing enigmatic questions for contemplation.[7] He also guided the young monk's introduction to Buddhist history and literature. In his studies of famous Buddhist texts such as the *Zhiyue lu* (Record of Pointing at the Moon) and *Gaoseng zhuan* (Record of the Lives of Eminent Monks), Taixu proved himself an earnest and able pupil.

In his early studies of the Chinese Tripiṭaka, Taixu was especially attracted to the *Lengyan jing* (Śūraṅgama Sūtra) and *Fahua jing* (Lotus Sūtra), the study of which helped him recognize the fundamental differences between Buddhist and Daoist teachings. It was during this initial period of Buddhist training that Taixu first met Yuanying (1878–1953), a disciple of Eight Fingers who came to visit Master Qichang in the summer of 1906.[8] Twelve years Taixu's senior, Yuanying would become an important leader within the sangha and serve as the first president of the Chinese Buddhist Association of 1929. Acknowledging their common interests, Taixu and Yuanying established a friendship and pledged to work with each other for a revitalized religious tradition in China. Because of differences of opinion



and personal style, it would turn out to be a difficult relationship to maintain. Many years later, in fact, Taixu wrote in his autobiography, "Although afterwards he and I were constantly engaged in conflict, when I think back on those days of scriptural studies, . . . I shall always remember his friendship."[9]

Taixu benefited not only from Qichang's instruction but also from private interviews with Eight Fingers at the Tiantong si nearby, as well as from opportunities to meet other respected Chinese Buddhist masters who visited the Ningbo area monasteries, including the Venerable Daojie (1866–1932), another of Eight Fingers' disciples.[10] Yet in the fall of 1907, inspired by lectures on the scriptures given by Daojie and strongly encouraged by Yuanying, the young monk bid farewell to Qichang and departed for Cixi to pursue more advanced studies at the Xifang si, which maintained one of the larger Buddhist libraries in Jiangsu. It was there, while concentrating on the Prajñāpāramitā (Perfection of Wisdom) literature, that Taixu had a powerful religious experience that was to prove a milestone in his spiritual progress. For Taixu, this represented the arising of the thought of enlightenment *(bodhicitta)* and was the real beginning of his bodhisattva career. He testified that it enabled him to slough off the "pollution of the world" and gave him "new life."[11] He later recalled, "After some time, knowledge of the Buddha came to me like a pearl, lost and found again, and as with a mirror, I was enabled to see clearly through the changes of this life and the world."[12]

In the spring of 1908, when Taixu was eighteen years old, the reformist monk Huashan came to the Xifang si, where Taixu was staying. According to Yinshun, Huashan was actually "the first person to start modernizing the sangha."[13] Impressed with Taixu, Huashan told him about those working for revolutionary political and social changes within China, asserting that the monastic order itself must modernize and promote educational reform. Initially, Taixu was uncertain about Huashan's ideas; indeed, the two monks argued for more than ten days about what such modernization efforts would require. Challenging Taixu to broaden his reading, Huashan gave him a wide variety of provocative books with which he was unfamiliar, including

Kang Youwei's utopian classic *Datong shu* (The Book of the Great Community), Liang Qichao's *Xinmin shuo* (On New People), Zhang Taiyan's (1868–1936) *Gao fozi shu* (Letter to Followers of the Buddha) and *Gao baiyi shu* (Letter to Lay Buddhists), Yan Fu's *Tianyan lun* (On Evolution), and Tan Sitong's *Renxue* (An Exposition on Benevolence).

Deeply influenced by these writings, Taixu soon aligned himself with Huashan's modernist stance. Committed 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. Writes Yinshun, "Because of Taixu's great resolve to save the world through Buddhism, he moved forward from that point and could never again restrain himself. Turning from the kind of religious path that seeks to transcend the human realm in order to enter the Absolute, rather he chose to distance himself from the Absolute in order to confront the world of humankind."[14] The vow to pursue this kind of path to transform the world, Taixu stated, was a direct result of his close relationship with Huashan.[15]

Soon thereafter, at the Xiao Jiuhua si near Pingwang, Taixu met Qiyun, the revolutionary monk from Hunan. Qiyun was a former student of Eight Fingers who, during studies in Japan, had become an early member of the Tongmeng hui (Chinese United League) founded by Sun Yat-sen in 1905. An iconoclastic spirit, Qiyun was associated with Xu Xilin (1873–1907), Qiu Jin (1879?–1907), and other revolutionaries intent on the overthrow of the Qing government.[16] Yinshun notes that, according to the demands of each particular situation, Qiyun wore either western clothes with leather shoes or Buddhist monastic garb. When Taixu first encountered him, he was wearing the monastic robes that permitted him to hide from government officials in the monastery. It was through Qiyun's influence that Taixu was first encouraged to read political materials such as Sun Yat-sen and Zhang Taiyan's *Minbao* (People's Journal), Liang Qichao's *Xinmin congbao* (New People's Review), and Zou Rong's (1885–1905)



*Geming jun* (Revolutionary Army). Influenced deeply by Sun's three principles of the people *(sanmin zhuyi)*, he became filled with optimism about revolutionary proposals for broad Chinese political and social reforms. Comments Yinshun, "This was the beginning of Taixu's associations with political partisans *(dangren)*."[17]

In the fall of 1908, Taixu went to Ningbo to work with Eight Fingers. The elderly master was serving as director of the Ningbo Sangha Educational Association (Ningbo seng jiaoyu hui), which he had founded earlier that year. When Taixu learned that Qiyun had been arrested on suspicion of involvement in subversive activities, he immediately sought Eight Fingers' help in pleading for Qiyun's release. After the monk was freed from prison, Taixu, Yuanying, and Qiyun assisted Eight Fingers with the promotion of his newly established educational association. The association in Ningbo was only one of a number of ideas for expanding monastic education that had been developed since the Qing government had suspended the imperial examination system in September 1905. That governmental decision had resulted in renewed efforts to confiscate Buddhist property by many local officials throughout China, because each locality faced the daunting expense of creating new educational institutions at which students could become qualified for official service. Buddhist leaders intended to counter such confiscations of property in part by highlighting their own attempts to improve education within the sangha.

Taixu's introduction to such efforts through the Ningbo Sangha Educational Association gave him a glimpse of the promise of educational reforms not only for enhancing the public image of the sangha but for advancing broad reforms of Buddhist thought and practice. Moreover, the organization gave Taixu some of his first opportunities to lecture on contemporary trends within Chinese society and religion, as well as to test the support for his views among the established leaders of the sangha. Thus, observed one commentator, by design and good fortune, Taixu had by his eighteenth birthday already made the acquaintance of "the most celebrated Buddhists in China and obtained a profound view of Buddhism."[18]

In the spring of 1909, Yuanying and Zhuangnian recommended that Taixu go to Jin Shan to practice meditation. Nevertheless, Taixu later confessed, "By that time my thoughts were already directed toward modern studies."[19] Thus he traveled instead to Nanjing, with the encouragement of Huashan and Qiyun, to begin studies at the Jetavana Hermitage (Zhihuan jingshe) operated by Yang Wenhui, later often called "the father of the Buddhist revival."[20] As noted in Chapter 1, Yang was a well-educated Buddhist layman who had devoted himself to publishing and distributing Buddhist literature through his Jinling Scriptural Press. In addition, as an aspect of his special alliance with the Ceylonese lay devotee Anagarika Dharmapala, he had founded a new kind of school on his estate for all those interested in Buddhism's global mission. Yang himself lectured on the Buddhist scriptures, especially on the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra,* which he judged to be especially compatible with modern science.

Otto Franke reported that the bylaws for the school were carefully articulated in thirty-five articles.[21] The school was designed to have three levels of education, with a total curriculum of eight years of academic work. At each level, there were requirements in Buddhist textual studies, modern Chinese literature, and English language and literature, with a minimum of forty-two hours of class time each week. The bylaws called for a limitation of enrollment to twenty-four students, monks, and laymen. All those selected for admission were to have as their ultimate goal the propagation of Buddhism throughout the world. Although Yang's innovative school was forced to close for financial reasons at the end of the academic year, Taixu's brief experience at the Jetavana Hermitage further fueled his optimism about possibilities for real social, political, and religious reformation in China.

By this time, Yuanying had become head monk of the Jiedai si at Ningbo, while Daojie had assumed similar responsibilities at the Fayuan si in Beijing. On Huashan's recommendation, Taixu served for a semester on the faculty of the Huayu Primary School at Putuo Shan. Staying at the famous monastery gave him an opportunity to meet many leaders within the sangha whom he did not know, including the Pure Land master Yinguang, whose conservatism would always set the two at odds.[22] Although Taixu returned to the Xifang si in Cixi to continue his studies of the Tripiṭaka, only a month later, early in 1910, he accepted Qiyun's invitation to help him organize in Guangzhou an Association for the Education of Monks (Seng jiaoyu hui), as encouraged by his friend Yuebin, the head monk of the Shuangxi si, which was located on White Cloud Mountain (Baiyun Shan) outside the city. At the time, Guangzhou was a major center for anti-Qing revolutionary activity. In fact, during the period when Taixu was in Guangzhou, radicals staged an unsuccessful uprising in the city, while in Beijing others plotted the assassination of the prince regent.



In the summer of 1910, Taixu, Qiyun, and Yuebin were all invited to lecture at the Hualin si in Guangzhou. While there, Taixu visited the Shizi lin (Lion's Grove), where he helped organize a new center for Buddhist studies *(fojiao jingshe)*. Because several of his lectures at the Shizi lin were eventually edited and published, Yinshun claims that "this was the beginning of Taixu's scholarly writing."[23] Indeed, it was Taixu's first opportunity to publish some of his ideas about the path of a modern-day bodhisattva and the necessity for a comprehensive reformation within the sangha. For example, stressing the need for developing an attitude that is open to religious change, he wrote in "Jiao guan zhuyao" (An Introduction to Buddhist Teaching and Meditation), "The good student of Buddhism relies on his heart and mind, not on ancient tradition, relies on the essential meaning of words, not on the words themselves. The good student is constantly adapting to circumstances and cleverly provoking people to think."[24] And in "Fojiao shi lue" (An Outline of Buddhist History), Taixu asserted that Buddhism's failure to remain a vital force in modern China was due to the otherworldliness of the sangha and the tendency of Buddhists to hold onto the externals of their religion without understanding its essence. Claimed Taixu, "China has entered the era of a world community. Government, religion, and science have all changed. Therefore Buddhism must change or it will definitely not survive!"[25]

## CONFLICTS AND COMMITMENTS

Although Taixu was only in his early twenties, he was already beginning to be recognized within the Chinese Buddhist community for his personal charisma and modernist positions. Indeed, because he was respected by many prominent government officials and gentry in Guangdong and Jiangxi provinces, Taixu was selected in the fall of 1910 to undertake for the first time in his career the heavy responsibilities of a head monk *(zhuchi)*. When his colleague Yuebin resigned as head monk of the Shuangxi si near Guangzhou, Taixu was called to the position. Within a year, in which he was constantly lecturing both in the monastery and in the city of Guangzhou, Taixu prompted the transformation of the monastery into a "Great Lecture Center" (Mohe jiangyuan). His educational goal was to emphasize the equality of all Buddhist schools and yet the special characteristics of each.[26]

In the months preceding the successful revolt at Wuchang in October 1911, which led to the downfall of the Qing dynasty, Taixu cultivated his many close relationships with known socialists and revolutionaries in Guangdong. Among his friends were political radicals such as Pan Dawei, Liang Shangtong, and Mo Jipeng, the latter "a well known anarchist of this period who was associated with the 'assassination teams' that specialized in killing government officials in South China."[27] Together they read the controversial works of Peter Kropotkin (1842–1921), Mikhail Bakunin (1814–1876), Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809–1865), and Karl Marx (1818–1883). In discussing China's political future, they debated a broad spectrum of views proposed by advocates of anarchism, socialism, democracy, and constitutional monarchy. Although there is no evidence of Taixu's participation in any overtly subversive activity, it was said that he met almost daily in secret with radicals plotting revolution. Their common anxiety about being discovered was justified when Qiyun was arrested again in April 1911. Soldiers were soon dispatched to the Shuangxi si to arrest Taixu as well. According to Yinshun, when Qiyun was taken into custody, a eulogy that Taixu had written in memory of the revolutionary martyrs who had died in the unsuccessful 1910 Guangzhou uprising was discovered among Qiyun's papers. Taixu was able to escape by hiding at the newspaper offices of his associate Pan Dawei. Because of these difficult circumstances, he decided to return to Zhejiang as soon as possible.



Accordingly, Taixu resigned as head monk of Shuangxi si that summer, then traveled to Ningbo to consult with Zhuangnian and Eight Fingers before going on to Putuo Shan for the remainder of the season. In the early autumn, he responded to Eight Fingers' urgent request to return to the Tiantong si at Ningbo. At the time, new attempts to confiscate Buddhist property by force had led Buddhist leaders in Shanghai to ask the elderly master to carry a petition to Beijing in protest. Taixu helped write the petition beseeching the Qing government to help protect Buddhist institutions. He even planned to accompany Eight Fingers to the capital to present the plan, hoping to have an opportunity to explain his own ideas about the revitalization and reform of Buddhism, but revolutionary activities along the rail line made the long trip to the capital too dangerous.

Taixu soon decided, however, to travel up the coast as far as Shanghai to meet with the gifted revolutionary monk Zongyang (1861–1930?), who was then at work on a major publication project designed to contribute to the education of the sangha: a newly edited edition of the entire Chinese Tripiṭaka.[28] Zongyang was a close associate and supporter of Sun Yat-sen, with whom he had become friends during an earlier period of residence in Japan. At this time he was living as a layman and using his lay name, Huang Zongyang.[29] He was settled at Hardoon Gardens (Ai li yuan), the large estate in the French Concession of Shanghai owned by his devoted and wealthy follower, Mrs. Silas Hardoon (Luo Jialing). It was there that Taixu heard the exciting news of the Wuchang revolt that precipitated the fall of the Qing dynasty. Jubilant at the reports, he considered with colleagues the future of the country and the precarious situation of Buddhism.

At the time of the 1911 revolution, Taixu noted that some monks actually organized monastic troops *(seng jun)* to support and participate in the military struggle against the Manchus.[30] According to Yinshun, in addition to the monk Quefei, who organized monastic troops

at the Yufo si in Shanghai, "Tieyan of the Kaiyuan si in Shaoxing [in Zhejiang province] used monastic assets for troop provisions, organized monastic forces, and appointed Dixian, the head monk of the Jiezhu si in Shaoxing, as commander."[31] In Wuhan, Welch reports, sangha troops were actually formed by order of revolutionary military commanders, although such quasi-military activities by Buddhist monks were, without exception, short-lived and insignificant.[32]

The Republic of China was officially founded in January 1912, when Sun Yat-sen accepted the provisional presidency in Nanjing. Taixu, who had spent the previous few months visiting monasteries in Zhejiang, also traveled to Nanjing to organize an Association for the Advancement of Buddhism (Fojiao xiejin hui). With help from associates in the Socialist Party, he obtained permission from the office of the president to initiate operations from the Pilu si. As Taixu was just beginning his organizational efforts, the radical monk Renshan (1887–1951), whom Taixu had known as a fellow student at Yang Wenhui's Jetavana Hermitage, came to Nanjing and met with him.[33] The discussions between the two monks bent on reform were significant because the immediate result would soon become widely known as "the invasion of Jin Shan" *(danao Jin Shan).* Indeed, the dramatic events that subsequently unfolded at the famous Jin Shan monastery marked a most important chapter in Taixu's career. As he later declared, "From this incident, the reputation of my Buddhist reformation spread, and since then it has been either respected, feared, despised, or admired by the people."[34]

Renshan had come to Nanjing with the intention of petitioning the Ministry of Education to change the well-endowed Jin Shan monastery—a large and traditionally conservative monastic institution—into a modern school for monks. When he heard about Taixu's plans for an Association for the Advancement of Buddhism, Renshan told him that there were many monks and lay devotees who resided in nearby Zhenjiang, just down the Yangzi River from Nanjing, who would be interested in a modern program of Buddhist education. Thus he encouraged Taixu to travel with him to Jin Shan to open and establish such an association there. When they reached the monastery, they stayed at the Guanyin ge, a hereditary temple in the large Jin



Shan complex where Renshan had first entered the sangha. With the knowledge of Abbot Qingquan, Prior Yinping, and Guest Prefect Shuangting, Renshan and Taixu prepared to hold the opening conference of the new association in the meeting hall. They printed and sent out invitations to the monks in Zhenjiang, Yangzhou, Nanjing, and as far away as Shanghai. Invitations were also sent to potential lay supporters, who were members of the army, government officials, merchants, or scholars in the Zhenjiang area.

When the conference opened, Taixu estimated that there were two to three hundred monks in attendance plus three to four hundred lay guests. Many of the latter were reportedly members of the Socialist Party in Zhenjiang. Taixu was chosen to serve as chairman, and he set forth briefly his basic principles of religious reform. As Howard Boorman summarizes,

> He [Taixu] believed that Buddhist land holdings were the common property of all followers of the religion and should be dedicated to the promotion of social welfare, particularly education. In a statement that aroused strong controversy, he advocated the adoption in religious communities of the principle that each person should be judged by his abilities and rewarded according to his work. Moreover, he argued for the redefinition of Buddhist doctrine because he believed Buddhism to be a religion for this world.[35]

Taixu also discussed the aims and purposes of the new association at Jin Shan and read its proposed bylaws. After Renshan made a supporting speech, a monk from Yangzhou named Jishan offered a sharply critical response. Angered, Renshan replied by recounting in detail the autocratic ways of Qingquan, Jishan, and other monks. Furthermore, he proposed that the entire Jin Shan monastery be turned into a modern school by using its considerable resources to cover the school's operating expenses. At this, according to Taixu, most of the guests clapped enthusiastically. However, shouting between opposing forces ensued, and the whole crowd became agitated. Renshan's proposal was ultimately accepted, and he and Taixu were elected to transform the Jin Shan monastery into the headquarters of the Association for

the Advancement of Buddhism with a modern monastic school. Taixu later acknowledged that the struggle certainly did not end there:

> That evening Renshan led more than twenty fellow students into the monastery to designate rooms for the association's offices. The next morning, when the association began to function, they went into the monastery's business office to examine its financial ledgers, and then into the meditation hall to announce the opening of the school. However, Qingquan, Yinping, Shuangting, Jishan and others had already left the monastery and were posting notices and even making appeals to government offices in order to oppose and stop the association. . . .
>
> Entrusting affairs in Zhenjiang to the care of Renshan, I went to Nanjing. . . . One night thereafter, Shuangting and others led more than ten workmen in fighting their way into the association's offices. Renshan and a number of others were wounded with knives and clubs. Afterwards, they initiated legal action, and in several months it was decided that Qingquan, Shuangting, plus five or six others be imprisoned for terms ranging from several months to several years. Because of this whole incident, the association's activities as well as the operation of the Jin Shan monastery were equally disrupted and the result was a confused situation that could not be straightened out.[36]

As Yinshun points out, Taixu maintained throughout his life that his intent at Jin Shan was only the very worthy one of providing modern educational opportunities for the monks of the Zhenjiang area. Taixu later wrote, "The association's bylaws did contain the revolutionary socialist idea of utilizing Buddhist property to operate a public Buddhist enterprise, but [what was] intended were peaceful, progressive steps."[37] He also stated, "It was with a peaceful attitude that I announced the preparation for these events."[38] Naturally, however, staunchly conservative opponents to modernization efforts within the sangha, as well as many moderates, fully sympathized with the monks of Jin Shan. While eschewing the violence, many Buddhists thought that the convicted monks had acted only to defend their monastery from an illegal takeover attempt that was substantially no different than those encouraged by hostile military and government officials.



Among traditionalists, therefore, Taixu soon came to represent the radical modernism and aggressive tactics that they feared and resisted. At the same time, he was embraced by the more progressive spirits within the Buddhist community as a promising young leader for reform.[39] Comments Welch, "Whatever the motives of its perpetrators, the 'invasion of Jin Shan' epitomizes the shock with which the Republican era burst upon the Buddhist establishment. It drastically foreshadowed the long conflict ahead between conservatives and radicals in the sangha."[40]

On April 1, 1912, less than two months after the abdication of the child Xuantong emperor later known as Puyi, Taixu responded to a call from Eight Fingers and traveled to Shanghai to participate in the establishment of the Chinese General Buddhist Association (Zhonghua fojiao zonghui). The old master had been very upset by the intemperate actions of the progressive young Buddhist leaders that had led to the serious events at Jin Shan. He was also concerned about the threateningly far-reaching charter of the Chinese Buddhist Association (Zhongguo fojiao hui), founded in Nanjing some weeks earlier by several radical Buddhist laymen who had little respect for the monastic order. The most prominent among these lay leaders was the scholar Ouyang Jingwu, who had been Taixu's fellow student at Yang Wenhui's Jetavana Hermitage.[41] The charter of the Chinese Buddhist Association claimed for itself extensive and unprecedented religious authority: the right to superintend all Buddhist properties, to reorganize and promote all Buddhist financial affairs, and to arbitrate all disputes within the Buddhist community. According to the monk Weihuan, the association's charter promised the government, in return for such broad powers and organizational independence, that the association would not sanction activities beyond the religious sphere proper to Buddhism. The charter was actually submitted to and approved by Sun Yat-sen, the provisional president of the Republic, in the early months of 1912.[42]

Welch asserts that Ouyang's organization never actually represented more than the audacious plans of a small group of his close friends and colleagues.[43] Nevertheless, it did challenge Eight Fingers to seek the help of Yuanying, Dixian, Xuyun (1840–1959), Taixu, and

other monastic leaders to organize a more representative and responsible Buddhist association that was supportive of the sangha.[44] Hoping to promote reconciliation and harmonious order, Eight Fingers persuaded Taixu to cease any further promotion of his own Association for the Advancement of Buddhism in order to merge it with a new organization, the Chinese General Buddhist Association.[45] He invited monks from seventeen provinces to convene at Shanghai's Liuyun si for the inaugural meeting of a new association. The result was the first truly broad-based national Buddhist organization established in China.

The Chinese General Buddhist Association proposed to improve the quality of the sangha through the close supervision of ordination, educational standards, leadership selection, and social work activities. Some monks wanted the new association to pursue special agreements with the military to guarantee protection for Buddhist property in exchange for direct financial contributions. Taixu persuasively opposed the plan, however, arguing that "it is the government's natural responsibility to protect the sangha's property. With regard to the sangha contributing directly to the military, that is rather an obligation of all the citizenry. The sangha ought not use its contributions to obtain the government's protection, and the government should not use protection of property as a way to elicit direct financial support from the sangha."[46]

Such a potentially powerful national Buddhist organization had never existed before, requiring all Chinese monks and nuns to join and to abide by its regulations. Yet the leaders of the sangha believed that the times called for new measures. Because the proposed organization was basically the product of moderate voices within the sangha, it received wide support. Xuyun states that he accompanied Eight Fingers to Beijing to present the charter of the Chinese General Buddhist Association to representatives of Yuan Shikai's newly established government.[47] According to Yu-yue Tsu, the charter's basic provisions included the following:

1. This society is formed by the union of all Buddhist monks.
2. With branches all over the country, it exercises supervision over all the monasteries and monks.



3. All monks, formally admitted into the Order, are given certificates attesting to their membership in the society.
4. No monk is permitted to receive any pupil [candidate for the Order] unless the candidate is a bona fide applicant and of good family.
5. No monastery is permitted to alienate any of its property without authorization from the society.
6. Observance of monastic rules should be strictly enforced; for violation of the same rules, monks are to be punished.
7. Seminaries for the training of candidates for the Order are to be established, and in them Buddhist scriptures and Chinese classics are to be taught.
8. Persons under twenty years of age are not to be admitted into the Order; also those who have not had three years' theological training.
9. For monks to hire themselves out for the performance of funeral services, especially appearing in funeral processions, is considered derogatory to the dignity of the monastic order, and so the practice is to be strictly prohibited.[48]

Although Eight Fingers was rudely rebuffed by officials of the Ministry of the Interior, the charter was eventually ratified, even as Ouyang Jingwu's rival association ceased to exist. Before the charter's ratification, however, the elderly master became ill and died in Beijing's Fayuan si, on November 10, 1912, believing that he had failed in his mission.[49] Taixu was deeply grieved by the death of the teacher whom he respected so much. Moreover, without Eight Fingers' strong leadership within the sangha, the new association for which the master worked so hard during the last year of his life functioned for only two short years. Yet the continuing need to defend Buddhist property and to address the infighting between the more conservative and radical factions within the Buddhist community contributed to the creation of more than a dozen other Buddhist organizations through the 1920s. Taixu himself was soon promoting the Buddhist Society of the Great Vow (Fojiao hongshi hui) from Ningbo's Yanqing si. To facili-

tate reform, he also considered trying to organize a specifically Buddhist "Tongmeng hui" (Buddhist Chinese United League), which he named the League for the Support of Buddhism (Weichi fojiao tongmeng hui).[50]

Speaking at Eight Fingers' memorial service at Shanghai's Jing'an si in February 1913, Taixu spoke of the urgent need for three revolutions: an organizational revolution *(zuzhi geming)*, an economic revolution *(caichan geming)*, and an intellectual revolution *(xueli geming)*. In consonance with these three revolutions, Taixu argued, in the founding policy statement of the League for the Support of Buddhism, for five essential elements that he judged would be absolutely necessary for the revivification and preservation of the Buddhist faith in China: first, a religious community freely organized; second, a spirit as fearless as that of sacrificial animals; third, a desire to learn and to seek education; fourth, a plan for putting into actual practice compassionate action toward all; and fifth, a dedication marked by peace of mind and a sense of vocation.[51]

When the first national assembly of the Republic began meeting in Beijing that year, Taixu was arguing publicly that religious practice founded on such elements deserved freedom of expression. In a petition to members of the assembly, he declared boldy that, "based on the principle of religious freedom, we should recognize in practice the separate jurisdictions of government and religion."[52] At the same time, he emphasized to members of the Buddhist community that the struggle for religious freedom from government intervention was something about which they could never become complacent. Indeed, that struggle would be joined again soon because of the expansive new regulations of the Buddhist establishment approved by Yuan Shikai's government in 1915.

In early 1913, Taixu took up residence at the Qingliang si in Shanghai, where the editorial offices of the Chinese General Buddhist Association were located. There he helped with the editing responsibilities for the association's new journal, *Fojiao yuebao* (Buddhist Monthly). Along with like-minded colleagues at the Qingliang si and Jing'an si, the site in Shanghai of the official headquarters of the association, Taixu considered the possibilities for Buddhist reforms and



the divisive political debates within the fledgling Chinese republic. The summer months brought the national turmoil of what became known as "the second revolution," as a number of provinces declared independence from the Republic in the clash between parliament and the provisional president Yuan Shikai. Although the rebellion was quickly crushed by Yuan's army, attempts to check presidential powers continued well into the fall, when Yuan actually dissolved the Guomindang and assumed dictatorial authority.

New intrusions into Buddhist monasteries were reported in relation to the fighting. Taixu and his friends Zongyang, Yuexia (1857–1917), and others considered the dangers of their political radicalism in view of Yuan's reactionary style of leadership.[53] In response to the heated political debates on China's future at the time, Taixu himself asserted, "The political perspectives of anarchism and Buddhism are very close, yet beginning from the stage of democratic socialism we can make gradual progress toward anarchism."[54] In the fall of 1913, the *Fojiao yuebao* ceased publication because of lack of funds. At age twenty-four, Taixu had reached what he later considered to be a pivotal point in his life.

## CONTEMPLATION IN SEALED CONFINEMENT

In the summer of 1914, Taixu elected to travel to Putuo Shan near the coast of the East China Sea, where he stayed at the Xilin temple. World War I, with its disillusionment about human capacities for progress and mutuality, had just begun in Europe. In addition, the distrust and enmity aroused by the Jin Shan incident remained acute in certain circles of the sangha. According to the monk Xuming (1919–1966), upon recognizing the failures of his own reformist endeavors within the Chinese Buddhist community and the war-torn state of his country and the world, Taixu actually began to have doubts about Buddhism's ability to be an effective and universal healing force.[55] Unwilling and unable to back away from his long-term aims, Taixu

nevertheless considered a period of strategic retreat appropriate. He was later to recall:

> The wish gradually formed within me of applying the law of Buddha for the harmonizing of the philosophies of ancient and modern times and of the east and the west, and of leading the nations of the whole world to follow the teachings of Śākyamuni. Since then, during the past decade, through circumstances favorable and unfavorable, whether traveling abroad or staying at home, whether engaged in mundane affairs or retired in lonely hermitage, this wish has not for one moment been permitted to leave my mind.
>
> Then the European War broke out. Added to the rottenness of the inward life of man, was the brutal struggle of the outward world. I was convinced of the magnitude of the human calamity, which like a wagon-load of hay on fire could not be extinguished with a cupful of water.
>
> Since it was ordained that I should wait until the ripe time to carry out my wish, I decided to make use of the waiting to exercise my religion [contemplation], and so I "shut myself" on Putuo Island for three years.[56]

In October, Taixu entered a voluntary three-year period of isolated study and meditation known as "sealed confinement" *(biguan)*. Such self-isolation was a highly respected religious practice of self-discipline for Chinese monks, during which they were released from the usual expectations associated with communal living and permitted to read and meditate on their own. Small cells or huts for monks so dedicated were often erected and provided for as an act of merit-making by lay supporters. The initiation of *biguan* was normally accompanied by elaborate rituals in which the monk's quarters were sealed with bright red banners announcing his inspirational example of commitment to the Dharma.[57] In Taixu's case, it was the Venerable Yinguang who presided over the formal ceremonies that sealed Taixu in his cloister.

The Christian missionary Karl Ludvig Reichelt, who became well acquainted with the monk, describes Taixu's surroundings at Putuo Shan in his book *The Transformed Abbot,* a biography of one of Taixu's disciples who eventually converted to Christianity:



> The idea of *biguan* is that a monk may be given opportunity to rehabilitate himself by concentrated meditation and thorough study of the Buddhist scriptures. Long meditations were not according to Taixu's mind but studies were simply life to him and he looked forward to having time for writing too. From the monastic library he had brought Buddhist writings. Paper and Chinese ink he regularly obtained through the little trap-door that opened and shut whenever food was pushed in for him. In the cell were a bed, a bench to sit on, a table with writing instruments and chopsticks, an extra table for books and a small altar in one corner with an image of Buddha. In the yard, just large enough to allow him a little exercise, were a small flower-bed and a few water jars. The water supply came through a long bamboo pipe from the mountain stream beyond. A couple of poles were set up with a string for laundry and in one corner of the yard the necessary "little room" had been erected.[58]

According to Reichelt, the silence and tranquillity of the place were accentuated by the sound of the sea tide as it rushed in and out among the sandbanks of Putuo Island. The profound influence of this setting on the development of Taixu's career, he points out, was reflected in the title of the most significant and long-lasting Buddhist periodical originating in the Republican period, namely, *Haichao yin* (The Sound of the Sea Tide), which Taixu founded in 1920.

During his three years of sealed confinement, Taixu devoted himself to an extensive reading program. In his autobiography, he claims that he kept firmly to a daily schedule that called for meditation and veneration of the buddhas *(li fo)* upon arising; the study of Buddhist literature in the morning; additional reading and writing in the afternoon, with attention not only to the Chinese classics but to modern literature as well; and, each evening, veneration and a final period of meditation before retiring.[59] Within his broad-ranging program of studies, Taixu was especially intrigued by the writings of Zhang Taiyan and the scholar-translator Yan Fu, both of whom maintained an active interest in Buddhism.[60] His reading included works in western history, philosophy, and science, although he spent most of his time studying the sacred scriptures of Buddhism, with special attention given to the *Lengyan jing* (Śūraṅgama Sūtra), *Dasheng qixin lun* (*Mahā-

yāna-śraddhotpāda Śāstra), and *Cheng weishi lun* (Vidyā-mātra-siddhi Śāstra).

During his period of confinement, Taixu wrote such diverse pieces as "Fofa daolun" (An Introduction to the Buddhist Dharma), "Jiaoyu xinjian" (New Conceptions of Education), "Zhexue zhengguan" (Proper Perspectives on Philosophy), "Lun Xunzi" (On Xunzi), "Lun Zhouyi" (On the *Book of Changes*), and "Lun Hanyu" (On Hanyu). Throughout his various works he called for a globalized form of modern education, individual freedoms in the context of a community committed to the welfare of all, and Buddhist wisdom and compassion as the basis for a new world civilization. According to Yinshun, in many of these works readers could easily see how "Taixu blended socialism *(shehui zhuyi)* with Buddhist teachings."[61]

Although in seclusion for three years, Taixu continued to monitor political developments in China and overseas. In May 1915, Yuan Shikai, hoping that affairs with foreign governments would not interfere with his bid for presidential powers that extended beyond even the extraordinary privileges granted in the revised constitution of May 1914, accepted the infamous Japanese "Twenty-one Demands." As Immanuel C.Y. Hsü notes, these called for "(1) recognition of Japan's position in Shandong; (2) special position for Japan in Manchuria and Inner Mongolia; (3) joint operation of China's iron and steel industries; (4) nonalienation of coastal areas to any third power; and (5) control by Japan of China's several important domestic administrations."[62] Additional agreements were signed with Russia and Great Britain for their special interests in Outer Mongolia and Tibet, respectively. These humiliating actions, along with Yuan's shocking announcement in December 1915 that he would assume the full powers of a monarch, led to a series of revolts throughout the country.

Taixu was also made aware while in seclusion of the adoption by the parliament in October 1915 of the Regulations for the Control of Monasteries and Temples (Guanli simiao tiaoli) promulgated through the parliament with Yuan's full support. The regulations were not only more restrictive than those adopted by the Ministry of the Interior in 1913, but extended supervision well beyond the Qing codes. As Tsu comments, the act was particularly troublesome for Buddhism:

> While these regulations were supposed to apply to Buddhist and Daoist institutions without discrimination, it was clear that owing to the fact that Buddhist institutions far outnumber those of the Daoist faith and that Daoism has no monks anyway, the regulations would fall more heavily upon the Buddhists—in fact, that was the intention of the government. The government justified itself by arguing that temples and monasteries are public institutions and many of them are of historic and artistic importance, and so supervision was necessary to prevent their falling into private hands. The chief features of the regulations are: (1) registration of temples and monasteries, monks and nuns; (2) taxation of temple property; (3) non-alienation of temple property; (4) subjection of religious activities and preaching services to police regulation.[63]

Welch notes that the final sweeping element of the policy aimed to limit any public statements by monks and nuns "to doctrinal exegesis, moral exhortation, and 'stimulating patriotic thoughts.'"[64] The government also reasserted its right to monitor and control ordination through required certificates issued by the Ministry of the Interior. Yet it went even further, claiming the authority to dismiss abbots for infractions not only of the civil code but of monastic rules as well. Paul Callahan reports that these actions resulted in vehement opposition in China "from both Buddhists and Christians." On the sangha's reaction, he remarks:

> The Buddhist National Society [Chinese General Buddhist Association (Zhonghua fojiao zonghui) founded in Shanghai in 1912] set up a lobby, a preaching hall, near the National Assembly and worked zealously to influence the populace and delegates against the government. In retaliation, the government declared the society inimical to public safety and closed it. Though Yuan's schemes failed and the Society was reorganized after his fall, it was again closed by the government in 1917.[65]

The confrontations with the government that continued during Taixu's period of sealed confinement eventually led him to reflect

further on the Sangha's relation to the world and its inability to speak with one voice. He came to believe that these issues were not unrelated to the diversity within the Buddhist community itself. Thus he began to argue that those pursuing the bodhisattva path needed to understand deeply—and actually integrate—the different emphases and diverse forms of piety associated with what he had customarily spoken of as two basic approaches to the Dharma: the intuitive approach of Chan, which was not founded on special scriptures *(buli wenzi)*, and the teaching approach adopted by the Vinaya (Lü), Tiantai, Huayen, Yogācāra (Weishi, or Mind-Only), Pure Land (Jingtu), and Tantric (Zhenyan) schools.

Taixu came to claim that since no one school encompassed the entire canon and none was without a sound foundation in the Buddha's Dharma, practitioners would benefit from a synthetic approach to enlightenment based on a broad study of scripture and tradition. Nevertheless, Xuming observes, while the reformer began to advocate forging a new religio-philosophical synthesis and was convinced that each school's perspectives were grounded in a "pure mind" *(jing xin)*, he was always extremely appreciative of the idealistic philosophical perspectives that he discovered in the Weishi tradition. Thus, on the one hand, as Xuming asserts, it was most clearly in the terms of this tradition that Taixu "grasped the fundamental principles of Chinese Buddhism."[66] On the other hand, as Shengyan indicates, his stance was clearly that of a Chan master:

> Taixu studied Chan in his early years; and although Taixu later judged the eight schools to be of equal importance, he did state, "When one reaches understanding, one naturally comes to the Prajñā (Sanlun) School and the Chan School of Bodhidharma." . . . He emphasized the application of Yogācāra philosophy and constantly used its terminology to explain Buddhist texts. Hence, he often has been mistaken for a scholar of the Yogācāra School, when in fact he only borrowed its terminology as a matter of expediency.[67]

Concurring that Taixu came to stress the unity of Buddhism early in his monastic career, Gao Yongxiao argues that one can discern in the monk's writings three distinct stages of reflection on the issue of



the unity and diversity of Buddhist teaching *(fofa de panshe)*.[68] In the first period of the reformer's religious life, Gao says, from about 1908 to 1914, Taixu followed the traditional method of distinguishing between a *zong*, or "lineage," and a *jiao*, or "school." A *zong* primarily emphasized the transmission of enlightenment experiences, while a *jiao* focused on certain highly prized scriptures and the transmission of enlightened understandings about the human situation and the nature of reality.

During the second phase of Taixu's career, from 1915 to 1923, after extensive studies of the Chinese Tripiṭaka during his *biguan*, the monk began to emphasize the fundamental interrelationship between Nikāya Buddhism and Mahāyāna Buddhism.[69] Indeed, notes Gao, Taixu began to highlight the teaching of the *Lotus Sūtra* that in fact "there is only one Dharmic vehicle, not two or three."[70] The Śrāvakayāna *(shengwen sheng)*, the Pratyekabuddhayāna *(yuanjue sheng)*, and the Bodhisattvayāna *(pusa sheng)* were just expedient expressions of the one Buddhayāna *(fo sheng)*. The eight schools of Buddhism, Taixu thought, represented only different aspects of the one true Dharma, which is adapted according to the various needs of its hearers. Shengyan observes:

> According to Taixu, "There are many tributaries of the Dharma, yet the source is one." True Suchness, being the essence of the Dharma, is one and undifferentiated. Differences among the treatises are for promoting the effect of preaching. Taixu divided the teachings into the Prajñā (Sanlun [Mādhyamika]) School emphasizing "Selectivity," the Yogācāra [Weishi] School emphasizing "Existence," and the True Suchness Schools (Chan, Tiantai, Xianshou [Huayan], and Esoteric [Zhenyan]) emphasizing "Emptiness." He also explained these three emphases in terms of the three natures noted in Yogācāra: the Prajñā School emphasizes the nature of wrong discrimination, the Yogācāra School emphasizes the nature of dependence on others, and the True Suchness Schools the nature of perfect knowledge. All three are perfect teachings, despite their different functions.[71]

John Blofeld once remarked, after a conversation with Taixu about the great diversity of traditions within the Buddhist household,

"I comfort myself with the words of the Venerable Taixu who declared that the various sects are like beads in the same rosary and that each one of them is the best approach for certain individuals."[72] Although Taixu acknowledged that every person must begin his or her pilgrimage through earnest study of one particular school's teaching about the truth, he judged that all practitioners would finally realize that the same goal could be reached by different routes. Thus, he concluded, "Upāya *(fangbian)* has many gates, but in returning to the origin *(gui yuan)*, there are not two roads."[73]

According to Gao, during the third phase of Taixu's career, from 1923 to 1947, he "distinguished between 'schools' *(jiao)*, 'doctrines' *(li)*, and 'actions' *(xing)* in order to organize a comprehensive presentation of Śākyamuni's transmission of Dharma."[74] As Chou Hsiang-kuang shows in outlined detail, in his teaching Taixu used "schools" as a category for explaining the historical development of the various Nikāya, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna traditions, as well as for introducing Pali, Chinese, and Tibetan, the languages that he judged to be most critical for advanced Buddhist studies. Under the category of "doctrines," Taixu explored with his students basic Buddhist teachings about karma, saṃsāra, nirvāṇa, and conditioned origination, as well as the more difficult Mahāyāna doctrines of buddha-nature, mind-only, and so forth. The category of normative Buddhist "actions" provided Taixu with a framework for a detailed discussion of Buddhist morality in terms of the five vows *(wu jie)*, the ten forms of good action *(shi de)*, and the great career of the bodhisattva in wise and compassionate service to all.[75]

As Yang Huinan points out, it was also in this third period, after 1923, that Taixu began frequently to refer to an important threefold distinction within Buddhism to embrace the scope of its doctrine—namely, the Dharma common to the Five Vehicles, the Dharma common to the Three Vehicles, and the distinctive Dharma of the Great Vehicle (Mahāyāna).[76] As discussed in Chapter 4, his central points were that the basic moral precepts required of all beginners on the path toward enlightenment remain significant for more advanced followers, and that reliance on only one part of the teachings is unproductive.



Just as Taixu had entered sealed confinement in 1914 with a certain amount of fanfare, so he came out of seclusion on February 4, 1917 with more than the usual attention. Reichelt says that, on the appointed day for the monk's return to society, a number of abbots, Buddhist scholars, and dignitaries gathered at Putuo Shan, formed a procession, and proceeded to Taixu's cloister. "Salvoes of firecrackers were discharged," he writes, "and a solemn mass was offered in front of his cell. Then the red seal was removed by the abbot and the hero was led out and acclaimed with enthusiasm."[77] Acutely aware of the great conflagration that raged on in Europe, of China's own instability, and of disorder within the sangha, the twenty-seven-year-old Taixu immediately began traveling to important monasteries throughout central China and visiting colleagues among the more conservative monastic leaders, such as Yuanying, as well as the more radical, like his old colleague Renshan.

Invigorated by the experience of confinement and more determined than ever to make a difference in advancing the Dharma in an age of confusion, Taixu also accepted invitations to travel to Japan and Taiwan (then a Japanese colony) to consult with other Asian Buddhist leaders about the present and future condition of their religion. He talked constantly about the dilemmas of a war-weary world, the bankruptcy of western culture, the certain demise of Christianity, the problems of Buddhist sectarianism, and the possibilities for the development of a "new Buddhism." Yet as Xuming has emphasized, Taixu never used the term "new" in any popular sense of the term (i.e., to mean "western," "foreign," "ultramodern," or "anti-traditional"). Rather, he claims, the reformer always intended "new" in the sense of the true, original essence of Chinese Buddhism, which needed to be rediscovered.[78]

That rediscovered essence of wisdom and compassion, embodied by the bodhisattva, was for Taixu the hope of all sentient beings. History had shown that neither western humanism nor western religion could adequately support the creation of a global culture. Yet Mahāyāna Buddhism, Taixu confidently proclaimed, could provide the foundation for a lasting world peace that would be an Asian gift to

the rest of the world. As he concluded in a lecture at the Yunhua tang, in the city of Zhanghua in central Taiwan, in October 1917:

> Buddhism is representative of East Asian civilization. Now Christianity, which is representative of contemporary Western civilization, has already at this point lost its religious power in Europe and America. Europeans and Americans have thus lost their basis for a secure life and the fulfillment of their destiny. It is because of this fact that the great World War is now taking place. We ought to proclaim our East Asian good word of peace and spread Buddhism universally throughout the world in order to change their murderous perversions and save all beings from great disaster.[79]

## ORGANIZING AND EDUCATING "NEW MONKS"

After his travels through Japan and Taiwan, and after consultations with Zhang Taiyan and Wang Yiting, Taixu instigated his reformist movement with the founding in Shanghai, in August 1918, of the Bodhi Society (Jue she).[80] During his *biguan,* Taixu had spent considerable time on imaginative plans for reorganizing the Chinese sangha, a project he considered as necessary as it was difficult. The first of several versions of his *Zhengli sengqie zhidu lun* (The Reorganization of the Sangha System) was written in 1915, in response to the threat presented by the Regulations for the Control of Monasteries and Temples. Yet Taixu recognized that the ultimate reception of such a controversial proposal would require the establishment of bases of monastic and lay support that could serve as effective organs for propaganda. The Bodhi Society—so named, said Taixu, "because of my long-cherished hope that the world could be saved through Buddhism"—was to be one such base.[81] According to Xuming, the founding of the organization constituted "the beginning of Taixu's new Buddhist movement."[82] With its creation, the number of the reformer's followers began to increase rapidly. The society's explicit purposes, noted



Taixu, were "to publish research, edit collected works, sponsor lectures on Buddhism, and encourage religious cultivation."[83] The monk himself later recalled:

> The next year [1918], I was invited to visit the South Sea Islands [where there are colonies of prosperous Chinese emigrants]. I formed the idea of building a National Monastery. My observation leads me to feel that the monastic institutions in our country have fallen away from ancient pure ideals and are corrupt beyond reform. If I could raise the funds from people abroad, I would build the national monastery [as a model of renewed and purified monasticism]. If I should fail to attain my object I would reconcile myself to the life of a wandering mendicant and, leaning upon Buddha's mercy, thus travel to my life's end.
>
> When I was at Putuo, some of my earnest devotees requested me to lecture on "Weishi lun."... I talked to them about my wish to reform monastic institutions and my plan to go south. They also saw the works I have written. They strongly advised against the southern trip at the time as the European War was at its height, and it would be difficult to raise money there, but urged me to publish my works and to organize a society for the promotion of Buddhism in China as the first step of my larger plans. And so we organized the "Bodhi Society" in Shanghai.[84]

The initial announcement of the Bodhi Society reveals the organization's aim to promote "self-enlightenment and the enlightenment of others" and its rules designed to nurture those on the bodhisattva path. The basic bylaws read as follows:

I. Purpose:
   A. To set forth the true principles of Mahāyāna Buddhism to cause those who slander the truth to repent, those who doubt to have faith and understanding, those who believe and understand to put their faith into action, and those who understand and practice their religion to witness to others; to transform fools and common people, radicals and ultraconservatives into sages, saints, and buddhas.
   B. To proclaim the true principles of Mahāyāna Buddhism to turn those who are cruel and evil into benevolent people and

those who are greedy and belligerent into righteous people; so that the wise will rejoice in the way and the strong will honor morality; to turn this war-torn and suffering world into a place of peace and happiness.

II. Regulations for members . . . :

A. Rules for self-cultivation:

1. Required practices:

a. To take refuge in the Three Jewels of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and take the four universal vows of a bodhisattva to make definite one's faith and resolve.

b. To observe the ten great precepts for the laity as found in the *Brahmajāla Sūtra*. If a member is not immediately able to observe all of the precepts, then he should select one or two of them and gradually increase the number until he is in compliance with all the right actions.

c. To reflect on perfect knowledge, investigate the essence of the mind, study the Buddhist scriptures, and practice bodhisattva behavior in order to develop your own wisdom.

2. Special regular practices:

a. To reflect on the [teachings of the] Chan school,

b. To support the teachings of the Zhenyan school,

c. To chant the Mahāyāna scriptures,

d. To recite the name of Amitābha,

e. To practice one form of meditation *(zhiguan)*,

f. Or to engage in several of these practices simultaneously.

3. Things to be done at one's convenience: to worship, offer repentance, and make donations. Practice all these things properly as opportunities arise in all times and places.



B. Regulations about group activities for the entire membership . . . :

1. On the eighth day of the fourth month, members should gather for one day to observe the birthday of Buddha by fasting, offering penance, releasing living beings, making donations, and doing other meritorious deeds.

2. Beginning on the evening of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, and continuing for seven days, members should hold a meeting for reciting the name of Buddha *(nian fo hui)*. The time should be limited so as to attain a oneness of mind without confusion.

3. Each year, from the first to the eighth day of the twelfth month, members should hold a meeting for meditation *(can chan hui)*. The time should be limited so as to become enlightened to the original Mind from which all things arise.[85]

Late during the next year, following the Beijing demonstration in May 1919 at which students protested the government's humiliating policy toward Japan and the outcome of the Versailles peace negotiations, the headquarters of the Bodhi Society were moved from Shanghai to Hangzhou, as Taixu moved to the Jingfan yuan near the West Lake. Shortly thereafter, in early 1920, the *Jueshe congshu*, the organization's quarterly magazine that Taixu edited, was renamed *Haichao yin* and became a monthly publication. In a relatively short time, it was to become the most important and widely read Buddhist periodical of the Republican period. Its goal was the exploration of models for the organization and education of "new monks." Although Taixu was obviously directing events to achieve his long-range goals, his own recollection, not surprisingly, is self-deprecating. He wrote in 1920:

> Lately I have been living in Jingfan yuan monastery, on the side of the Western Lake, Hangzhou. Here I had desired to live quietly for the practice of contemplation, but the members of the Bodhi Society have asked me to edit a new magazine, called *Haichao yin* [The Voice of Sea Waves] to meet the needs of the time. I have consented to do it for one year, as the work is congenial to my original wish, and so for this year, I have decided to lay aside other work and devote myself to editing the magazine. But at the close of ten thousand years, the Tathāgata will surely raise up men to establish the Law and spread it throughout the world of the living.[86]

The society's publishing effort—for which Taixu was able to secure financial assistance from interested laypersons—aimed both at religious instruction and institutional reform. The ultimate goal of *Haichao yin* was no less than a modernizing transformation of Chinese Buddhist piety and of the institutional structures that could encourage and support an expression of that piety. Observed Tsu:

> It aims to lift the voice of Mahāyāna Buddhism for the guidance of mankind tossed as it is by the waves of modern thought. The magazine contains (1) exposition of Buddhist doctrines, as for instance a new commentary of "Mahāyāna-śraddhotpāda-śāstra" (Awakening of Faith); (2) apologetics or defense of the faith in face of modern criticism; (3) advocacy of reformation, as reorganization of the monastic order; (4) testimonials: stories of conversion experience, lives of saintly devotees, etc.; (5) critical review of works on religion and philosophy, especially on Buddhism. It is of high quality and is edited by Taixu Fashi himself.[87]

The significance of the appearance of the innovative Chinese Buddhist periodical was soon acknowledged by the Japanese editors of the international journal, *The Eastern Buddhist,* who wrote:

> The Kaichoou *(Haichao yin),* a Buddhist monthly, published at Wuchang under the editorship of Rev. Taixu is full of interest and information. This we wish to be the real beginning of a general re-awakening of interest in Buddhism throughout the length and breadth of the Middle Kingdom, which produced in the past so many saintly souls and spiritual leaders contributing to the ever-upward progress of Eastern civilization, and where Buddhism, fully assimilated by the native genius and mode of feeling, has resulted in the creation of its special form now designated as Zen or Chan.[88]



One of the first articles published in 1920 in *Haichao yin* was from Taixu's *Zhengli sengqie zhidu lun* (The Reorganization of the Sangha System), composed in first draft during his period of sealed confinement. According to Callahan, the essay "took the Chinese Buddhist world by storm."[89] Although the specifics changed slightly in later revised versions, as discussed in Chapter 5 below, Taixu's plan called for Chinese Buddhism to be reshaped institutionally with new model monasteries, benevolent organizations, and educational ventures. It required higher levels of education for all monks and nuns in view of the increasing levels of education in the general populace. It proposed productive physical labor by all able-bodied monastics so that the community could be self-supporting, eliminating the need for the decadent commercialism of masses for the dead. Taixu also envisioned monasteries and temples more as places of study and meditation than as centers for esoteric rites. Accordingly, an exemplary national monastery was to be established, complete with a massive library and a museum of Buddhist art and artifacts open for research. Affiliated with it would be a network of related institutes for Buddhist studies, as well as centers for Dharma proclamation and meditation.

As Taixu refined his plan in the years that followed, he chose to address not only the issue of the sangha's functional organization but the question of how many monastics were needed to propagate Buddhism in China. His recommendations eventually called for drastic reductions in the size of the monastic community, while redefining the sangha's role vis-à-vis society to reflect his own form of ethical piety. Under his controversial scheme, a moderate number of professional monks would perform good works for the benefit of society as a whole (such as operating schools, orphanages, and hospitals) under the direction of a small cadre of highly educated scholar-monks who were experts in Buddhist doctrine, and complemented by an almost equally small number of elderly monks who specialized in spiritual

cultivation through meditation and chanting. The great majority of monks, who Taixu thought shouldn't really be called monks at all, would engage in manual labor to support the propagation of the religion by those most able to do so in a modern society. Welch comments:

> Between 1915 and 1947 he produced seven more versions [of his plan for reorganizing the sangha], each representing an evolution over the last. None was ever put into practice: they were, in fact, so impracticable and so grandiose that it is hard to see how they could have been taken seriously. Rather, as if he were a child deploying regiments of toy soldiers, Taixu divided up the sangha into departments, each with its own specialty. For example, according to one of his later schemes, China was to have ten thousand scholar monks, who earned academic degrees in four grades according to the number of years they spent at study. The highest grade would consist of eight hundred monks with the Ph.D., each of whom had studied for nine years. Twenty-five thousand monks were to engage in good works (nine thousand teaching Buddhism, seven thousand running hospitals, orphanages, and so on). Finally, a small number of elders would run sixty centers of religious cultivation *(xiu lin)*, at which a thousand monks would meditate and recite Buddha's name. This accounted for only thirty-six thousand of China's half a million monks. What would have happened to the rest is unclear. Perhaps Taixu expected that many of them would disrobe to avoid manual labor and military service, both of which he is said to have favored for monks. With the sangha reduced to scholars and functionaries, there would not have been funerary specialists to perform rites for the dead, but this objection carried no weight with Taixu, for such rites were something of which, by now, he tended to disapprove. Indeed, he seems sometimes to have had grave doubts about monkhood itself.[90]

Taixu, with his "utopian propensity," was convinced that Buddhism could revitalize itself in the twentieth century through educational modernization, social service, and international cooperation. His greatest accomplishment in the area of monastic education was the Wuchang Buddhist Institute (Wuchang foxue yuan), founded in 1922. According to Earl Herbert Cressy, Taixu moved in that year



from Hangzhou in Zhejiang province to the Wuchang and Hankou area in Hubei province because "he found the monasteries in Hangzhou too conservative to welcome his more up-to-date attitude."[91] In Hankou, in contrast, his lectures on modern Buddhist reform soon inspired the establishment of a new lay organization, the Right Faith Buddhist Society of Hankou (Hankou fojiao zhengxin hui), for which Taixu served as "Guiding Master" *(daoshi)*. The society soon built a large three-story complex for its publishing and educational activities, and by 1933 claimed a membership of thirty thousand.[92] Still, Taixu's principal concern at the time was the creation of his new type of monastic school across the Yangzi River in the neighboring city of Wuchang. Cressy reports:

> Upon the arrival of the Monk Taixu in Wuchang, in 1922, there was an emphasis upon securing better educated leaders for Buddhist monasteries and associations. Accordingly a college was established which had a plant consisting of three main buildings and ample accommodations for classrooms, service departments, and living quarters for faculty and students.
>
> About $60,000 was expended in establishing the school. For the first two years it was conducted on a modest basis, but later it was divided into a number of departments. The writer visited this school in 1925 and interviewed Taixu, its head. The seventy students in residence were middle-school graduates and were a very intelligent and keen group of young men.[93]

With the generous support of lay Buddhist leaders Li Yinchen, Chen Yuanbai, Wang Senpu, Li Kaicheng, and others, Taixu's seminary in Wuchang became a pioneer in Buddhist education. The school adopted the western educational format of lecture and discussion classes. It employed monastic and lay instructors, provided blackboards for use by teachers and students, and required academic course work not only in Buddhist studies and languages but in secular subjects, such as history, literature, and psychology, as well.[94] Its excellent library was renowned for a collection that eventually included more than forty thousand books. Because of the success of Taixu's innovations, the Wuchang Buddhist Institute gained recognition as an edu-

cational model for Buddhist seminaries throughout China. James B. Pratt, who visited the seminary in 1923, reported attending one of the lectures after a pleasant private interview with the master:

> At the lecture were sixty-three students, all but five of them being monks. Taixu lectured without notes and very easily, making constant use of the black board. Each student had a copy of the sūtra that was being expounded, and followed the lecture eagerly, taking careful notes. I gathered from what my interpreter told me that his lectures were less abstruse than those of Mr. Ouyang [Jingwu]. His influence must be considerable. If sixty monks, or half that number, can be sent out every year with his impress upon them, there is still hope for Chinese Buddhism.
>
> Taixu's aim, he told me, is chiefly to make Buddhism known as it really is. He is the more hopeful that his effort in this direction will bear fruit, because it is in response to a real demand. Chinese students are returning every year from Europe and America, or graduating from colleges in China, and demanding to know what Buddhism is. The question, he insists, must be answered from Chinese sources—from the great Mahāyāna sūtras—and in a scholarly and philosophical way. His primary aim is, therefore, scholarly and philosophical. Solid knowledge and solid thinking must form the basis of anything lasting in the way of a Buddhist revival. Only indirectly does he hope to spread Buddhism among the common people.[95]

Taixu's modernization extended well beyond the five seminaries that eventually came under his direct authority. Conservative leaders disparaged the broader scope of education available in Taixu's seminaries, maintaining that it served only to distract monks and nuns from the more essential elements of a uniquely Buddhist style and content to learning. Yet many Chinese Buddhists found a more comprehensive form of education especially relevant given the intellectual challenges in the wake of the "May Fourth Movement" and the anti-religion activities of the 1920s. While others debated his methods, Taixu never altered his course or wavered in his insistence that students seek to understand the Dharma in relation to the social and political issues of the day. Nevertheless, after 1934, financial difficulties forced the closure of the groundbreaking school at Wuchang, and the plant was occupied by soldiers, as it had been for a brief period in 1929. Attempts to revive the school by transferring it to Beijing ultimately failed to continue its operation beyond 1937, when the war with Japan made funding extremely scarce.



Meanwhile, Taixu founded and directed other monastic schools, each theoretically a part of his World Buddhist Institute. The seminary in Beijing at the Bolin si (Bolin si jiaoli yuan), which, like the Wuchang Buddhist Institute, was to specialize in English-language studies, functioned only for the 1930–1931 academic year.[96] Taixu's important South Fujian Seminary (Minnan foxue yuan) in Xiamen (Amoy), which specialized in Japanese-language study, functioned from 1925 to 1939. His seminary in Chongqing, Sichuan (Han Zang jiaoli yuan), specializing in Tibetan studies, was in operation from 1932 to 1949. And in Xi'an, Shaanxi, the seminary that he established at the Daxingshan si (Bali sanzang yuan), specializing in Pali studies, functioned for only a short period after its founding in 1945.[97]

Taixu was not only a pioneer administrator concerned with new structures for monastic education but a popular Buddhist lecturer who was able to adjust the tone and content of his messages to the special character of different audiences. On the one hand, he could explicate for his students in the classroom the difficult metaphysical theories of Weishi idealism. On the other hand, though he viewed Buddhist devotionalism as a *upāya* (skillful means), he could speak impressively for the laity on the glories of the pure lands. In fact, when Taixu had been appointed head monk of the West Lake's Jingci si in the spring of 1921, he had urged the transformation of the traditional meditation hall *(chan tang)* into a "horned tiger hall" *(jiaohu tang)*, "so as to continue the complementary practice of Chan and Pure Land Buddhism that was the custom of Yongming Yanshou [904–975]."[98] Moreover, Taixu and his seminarians from Wuchang effectively used Protestant-style worship services in brightly illuminated street chapels to attract potential followers. Describing Taixu's accomplishments in Hankou in the 1920s, Reichelt commented:

> A new and interesting scene was revealed when darkness fell. A door had been opened wide and people from the street poured in to the preach-

ing-chapel where an imposing image of Amitābha stood at the rear. The niche where the image was set up was brilliantly illuminated by electric bulbs. The radiant figure of Amitābha and the music from the organ soon had their effect and the hall became completely filled. A sermon began, followed by short "testimonies" from the students. Taixu had impressed upon his assistants that on such occasions it was best to concentrate upon the message of the Pure Land School, because this was all the ignorant people could understand. In this way Buddhists could compete better with Christians who had made so much progress in China especially through evangelism in street chapels.[99]

Taixu was good at planning for his mission ventures and often sent disciples ahead of his scheduled visits to different areas to prepare the community for his preaching and teaching activities. In addition, his disciples frequently engaged in mission trips of their own when the master could not be present. For example, A. J. Brace, a YMCA official in Chengdu, reported that efforts to increase membership in his own Christian organization had been "seriously hurt" by the visit to the city in 1922 of some of Taixu's students. Providing us with a helpful picture of the new form of missionary endeavors that the Buddhist reformer actively encouraged, Brace wrote:

> In the summer of 1922 disciples of the famous monk Taixu journeyed from Shanghai to Chengdu in Sichuan Province to bring the modernized message of Buddhism as taught by their master. Their coming was the occasion of great rejoicing, and a real revival of Buddhism was the result. They had been heralded for more than a year and their way was prepared by a wide circulation of Taixu's popular magazine, "Haichao yin"—"The Voice of the Sea," or "The Sound of the Tide." Very carefully edited articles had prepared the people for the visit of the missionaries, and the new message found a ready response even before their arrival. It brought a message of peace for the troubled days, and the magazine clearly stated that the new message was destined to lift the sublime teachings of the Mahāyāna Doctrine for the help of the people tossed about in the sea of modern doubt. The message was essentially spiritual and taught, or stood for, three propositions, (1) a real desire to reform monasticism, (2) a plan to reconstruct Buddhist theology along lines of modern philosophy, (3) to use the teachings of Buddha to elevate the people and improve social conditions.
>
> On the arrival of the missionaries, they were welcomed officially by the Governor of the Province. The sixteen daily papers all joined in a welcome, and gave columns to the new teaching, thus supplying a liberal supply of advertising. The opening meetings were attended by large crowds who listened attentively to the new program, and large numbers voluntarily enrolled themselves for the daily course to be given. In fact, a real program was gotten out, much like a university course, or a summer school curriculum, and fees charged for the course. Then daily the large hall in the Public Garden of the Manchu City was thronged with auditors to hear the public addresses, and the class rooms were filled with eager students to listen and follow the course throughout.
>
> A thorough course was given in the history of Buddhism, what it had done for the world, and how it had become encrusted with many superstitions. Now all was changed. The old simple story of the Enlightened One and how he found the way of salvation was declared. Idolatry was opposed, and in bygone days it was only tolerated as an accommodation to the weakness of the ignorant people. Now education was to be stressed, the priests had always been ignorant. A Buddhist university was to be established. The monks were to be encouraged to be busy as learners and servants of the people rather than follow the lazy lives of the past. The mercy of Buddha was taught and enjoined so that the wicked might be led to kindness, the selfish to righteousness, the hungry to find satisfaction in the doctrine. Most emphasized were the daily hours for fasting and meditation.
>
> A real revival was effected along these lines, and many of the foremost business and professional men took the vows and followed the course of meditation regularly. Many men who had not been interested in religion came under the sway of the new-found faith, and personally told me of the value of the hours of meditation and how their faith had been strengthened. The course on reading was followed widely. The students burnt incense daily as they read and meditated. At the meetings singing was indulged in, and often tunes quite similar to Christian tunes

were used, and one song with the refrain, "Take the name of Buddha with you." They even organized a Young Men's Buddhist Association which is going strong.[100]

Taixu also began enthusiastically to involve his seminarians and lay supporters in social service ministries. He asserted that the non-differentiation of self from others was the very basis of a bodhisattva's compassionate activities in the world, and that helping another person was coterminous with helping one's self. As a result, after Taixu's weekend sermons in Hankou, his students would commonly usher people in need of health care to rooms where physicians, who were among his lay disciples, provided free treatment and medicine, exemplifying a long tradition of Buddhist concern for healing.[101] He helped his disciples Miaoji and Hualin establish a modern school for children and a welfare program for the diseased, destitute, and jobless. It was reported that they "used to go around to the sick with medicines, dressing wounds and distributing articles to the needy."[102]

The previously mentioned Right Faith Buddhist Society of Hankou became one of the most socially active lay Buddhist associations in the country. In accord with Taixu's emphasis on social responsibility, the society operated a clinic that provided free medical treatment for the poor, administered a free primary school for children of low-income families, donated coffins to families who could not afford them, funded a non-Buddhist social service agency that provided assistance to indigent widows, distributed food to needy families on holidays, served meals in fire catastrophes, and rescued people and animals in flood crises.[103] Most of the major cities of China developed similar lay Buddhist organizations, with laity *(jushi)* active in a variety of religiously motivated pursuits, in order "to propagate the Dharma and to benefit humanity."[104] Seeking to characterize the type of lay believers who were often attracted to Taixu's teachings and whose devotion was a driving force in aspects of the effort at Buddhist revitalization, John Blofeld once wrote:

> The jushi [lay devotees] are often men of considerable learning as well as faith and piety, they sometimes exhibit a more profound understanding of Buddhist philosophy than many of the monks and nuns. To this learning they add active observance of the teaching that the utmost compassion should be shown to all sentient beings. . . .
>
> The jushi is usually a cultured person. He prefers to wear the dignified Chinese gown of blue, gray or bronze-coloured silk, and by his habits and gestures, exhibits his fondness for and understanding of the traditional culture of his country. He is often a poet or painter as well as a philosopher and metaphysician, and may be something of a historian or possess a knowledge of Chinese herbal medicine in addition. . . . They often show themselves to be far above the vulgar superstitions which have done much to lower the tone of the great moral and metaphysical system created by the Indian sage Gautama.[105]



In the early 1920s, Taixu also initiated a new program of Buddhist visitation to prisons, encouraging students at his seminary in Wuchang to minister to the incarcerated. It was recognized as an innovative program by most Buddhists, although the charter of the 1912 Chinese General Buddhist Association, founded in Shanghai, had at least called for prison visitation.[106] Perhaps Taixu's program was interpreted as new because there had been little or no actual response to this element of the association's 1912 charter. Emphasizing the Christian precedents for such activities and describing Taixu's program as merely imitative, the missionary-scholar Reichelt comments:

> Taixu had noticed that Christian missionaries and some Chinese evangelists had obtained permission from the authorities to visit the public gaols in order to speak to the prisoners. It was even described in the newspapers because quite a number of prisoners had become converted and had left the gaols as new men. This challenged Taixu. Why should not Buddhists do the same? He placed the matter before his students, and of course everybody offered for service. Taixu applied to the authorities and permission was given. . . .
>
> Prisoners used to gather in a large room and young Buddhist monks in their dignified robes performed with the greatest eloquence as "teaching masters" to this mixed audience. They too were "written up" in the newspapers.[107]

After a time, enthusiasm waned among students at the Wuchang Buddhist Institute, and the prison program lost much of its momentum. Yet despite Taixu's eventual disappointment with this development in Wuchang, the idea of prison ministries did spread to other Buddhist groups and to other parts of China.[108]

Through all these educational and human service activities, Taixu sought to respond to the demands of the time while recalling what he considered to be the true nature of his religious tradition. He wanted Chinese Buddhists to build on an essential dimension of their Mahāyāna heritage that had been overlooked and inadequately developed. In view of criticisms by Christians who facilely contrasted their own tradition's social consciousness with the blatantly self-centered spirituality of Buddhists, the reformer tried to present those on the bodhisattva path as members of a socially responsive and morally responsible religious community.

In large measure, of course, Taixu shared with Christian missionaries a critical outlook on "real" Chinese Buddhism—that is, the religion as "commonly practiced" in the Republican period. At the same time, however, he envisioned an "ideal" Chinese Buddhism that could change forever not only the future of Asia but that of the entire world. Indeed, it was to the task of articulating more clearly aspects of that projected global religion that Taixu was to give much of his time and energy during the last half of his monastic career.

CHAPTER 3

# AN ECUMENICAL VISION FOR GLOBAL MISSION

During the last thirty years of his life, in addition to his efforts in the field of monastic education, Taixu devoted considerable energy to the establishment of regional and world Buddhist organizations. Xuming asserts that the reformer's growing interest in the 1920s in the global organization of Buddhists reflected a definite strategic decision on his part. At first, Taixu believed that the reorganization and reform of the monastic and lay communities within the Chinese Buddhist household would lead, rather naturally and directly, to the spiritual transformation of the nation and, eventually, of the entire world. However, given the failures and obstacles related to this internal Chinese reformation, Taixu began to think more expansively about organizing an ecumenical Buddhist movement on a global scale. Thus, while continuing efforts at institutional reform within the Chinese sangha, he hoped to find a way to bring together progressive-minded monks and laypeople from many nations who were prepared to commit themselves to a Buddhist mission to the world. It would be the conversion of the Christian West that would facilitate the thorough revitalization of Buddhism in East Asia and the shaping of a global Buddhist culture in which the enlightenment of every living being would be possible.[1]

Yet except for his brief visits to Taiwan and Japan in 1917, it was not until after 1923 that the Chinese master had any concrete oppor-

number of controversial initiatives. Many Chinese revered him as one who truly understood the Dharma and lived in harmony with the Dao. Some thought him an exemplary leader whose mission contributed not only to the vitality of the Buddhist community but to the nation's cause in years of crisis. Others, both inside and outside of the Chinese sangha, questioned the purity of his motives and faulted him for pride and self-interest. Many conservative leaders within the monastic community did not like his humanist leanings and distrusted his utopian visions for a reorganized religious community. Thus Welch is correct in stating that the majority of Chinese Buddhists in Taixu's time felt considerable ambivalence about him:

> They were pleased that one of their own had managed to become so famous, and they acknowledged the value of some of his ideas, but he did not correspond to their concept of what a monk ought to be. He seemed to them to talk about Buddhism more than he practiced it. The monks they most respected—Xuyun, Yinguang, Dixian, Hongyi, Laiguo, Tanxu—were persons for whom practice was of the essence, who remained aloof from the world rather than seeking for status in it, who wanted to restore Buddhism to what it had been rather than make it into something new. They feared that, if it were made into something new as Taixu seemed to be proposing, it would no longer be Buddhism.[116]

Making Chinese Buddhism into "something new" was at the heart of Taixu's career. When the reformer spoke of a "new Buddhism," "new monks," and a "new global culture," many naturally wanted to cling to the old and familiar. Yet Taixu believed that the scientific revolution had redefined the context for religious commitment in the modern era. Chinese Buddhists, he argued, could not simply "go back" to revalorize the common practices of the past; preaching the Dharma effectively in the future would require something more. Going boldly forward naturally meant reaching back to recover the courageous and caring spirit of the one who originally discovered the Dharma in our age, but it simultaneously meant change and adaptation to a new and evolving social world.

CHAPTER 4

# MAHĀYĀNA AND THE MODERN WORLD

Yu-yue Tsu has asserted that the first phase of the revival of Chinese Buddhism that began during the final years of the Manchu dynasty was primarily political rather than spiritual in nature. That is, the most important attempts to reform and reenliven the Chinese Buddhist community during the waning years of the Qing and the initial years of the Republican period were predominantly organizational in character.[1] Deeply troubled about Buddhism's precarious position within Chinese society, members of the sangha as well as laity pondered how to reorganize their religious community in order to respond more effectively to changing circumstances. They were concerned about both negative external perceptions of their tradition and internal Buddhist problems. Neither, they realized, would be easy to address. Many intellectuals and ordinary citizens alike saw no relationship between the practice of Buddhism and efforts to remake and strengthen the nation. In addition, the sangha seemed helpless to deal with the debilitating issues of regionalism, factionalism, and the erosion of lay support caused by the large numbers of monks seeking personal gain by performing rites for the dead.[2]

The principal reason for the failure of all the efforts in the first organizational phase of the Buddhist revival in the Republican period, Tsu concluded, was the obvious need for a prior spiritual reawak-

ening within the whole Chinese Buddhist community. What was required was the emergence of competent, consistent, and challenging visionary and ethical leadership. Writing in 1921, Tsu commented:

> The failure of the first wave of Buddhist revival to achieve spiritual results was in large measure due to the lack of a truly great spiritual leader. Now such a leader seems to have appeared in the person of Taixu fashi [Dharma Master Taixu], a monk of great learning and saintly character, and with his appearance has commenced the second wave of Buddhist revival. As the first was political in nature, the second is essentially spiritual. A genuine desire to reform monasticism, to reconstruct Buddhist theology according to modern philosophy, and to promote human welfare on the basis of the teachings of Buddha is the dominant note.[3]

Although Tsu's estimation of Taixu's role as the sole catalyst for a "second wave" of the Buddhist revival is overstated, the Chinese reformer did make an incomparable contribution to the revitalization of the Buddhist community in the Republican period. He did so by trying to relate Mahāyāna Buddhism to life in a new China, and by offering an engaging description of the bodhisattva's path in the twentieth century—a modernist, social-activist portrayal that some judged to be, according to traditional standards, a betrayal of Buddhism. Yet it was clearly a portrayal to which many sincere Chinese Buddhists rallied, and one in which many in the People's Republic of China, in Taiwan, and elsewhere continue to find hope.

Taixu conceived of his role as that of an interpreter of the ancient spiritual truths of Buddhism and expositor of their modern application. In that role, he expressed his concerns about the need for safeguarding religious freedom and raising Buddhist standards. Therefore, as Taixu claimed at Eight Fingers' funeral in 1912, he was strategically committed to advancing three "revolutions" within his religious community. With regard to an "organizational revolution," as we have seen, Taixu was a tireless theoretician, if not always an accomplished master at implementation. Concerning the sangha's needed "economic revolution," he sought to ensure the long-term financial stability of institutional Buddhism by calling for productive work by monks and closer ties to the growing number of educated laity.



Through an "intellectual revolution," the reformer hoped that Buddhists could learn to express the Dharma in ways that were inspired by scripture, faithful to the original spirit of Śākyamuni, and appropriate for the time.[4]

What China and the world needed most, Taixu asserted, was a revitalized Buddhist community intent on attaining enlightenment, invigorated by modern educational reforms, and involved in compassionate service in the ways of a true bodhisattva. As Frank Millican commented in 1923:

> At this time of general intellectual awakening and mingling of the social, political, and religious systems of the world, Buddhist thought in China is hidden in classical books, many of which are not easily available to the reading public. It is also truly bound by an ancient and stilted literary style which only expert scholars of Buddhism are able to read understandingly. The situation is even worse than that of Christianity in Europe before the Bible was printed in the vernacular. And, doubtless, history, as well as modern tendencies to discard or neglect anything that is not provided in convenient form, have forced upon Taixu and modern devotees of Buddhism the conviction that, if Buddhism is to survive, it must be restated not only in language which the ordinary scholar can readily understand but also in terms familiar to the modern mind.[5]

Accordingly, Taixu sought to restate Chinese Buddhism by emphasizing a particular form of Buddhist piety that he judged to be especially relevant to the modern world. This was a form of piety with elements that were certainly not without precedent in the history of Chinese Buddhism, but one that was given especially sharp focus in Taixu's life and work. As an ethical pietist, his basic understanding of his spiritual tradition tended to revolve around social responsibility. He was concerned that Mahāyāna Buddhism address the unique ills of the present age and engage in the transformation of this world into a pure land.

A conceptual revolution appeared crucial from Taixu's perspective because human thought patterns were intrinsically related to human actions. Commenting on the consequences of incorrect assumptions and perceptions for moral responsibility, he once observed:

the Republican period. That aim is complicated by the very size of the written record. The Chinese master was a popular lecturer and prolific writer who wrote an incredible number of books and essays.[8] Although he was clearly not the systematic expositor of doctrine that his most gifted student and biographer Yinshun eventually became, Taixu was certainly more than an activist "pamphleteer," as he has been called.[9] Indeed, his way of presenting both the theoretical and practical dimensions of the bodhisattva path set a pattern that became widely influential. Thus I highlight only some of the major themes in Taixu's reformist mission. My goal is not to offer a comprehensive account of Taixu's writings in relation to the three revolutions in organization, economy, and thought that he called for at Eight Fingers' funeral, but simply to characterize the direction and unique thrust of his teachings as he sought to help his co-religionists answer a persistent question of the day: Will Buddhism wither away in China or "will the religion of the Enlightened One that now flickers behind the walls of lonely cloisters and monkish cells flame forth again as the Light of Asia?"[10]

In view of the familiar appellation for Śākyamuni of "the Great Physician," I focus in this chapter on Taixu's own diagnoses of the primary "diseases" afflicting modern civilization, and on the life-saving first aid that he proposed—namely, "a Buddhism for human life." As Taixu once remarked, "The Buddha is called the Great Lord of Healing *(da yi wang)*. His Dharma heals the sick minds of this world, and the basic meaning of 'to save' *(ji)* is 'to heal' *(yi)*."[11] Like physicians who diagnose physical illnesses, Taixu offered his own assessments of contemporary forms of spiritual suffering that continue to stand in opposition to Buddhist images of the enlightened life. And just as doctors prescribe treatments and lifestyle regimens that can effectively restore the health of patients with serious diseases, so Taixu confidently offered a restated, modern form of Buddhism as the world's only hope for a more just and peaceful future. Indeed, in sharp contrast to the troubled, self-centered, and self-destructive society that he observed around him, the reformer spoke optimistically of a Buddhism for the living, and of a humanitarian utopia that could actually be realized in this world of time and space. On behalf of a suffering world not even fully conscious of the dimensions of its own suffering, the Buddhist master's goal was to shape a practical discipline of spiritual healing for all beings.



## THE DILEMMAS OF MODERNITY

In his 1935 book, *Foxue de jianglai* (The Future of Buddhism), Taixu observed that modern science has created a radically new context for human existence, one with both beneficial and harmful consequences for many aspects of communal life. On the one hand, because of numerous technological advances, resources that enhance material standards of living have become extraordinarily plentiful throughout much of the world. The Industrial Revolution has led to a restructuring of economies that has permitted most people and communities to enjoy material advantages undreamed of a century before. On the other hand, Taixu asserted, this "blessing" has also become a terrible curse. Although from a material standpoint modern science may have made life "easier," it has simultaneously served to undermine traditional morality and produced chaos. As Taixu remarked,

> From now on, the lives of human beings will be naturally very rich in material things. This is because through scientific progress we are discovering an unlimited hidden treasury of natural resources for living. At the same time, by using scientific tools and methods we will continue to advance and strive for further progress. With regard to improving people's living standards, the significance and contribution of these tools and methods will be great.
>
> We know that the special gifts that science has bestowed on the lives of human beings can be said to be considerable. However, when the impact of science on human morality is carefully examined, it has not had a beneficial affect. In fact, not only has science not had a positive influence, but in the past few decades moral principles that have been established on a philosophical basis have undergone an increasingly critical attack from science and indeed have lost their foundation. [Furthermore,] moral principles that have been established on a religious basis of divine authority have also been overturned. Because of these

developments, throughout the world the central point of orientation for moral behavior has been completely lost.

With regard to the relation of science to morality, then, does it or does it not have a beneficial affect? From these developments we can fully understand [the correct answer]. As a result of scientific advances, our lives are becoming materially more prosperous each day, while simultaneously our consumer desires also increase. We are utilizing the knowledge and tools of science to the fullest extent in order to exploit the development of natural resources—what may be called the subduing of nature. Therefore while our technological capabilities are rapidly increasing, conflicts sparked by our ever-rising consumer desires and powers are also developing into serious crises unprecedented in history. Ours is becoming an age of intractable problems for which there will be no easy solutions.[12]

In the modern world of science, the failure of religious or theological ethical systems to provide adequate moral guidance, Taixu observed, may be understood by recognizing their weak and obsolete cornerstone. This foundational delusion may be identified as the belief that human beings are "children of the gods." All forms of traditional theistic systems, according to Taixu, transmit behavioral norms that are not established on any humanistic basis. The origins of their behavioral paradigms are clear: they originate from beyond the time and space continuum of human existence within this world. Historically, the Buddhist master admitted, theological ethics of this type have played an important part in the evolution of human society. In many cases in the past—where the belief in deities and their powers of retribution and blessing could be sustained—the attempts of various individuals and groups either to imitate the moral actions of their gods or to obey faithfully their divine commandments have contributed to creative and harmonious social orders. Throughout recorded history, many deeply religious persons, seeking earthly and paradisaical rewards and fearing eternal punishments, have sincerely tried to adhere to their society's sanctioned modes of behavior in both their private and public lives. However, in the contemporary world, Taixu stated, primitive theistic beliefs no longer carry any real force. Modern science has effectively swept away all god-language by correctly identifying it as a form of mere wish-fulfillment, as an ultimately debilitating self-deception. Therefore, Taixu concluded, any ethic for the present or future that is established on the injunctions, prohibitions, or expectations of heavenly deities has been totally undermined by science.



Philosophically derived ethical principles have enjoyed no more success. The primary reason for this, Taixu commented, is that all philosophical systems are based on the elaboration of particular human ideas and ideals that are inevitably in competition with other ideas and ideals. Because their origin lies fully within the realm of time and space, they have not been able to motivate and inspire all people to reach common understandings of the meaning of life and death—or to reach agreement on appropriate modes of action within community. In sum, philosophical principles are intrinsically relative and just as ineffective as theological principles when it comes to providing a viable foundation for a truly universal ethic in an age of modern science. Our basic dilemma, declared Taixu, is simply this: "Humanity has completely lost the centerpoint for morality."[13]

This fact has dangerous implications for the entire human community, claimed the Buddhist master, because scientific technology, however beneficial, is unmistakably related to the increasingly destructive spirit of consumerism that afflicts modern societies. That is to say, as human lives improve materially, human desires are fueled for ever greater pleasurable enhancements. Eventually, Taixu suggested, not only will the unequal distribution of goods become a volatile issue, but the capabilities of modern technology will not be able to keep pace with the perpetually increasing material desires of human beings. The consequence will be an unprecedented explosion of violence between the rich and poor—namely, between the privileged, who have both material goods and the power to control their distribution, and marginalized peoples who have neither goods nor power.

In the first two decades of the twentieth century, averred Taixu, the world witnessed the bloody prelude to that impending struggle. World War I should be seen as the opening drama in a modern social cataclysm. The lives and well-being of our ancient ancestors were

largely threatened by things and events in the natural world: poisonous snakes, carnivorous animals, floods, and other natural calamities. Yet these external threats now pale in comparison to those presented by the development of increasingly unrestrained and self-centered minds. Science may have diminished most external threats in nature, but it has also engendered new manifestations of internal threats latent in the human personality. Indeed, because the foundations for all religious and philosophical ethical systems have been eroded while technological advances have increased the desires for material goods, individual people consider only themselves and seek only to satisfy their own instinctive cravings. At times, many are quite willing to employ force to achieve their selfish aims, assaulting and killing one another in the process. "In the confrontation between nations, races, and socio-economic classes," the reformer observed, "each one exposes to the fullest extent the selfishness of their animal desires."[14] In sum, he concluded, the greatest contemporary threats to human life are "self-generated."

Taixu further charged that the egocentric mentality that leads to social inequalities and violence may be identified as the byproduct of a type of culture that has developed uniquely in the modern West. The reformer argued repeatedly that although western culture has made the greatest progress in improved standards of living in the material sense, it has failed miserably in the development of the moral life. Western culture is essentially "a culture of making and using tools," he asserted, one that has effectively raised expectations and desires for material possessions while suppressing human drives toward realization of the common good.[15]

Taixu was not an unsophisticated opponent of western science and technology. Nevertheless, his descriptions of the human condition in the modern world are reminiscent in many respects of Max Weber's discussion of the contemporary capitalist's "iron cage" of economic compulsion.[16] For example, addressing his Paris audience in 1928, Taixu remarked:

> Scientific discoveries have brought about a certain doubt as to religious evidence. The old gods and religions seem to have been shaken in the wind of science, and religious doctrines have no longer any defense, and the world at large seems to be handed over to the tyranny of the machine and all those monstrous powers to which science has given birth.[17]



Echoing this same theme in 1940, when visiting India, the reformer delineated three great historic cultures: those of India, China, and the Euro–North American West. Contrasting the three while pointing to the need for a cultural synthesis, he commented:

> You may take the cultures of the world and divide them into three kinds. The first is a culture that cultivates a holy and pure inner mind; the second, one that improves human relations; and the third, one that manages material capabilities. Developing respectively from these three types are Indian culture, Chinese culture, and Western culture. In the past, China and India have made enormous contributions to the world. However, now both are being influenced by the West. On the unfortunate path taken by Western culture, human beings and material things are considered to be of equal worth. Therefore the world's crises deepen every day. I hope that in the future we will not lean to any one extreme. Material resources must be developed while at the same time our spirits are cultivated and ethics emphasized.[18]

As these remarks suggest, according to Taixu, any remedy for this fundamental crisis of the modern world must be based on a careful examination of the relation between religion and culture. It is the development of culture that has distinguished the human species from the rest of the animal kingdom and marked its evolutionary transformation from a primitive to a civilized state. Religion, philosophy, government, economics, science, literature, the fine arts—all are important aspects of culture. However, religion is its most determinative single dimension, Taixu asserted. Religion represents a people's sense of ultimate meaning and value; it produces patterns of relationships and creates community.

In some of his writings, such as *Foxue de jianglai,* Taixu identified not three but four basic types of religio-cultural perspective. First there are cultures in which people seek primarily to alter the exter-

nal world—that is, to refashion their environment to create a more conducive context for human satisfaction and fulfillment. A second type of culture exhibits the opposite tendency, focusing not on external realities but on each person's inner spiritual nature. In such cultures, Taixu wrote, when people encounter inevitable hardships and perplexities, they characteristically seek to adjust not their external circumstances but, through concentrated introspection, their personal religio-philosophical worldview. The third type of culture is one in which people seek to change neither the external world nor their internal stance, but to remain in a state of utter passivity and nonassertive harmony with all things. Resignation rather than any kind of transformation characterizes this kind of culture.

A fourth type provides a totally different cultural ethos. In this most important type—to which societies shaped by Mahāyāna Buddhism belong—people seek fulfillment and enlightenment both by developing and adjusting the character of their own inner life and, simultaneously, by working to effect beneficial changes in the external world. As Taixu himself put it, "Such cultures plan to transform completely both internal and external realities."[19] If the dilemmas of the twentieth century are to be successfully addressed, he concluded, only such a religio-philosophical perspective will suffice.

Beyond the need for this fourth type of culture, a globalized community in crisis requires a religious faith that enables people to transcend the prejudices of their various local cultures. According to Taixu, such a community needs a truly universal religio-ethical system. Christianity has shaped the highly industrialized culture of Western Europe and the United States. Islam has shaped the Middle Eastern and African cultures, while Hinduism, or Brahmanism, has determined the cultural life of India. Yet of all the religious traditions in the world, he averred, it is Buddhism that has shown the greatest capacity for transcending the powerful ethnocentric particularities of local culture. From its origin on the Indian subcontinent in the sixth century B.C.E., the religion has spread throughout Central, Southeast, and East Asia, and within the last century even to the West. While traditions like Hinduism, Daoism, Confucianism, and Shinto have never



escaped in any substantial way the boundaries of their respective homelands, Buddhism has achieved remarkable success in worldwide mission as a truly universal religion.

Moreover, the reformer emphasized, wherever the Dharma has been faithfully practiced, Buddhism's influence has been dramatically positive in every aspect of human life and achievement, demonstrating its great practical value for the establishment of human community. Such a beneficial influence could not be reasonably shown for Christianity, which, Taixu maintained, is in any case intellectually untenable in the modern world. Therefore, he declared, in selecting and synthesizing the best elements of local cultures to form a new "global culture," Buddhism must be a fundamental component. Without the fusion of eastern and western cultures and the adoption of Buddhism's unique spiritual principles, the consumer-oriented, technological civilization toward which the entire world is rapidly moving will have no foundation except that of an egocentric individualism, no future but competitive struggle and the exercise of power. Buddhism, he proposed, can provide the only basis for "a universal civilization and a universal philosophy" because it teaches that all sentient beings are one and that "all human egos are bound together by bonds of sympathy."[20]

In addition to a religio-cultural perspective that seeks to transform both internal and external realities and a religious tradition capable of transcending local cultures, there is a third requirement for addressing the dilemmas of modernity: namely, a religion fundamentally in harmony with science. On the one hand, Taixu asserted, a careful investigation reveals that "Buddhism is the only religion which does not contradict scientific truth."[21] Everything that modern scientific research has discovered about the complexity and interdependent nature of reality by using both telescopes and microscopes has served only to confirm the religio-philosophical insights found in the Mahāyāna scriptures. On the other hand, he claimed, Buddhist truth is also "unscientific" and not limited to the truths discovered through experimental research. While always in consonance with the insights of science, Dharmic truth transcends and perfectly completes

them. According to Taixu, scientists have not gone far enough in their research into the mysteries of nature. As they proceed, they will be able to verify, yet never disconfirm, the Dharma that the Buddha revealed. As Taixu once put it,

> The scientist claims that scientific knowledge is the whole truth and stops there. In this he resembles the blind man who, after examining the body of an elephant, declared the ear to be a fan and the tail a broom. If we compare the elephant and all the organs of its body to the universe, then the blind man may be compared to the scientist who has never realized an absolute, universal perception of the universe. Scientific methods can only corroborate the Buddhist doctrine; they can never advance beyond it. . . .
>
> Science, therefore, can never be the main support of Buddhism, although it may act as a valuable auxiliary and much may be expected from uniting the two methods of investigation. . . . The scientist, however, is constantly trying to improve his instruments rather than to perfect his inner vision. This is like depending on our bodily senses. The main principles of the Buddhist doctrine, therefore, are "unscientific" and sweep away all the false conclusions at which science has arrived. Otherwise, it would be impossible to overcome ignorance and attain enlightenment.
>
> If life, however, were founded on the six pāramitās—the six perfect virtues of the bodhisattvas—and these in turn were realized to be in accordance with scientific research, then we might hope to enter into the pure realms of Buddha and emerge from the chaos of fire and brimstone into which we have fallen.[22]

Summarizing elsewhere this same dialectical perspective on science and scientists, Taixu stated:

> Those who criticize science say that science is responsible for the weapons of warfare and therefore is harmful. Those who praise science point to the great material achievements of modern civilization which benefit mankind. We need not join the controversy, although those who have gone through the World War cannot be blind to some truth underlying this criticism. We should note, however, that the criticism refers to the fruits of science. Science itself is a method which is beyond criticism. Science is always open-minded, ready to discard what is disproved and to adopt what is verified, in order to reach the truth of reality. However, there is one obstinate superstition among scientists, and that is, they believe this scientific method is the only road for arriving at truth, and fail to realize that the ultimate reality of this universe cannot be penetrated by it.
>
> In general, what is a gain to science is a loss to religion. Those religions with doctrines of gods and souls fundamentally lack the stability of truth and are easily shaken. But Buddhism benefits by the discoveries of science. The more science progresses, the clearer Buddhism becomes, for Buddhism explains the truth concerning the universe. Take an illustration from astronomy. In ancient times, men thought of heaven as above and the earth below; then came Copernicus who taught that the sun was the center of our system. Now we have arrived at the idea that there is no one center anywhere in the astral universe. This supports the Buddhist conception of the great unlimited void, embracing numberless worlds, all interwoven like a spider web. Science helps us to understand Buddhism by offering suitable analogies. But the core of Buddhism science cannot reach, for it has to do with inward illumination, the direct insight into the reality of the universe, an intuitive experience only acquired by oneself, where all logic, analogy, or scientific hypothesis are of no avail. When scientists insist that theirs is the only method of arriving at truth, they remind one of blind men trying to understand an elephant by the sense of touch. They will get partial impressions of the different parts of the animal and what strange impressions as compared with a living elephant as seen by a man with normal eyesight.[23]



Wing-tsit Chan once observed that although Taixu argued vehemently that Buddhism was entirely harmonious with science and that Einstein's theory of relativity confirmed the basic insights of Buddhist idealistic philosophy, actually "Taixu did not know much about science or Einstein."[24] Of course, the extent of the monk's scientific education was limited. Nevertheless, in 1926 Frank Millican commented at length on the reformer's rationale in emphasizing the necessity of developing a "scientific Buddhism":

We shall be prepared to understand why Taixu attempts to associate Buddhism with science rather than with religion. He rejects anything that suggests the supernatural or metaphysical. Science, he observes, sticks close to the facts of experience and thus is in position to have its conclusions constantly checked up by means of further experiments. Buddhism, he claims, has this same scientific approach to the problem of the understanding of the nature of life and of the universe. Yet it is much broader in scope. It goes beyond a study of the physical sciences and includes the science of psychology. Since to Taixu, the Idealist, the universe in its final analysis is of the nature of mind there is no justification for the arbitrary limitation of the field of science to the so-called physical sciences. The scientific method should operate on different levels. There are, first, the so-called physical sciences based on the six senses. Then there is the scientific study of thought processes. Beyond this there is the more profound science of direct intuitive acquaintance or enlightenment known only to a few choice souls who have seen through the nature of existence and have come to a consciousness of reality beyond all the illusions and distractions of life. This experience is attained by means of quiet abstraction and intuitive response to the universe. The Buddhist Hall of Meditation is the laboratory for this more advanced type of scientific research. And the materials for the experiment are none other than one's own bodily senses and his mind. . . .

This more comprehensive view of science includes three stages. The first is a direct conscious experience of the things of our environment *(bianjue)*. The second is an understanding of the law which operates in our environment—the law *(lüfa)* of growth and decay and all the changes that take place in the phenomenal world. The third is the final stage of harmony in which one sees beyond the changing phenomena of existence and becomes conscious of reality—the reality in which there are no distinctions as this and that, good and evil, self and non-self. This final stage—which is salvation—in which the person has come to understand the three above stages of life is Taixu's goal for life. This stage of perfect Buddhahood, he tells us, involves a belief in Buddha, the Law, and the Order; it involves true faith and a belief in the law of cause and effect. It further involves conformity to the ten rules of good conduct and the ability to rise above the things of desire which are the cause of suffering.[25]



## A BUDDHISM FOR HUMAN LIFE

Taixu located the convergence of the three religio-cultural elements required for addressing the contemporary crisis—namely, a tradition that transforms both the self and the world, that transcends local culture, and that is in harmony with science—in what he called a "Buddhism for human life," or "Buddhism for the living" *(rensheng fojiao)*. This was a theme that Taixu first began to explore in a 1928 lecture in Shanghai, and it was one that he continued to detail until his final lecture on the subject in Zhenjiang in August 1946.[26] As Hong Jinlian has remarked, this seminal concept is rooted in the various influences of late Qing modernism, Tiantai philosophy, Chan iconoclasm, and western scientific optimism.[27] On the one hand, in propagating a Buddhism for human life, Taixu was influenced by aspects of western humanism that were sweeping Asia and by the radical enthusiasm of the reformers of the New Culture Movement. In this sense he was a Chinese intellectual of his times, urging the nation to embrace the challenge of building a new country with new values within a new world order. In fact, he presented his "Buddhism for human life" as a complement to and perfection of Sun Yat-sen's form of nationalism. Thus, just as political leaders were taking the best of China's five-thousand-year-old culture and blending it with the best of western scientific culture to produce a "three-principles-of-the-people culture" *(sanmin zhuyi de wenhua)*, so Mahāyāna Buddhists were establishing connections between the best results of that process and the virtuous conduct of the first ten grades of bodhisattva faith *(shi xin wei)* in order to establish a practical Buddhism for the living.[28] On occasion, Taixu even referred to his own efforts in terminology that paralleled Sun's *sanmin zhuyi*, advocating a "three-principled Buddhism" *(sanfo zhuyi)* that entailed an ideal sangha of Dharma teachers *(foseng zhuyi)*, an ideal lay Buddhist order of active bodhisattvas *(fohua zhuyi)*, and a national culture infused with the spirit of Mahāyāna Buddhism and reaching out to the entire world *(foguo zhuyi)*.[29]

On the other hand, although external influences must be acknowledged, the sources of Taixu's position were profoundly Buddhist. Taixu wanted to focus attention on classic, if neglected, Mahāyāna themes about the nature of the truly enlightened life. Many

interpreters have failed to recognize this fact in explaining Taixu's teachings, as Hong has noted:

> Most people give greater attention to the fact that Taixu was following secular responses [to events of his time] and ignore the ultimately scriptural ideals of his Buddhism for human life. Because of this fact, most people think that the main point of his "Buddhism for human life" was a response to the conflict with the cultural ideals of Confucianism, or was merely blending harmoniously together the new knowledge of the world. That is to say, it represented a secularization [of Buddhism] and that's all. As Yinshun remarks in his article, "On Entering the World and Buddhism," "most people do not see the [true] sources of Taixu's Buddhism and think it reflects only popular trends and merely a kind of secularization, with the result that the meaning of essential Buddhism does not clearly present itself before the student."[30]

Indeed, Taixu did not aim to present a watered-down, secularized version of Buddhism but to defend and renew the religion by recalling the spiritual foundations on which the entire structure was built.

In so doing, Taixu firmly rejected what he considered to be distorted interpretations of the religious tradition by non-Buddhists. While obviously not uncritical of many within his own religious community, the reformer could not permit to go unchallenged the kind of destructively dismissive charges expressed by Confucianist critics such as Liang Shuming (1893–1988). Once a lay devotee himself, Liang asserted that Buddhism's escapist mentality was wholly inappropriate for twentieth-century China and that those who were trying to reform and revive the religion were only taking advantage of difficult times for selfish ends.[31] In his noted 1922 work, *Dong Xi wenhua ji qi zhexue* (Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies), Liang remarked that he had read some of Taixu's reformist essays in *Haichao yin* and had discussed the matter with the respected classical scholar Zhang Taiyan. Yet Liang's ultimately negative judgment of Buddhism was unequivocal:

> Many Buddhist scholars say that a Buddhist revival can bring relief to present human suffering and can cause China to experience a great peace without disorder. Yet I dare to say to everyone, if there is a revival of Buddhism, then China's disorders will be without end. . . . Confucianism and Buddhism are exact opposites. The former talks about life in the present world and does not discuss things outside of it. The latter only talks about things outside the present world and not life within it. Because of this, Buddhism in our time has no possibility of any great activity [within society], and those who want to encourage such activity have no alternative but to alter the religion's original appearance. So we can remember the article in *Haichao yin* in which the monk Taixu takes as his theme the two vehicles [which ensure rebirth in the world] of humans and devas in order to extend the scope of Buddhism to life in the present world. . . . Yet in summary, Buddhism is basically useless in this world. If in order to make use of it one has to transform Buddhism's basic appearance, then why even waste time on it? I oppose the promotion of Buddhism and I oppose the reformation of Buddhism.[32]



Taixu responded that Liang Shuming, like many others who denounced Buddhism, had simply failed to understand the religion. Moreover, Taixu wrote, although Liang had placed his faith in Confucianism, informed and courageous people actually capable of responding to China's deepening modern crisis "were not being produced through the study of Confucianism but only through the study of Buddhism."[33] What such critics had failed to grasp, he concluded, was the fundamental link in Mahāyāna doctrine between wisdom and compassion—albeit a link not always evident in daily practice. What Liang and others had failed to comprehend was the broad scope of the Dharma and the foundation of moral instruction common to all paths and levels of spiritual attainment.

In formulating his argument, Taixu sought to explain the close relationship between what he termed a "Buddhism for human life" and the meritorious precepts of the Dharma common to the "five vehicles" of Buddhism. These five vehicles *(wu sheng)* can be considered methods, or conveyances, for rebirth among human or divine beings. On the basis of spiritual attainment, one may be reborn in the world of humans, in a pleasurable heavenly realm, among the śrāvakas pursuing arhatship, among the ascetic and self-taught pratyekabuddhas, or among the buddhas and bodhisattvas. According to Taixu, although Buddhism has delineated the Dharma common to the final

three vehicles (i.e., the śrāvaka, pratyekabuddha, and bodhisattva vehicles) as well as the Dharma unique to the final vehicle (i.e., that of the bodhisattvas), all advanced, world-transcending disciplines are grounded in norms or rules that all five vehicles have in common—namely, the noble eightfold path, the five precepts, the ten good deeds, and so forth. Thus these fundamental disciplines are not merely a set of preliminary and possibly dispensable exercises, nor is the practice of the moral precepts only an initial step for beginners along the way.

Indeed, although the practices that lead to supreme enlightenment far exceed in number and scope those common to the five vehicles, they do not transcend the Buddha's basic instructions in the sense of rendering them irrelevant. The foundational precepts of the religion are interconnected with all others and remain at the heart of the path for all bodhisattvas, whether they are accomplished or only just beginning to glimpse the meaning of their great vows. As Taixu put it,

> The reason that common people criticize Buddhism as having nothing to do with human life or ethics is because they know only about the ways of escaping the world according to the Dharma of the three vehicles, and they do not understand the significance of the Mahāyāna teachings and the Dharma common to the five vehicles. Actually basic for Buddhism are the [common] teachings of the five vehicles, which explain human morality and instruct humans how to cultivate good thoughts and actions.[34]

Yinshun wrote about Taixu's approach:

> Feeling the narrowness and poverty of the present decline of Chinese Buddhism, Venerable Master Taixu decided to use the "Dharma common to the Five Vehicles," the "Dharma common to the Three Vehicles," and the "distinctive Dharma of the Great Vehicle" to embrace all Buddhist teachings. . . . [He] gave high praise to the complete Buddhist teachings, namely, that "having merits and virtues, people can be assured of being born as human or heavenly beings; having wisdom, they can become śrāvakas or pratyekabuddhas. All of these people must rely on all the vinayas, sūtras, and śāstras; if only a part of the teachings are utilized, one cannot attain enlightenment." These complete Buddhist teachings are worthy of being actively proclaimed.
>
> When the Tathāgata explained the Dharma, he always began by teaching the "proper method"—giving, keeping the precepts, and abandoning desire in order to be reborn in heaven (concentration). Then, to those who might be able to renounce the world, he taught a world-transcending doctrine. Because the emphasis of the Buddhist teachings is on transcending the world, those who compiled the sūtras always skipped over the Buddha's "proper method." The ancient Abhidharma texts began with the five precepts, but the later Abhidharma texts eliminated them. . . . [Yet] with regard to this, Venerable Master Taixu, penetrating deeply into the Buddha Vehicle with exceptional insight, revealed the real purpose of the Tathāgata's appearing in this world—to teach people to enter the Buddha-way from human lives. Thus, the method for beginners emphasizes both practicing the ten good deeds (without abandoning the worldly affairs of daily life) and following the right deeds of the Human Vehicle to enter the Buddha Vehicle, instead of emphasizing practices of renunciation such as mindfulness of death.
>
> Using right deeds to move from the Human Vehicle toward the Buddha-way rests on gathering the merits of the Dharma common to the Five Vehicles and the Three Vehicles. . . . According to the complete Buddhist teachings as determined and revealed by Venerable Master Taixu, all these teachings are simply methods for becoming a buddha. This approach not only connects the three levels of the Dharma common to the Five Vehicles, the Dharma common to the Three Vehicles, and the distinctive Dharma of the Great Vehicle, it also connects the teachings belonging to the regular way and the skillful way. This approach reveals the entire sequence of the Buddha-way, and leads one to the supreme buddha realm.[35]

Not only is Buddhism's emphasis on right action in the world so fundamental, Taixu pointed out, but the literature of Mahāyāna Buddhism is replete with heroic descriptions of the bodhisattva's selfless actions on behalf of others. In the *Weimojie suoshuo jing* (Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra), for example, one who is a true bodhisattva "views things as impermanent, but does not neglect to cultivate the roots of goodness," "views the world as marked with suffering, but does not

hate to be born and die in it," "sees that there is no permanent ego, but is tireless in instructing others," "sees that there is no birth, yet takes on the form of birth in order to share the burdens of others," "embraces the view of emptiness and nothingness, yet does not discard one's great pity."[36] Of course, this "pity" or "compassion" *(ci)*, Taixu stressed, does not mean "love" *(ai)* as the term is commonly employed in the western religious traditions. "Love" in this sense, he charged, is defined in relation to the erroneous concepts of "self" and "others." Indeed, it can be shown that "loving" actions are intrinsically directed toward benefiting the self, even when their ostensible goal is to help others. In contrast, Taixu wrote,

> From the Buddhist perspective, love comes from the causal interrelationship of all things. Therefore, in keeping with Buddhist principles, it is not called "love" but is referred to as "great compassion." Seeing the suffering of all living beings, in his great compassion the Buddha made up his mind to relieve this suffering. This cannot be compared to the kind of covetous love that arises from promoting oneself. For this reason it is a great compassion that is pure and good and without a trace of evil. This kind of great love is the mother of all the buddhas and the source of all Buddhist truth.[37]

Not understanding the great compassion of a bodhisattva, averred Taixu, Liang Shuming and others have mistakenly concluded that Buddhism has no beneficial function in the modern world. Yet, quite to the contrary, given the extent of human suffering and the potentially disastrous possibilities for evil in the twentieth century and beyond, ours is "the most appropriate age ever for proclaiming the Buddhist Dharma."[38]

In further explicating his use of the innovative term "a Buddhism for human life," Taixu commented that it is necessary to recognize Buddhism's two basic principles for mission: to state the truth and to respond to the needs of sentient beings. "Without the truth," he stated, "Buddhism loses its substance *(ti)*; without responding to need, it loses its function *(yong)*."[39] Practitioners must comprehend both the essence of Buddhist teaching as well as the variety of doctrinal and ritual expressions that have developed as Buddhists have responded to



changing human needs and circumstances. Thus, students of the religion must comprehend the similarities and differences between the kind of anti-Brahmanistic Nikāya Buddhism that developed in India and Southeast Asia and the kind of Mahāyāna Buddhism that flourished in Central and East Asia. In short, Chinese Buddhists must be aware that they are transmitting an ancient and timeless religious message that transcends culture, while simultaneously understanding how their particular culture has affected both various elements of monastic living and the methods and metaphors for communicating the Dharma within schools as different as Tiantai, Chan, Zhenyan, and Pure Land.

According to Taixu, because Buddhists have historically maintained this dual concern for universal truth and human need in different mission contexts, they are uniquely prepared to contribute to the global culture emerging in the twentieth century. The globalization process is creating a synthetic, international culture in which the special characteristics of different peoples are being selectively appropriated according to three interrelated standards: a realistic perspective on human nature, a scientific perspective on truth and falsehood, and a "communitarian" perspective on the social order.[40] A reformed, modern expression of Mahāyāna Buddhism, he declared, stands in a unique relationship to that potential cultural synthesis because it is in fact in harmony with all three.

Moreover, Taixu claimed, a "Buddhism for human life" requires that all religious practices that have to do with gods and ghosts be immediately discontinued. These are superstitious activities incompatible with the highest truths of Mahāyāna. According to popular misconceptions, Buddhism is concerned primarily with death and the travails of souls in hell. Though such a view does recognize that the character of one's life in this world is important—if only because the character of one's afterlife depends on it—in its weighted attention to the dead it disregards the conditions for life in this world and does not penetrate to Mahāyāna's ultimate views about nirvāṇa and saṃsāra. As Taixu explained it,

> So-called death is actually a part of life. Only when we are able to understand life will we be able to understand death. On the contrary, if we

> only understand death, not only will we not understand life, we will not really understand death. Therefore, in view of negative interpretations of Buddhism, we can dispense with the previous inferior practices of the religion as we go about improving actual human life.[41]

Therefore, rather than focusing on rites for the dead, all practitioners should energetically enter upon the bodhisattva's ten periods, or stages, of development *(shi zhu)* and the ten activities required for the universal welfare of others *(shi xing)*.

Taixu knew that it would be difficult to overcome popular misunderstandings of Chinese Buddhism and disassociate the religion itself from the worship of deities and spirits. Hence he believed that four distinct elements would have to converge in the lives of those committed to religious reform:

> First, on the basis of his own life, he knew that *genuine religious conversion experiences* would shatter all superficial perspectives on reality and lead individuals to take up the disciplines of a religious path. These conversion experiences would destroy the illusion of self and others and establish a true basis for community.
>
> Second, integral to and proceeding from these religious experiences, *great vows to engage in compassionate service within the world* were necessary. If Buddhism involved only extraordinary transcendental experiences and sanctioned a withdrawal from society rather than an engagement with it, then the religion could not long survive in a modern society.
>
> Third, Buddhist reform required those who, beyond extraordinary life-changing experiences, had *practical knowledge of how to accomplish things in the everyday world*. What was needed was a practical sense of how to express spiritual insights in concrete ways that transformed both internal and external realities.
>
> Fourth, *courageous moral actions that were appropriate to the uniquely dangerous circumstances of the age* were essential to reform. Thus a sensitivity to current needs—a sense of "Dharmic timing" as it were—was critical to a revitalized religious community.



Taixu judged that because, historically speaking, successfully adaptive religions had manifested all four of these elements to one degree or another, no effective revival of Buddhism in the modern period would be possible without them.[42]

Rejecting both Confucian humanism and all forms of popular religion that venerated gods or ghosts, Taixu sought to outline a style of moral reasoning appropriate for a modern, socially engaged Buddhist. He realized that many religious people relied on the commandments of deities external to the world, judging actions to be right or wrong because they had been either enjoined or forbidden by a divine power. Others adopted a teleological or utilitarian position, maintaining that moral acts are those that produce the best possible consequences or the greatest happiness in each unique situation. Still others preferred to define moral goodness in terms of one's motivation, intention, or disposition. In this last case, noted Taixu, "all human behavior must be judged by the motives in one's mind. So if that person's mind is good, the person is moral, and if the person's mind is evil, the person is immoral."[43]

Yet all these approaches are clearly inadequate, according to Taixu, so that we need to establish a new standard for judging right and wrong. "One-sided theories" are those that base moral goodness either on simple obedience to one's own set of divine commands (which are often in conflict with other people's divine commands) or on merely human calculations about happy consequences or hidden motivations. Both these types of moral reasoning, he asserted, fail to attend to the great principles of the universe. The great principles of cause and effect, which are the primary subject of Buddhist investigation into the nature of things, provide the only sound and unchanging basis for moral judgment. Grounding his sense of "what ought to be" in the most comprehensive understanding of "what is," Taixu directly related sound moral reasoning to a theory of knowledge. Thus, he claimed,

> Human beings should have two sources for knowledge: scientific and religious. Philosophical knowledge is only an extension of these two and is not independent of them. Scientific knowledge is certainly important,