Reorientating illusory convention in renewing the tradition: Taixu and Fazun's humanistic Buddhism

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I investigate how Taixu 太虛 (1890–1947) and Fazun 法尊 (1902–1980) tackle what I refer to as the problem of conventional reality. It is a problem that thrives on the metaphysical characterization of this-worldly conventionality as a non-existent illusion and the normative prioritization of transcending this-worldly illusions. In exploring their resolution to this problem, I zoom in on Taixu's initiative to build a pure land on Earth and Fazun's cause of institutionalizing the true dharma through Buddhist education. As I will argue, these practitioners reread the twofold truth in Madhyamaka to reorient themselves with illusory conventions, which indicates a performative philosophy of renewing Buddhist norms, especially those related to the Bodhisattva ideal. Instead of creating a rift with the historical past, Taixu and Fazun rearrange the past to reinforce the openness of their tradition. It is through their effort that humanistic Buddhism becomes the modern, new normal.

1. Introduction: the problem of conventional reality and why it matters

In the Madhyamaka theory of twofold truth, sentient beings shall comprehend the illusory and false nature of dependent-arising at the conventional level so as to realize the ultimate truth of emptiness. As the Madhyamaka master Jizang 吉藏 (549–623) once stressed, 'for practitioners with skilful means and wisdom, they come to learn the twofold truth to realize that there is nothing to attain' (若有巧方便慧, 學此二諦, 成無所得).[1] The non-attainability of reality can easily be (mis-)construed as a Buddhist move to reduce this-worldly conventional life to illusory nothingness, which triggers intellectual concerns over nihilism across cultures and traditions.[2] Such a concern discloses what I call the problem of conventional reality. It is a problem that thrives on the metaphysical characterization of conventional reality as a non-existent illusion and the normative prioritization of transcending this-worldly illusions. The problem of conventional reality resurged toward the end of the 1800s, when Buddhist reformers throughout East Asia

strove to make their tradition into a religion compatible with modernity. One of these reformative movements was later known as humanistic Buddhism.

The task of this article is to explore how generations of humanistic Buddhists, like Taixu 太虛 (1890–1947) and Fazun 法尊 (1902–1980), wrestle with this problem and reorient themselves with illusory conventions.[3] Analyzing their effort from the lens of performative philosophy, I aspire to refashion our definition of Buddhist modernization beyond the progress-centred approach.[4] To unpack the problem of conventional reality, I find it helpful to revisit an exchange between Taixu and Liang Shuming 梁漱溟 (1893–1988) in the early 1920s.

As a renowned advocate of modern Confucianism, Liang provided a sharp remark on humanistic Buddhism in his 1921 monograph *Dong-Xi wenhua jiqi zhexue* 東西文化及其哲學 [Eastern-Western Cultures and Their Philosophies]. He wrote:

> Confucianism and Buddhism are opposites: one [Confucianism] focuses on this-worldly life, not other-worldly events; the other [Buddhism] centres on other-worldly events, not this-worldly life. As such, it is hardly possible for Buddhism to become a [socially] engaged movement in modernity. If someone wants to take Buddhism out and make it into a movement, they must alter its authenticity ... In a word, Buddhism cannot be applied to this-worldly reality. Just because people intend to utilize Buddhism, they will alter the authenticity of Buddhism. Then, why must they ravage Buddhism in this manner? I object to the promotion of Buddhism and to the reformation of Buddhism.

> 孔與佛恰好相反: 一個是專談現世生活, 不談現實生活以外的事; 一個是專談現世生活以外的事, 不談現世生活. 這樣, 就致佛教在現代很沒有多大活動的可能, 在想把佛教抬出來活動的人, 便不得不謀變更其原來面目 ... 總而言之, 佛教是根本不能拉到現世來用的; 若因為要拉他來用而改換他的本來面目, 則又何苦如此糟蹋佛教? 我反對佛教的倡導, 並反對佛教的改造.[5]

Two points are underscored in this excerpt: first, Buddhism is an other-worldly centred teaching inapplicable to Chinese modernity; and second, if monastics and lay followers want to refashion Buddhism into a socially engaged movement, their practice will distort the authentic norms – as the standard way of acting – of the Buddhist tradition.

Notably, Liang made this remark not due to a lack of Buddhist knowledge.[6] Having lived through the unsuccessful reforms of the republican government and the subsequent warlord period (1912–1928) in China, Liang was disenchanted by Western modernity, especially its glorification of egocentric desires to foment competition, conflicts, and wars.[7] His disillusionment led him to rediscover Buddhism.[8] However, as Liang improved his knowledge of Buddhism, he became convinced that, as an other-worldly centred teaching, it could not enable the Chinese to tackle this-worldly calamities.[9] Reintroducing Confucianism as a philosophy of life, Liang promulgated in the afore-mentioned monograph that, in its modernization, China should first imitate Western cultures to develop science and technology and then enact Confucianism to remedy the social crisis caused by Western egocentrism, before embracing Buddhism.[10] Thus, he deemed the life attitude of Buddhism to be too 'premature' (*zaoshu* 早熟) and 'untimely' (*buheshiyi* 不合時宜) for China and its people.[11]

Liang's personal trajectory alluded to a lived experience shared by intellectuals in the early 1920s. That was why, just a couple of months after Liang released his monograph, Taixu acquired a copy and devoured it overnight. His book review was later published in the journal *Haichaoyin* 海潮音 [Sound of the Sea Tide]. In this

review, Taixu treasured Liang's work as 'the first and foremost masterpiece since the New Culture Movement' (新文化運動以來第一傑作).[12] Impressed by Liang's analysis, Taixu concurred with Liang's reflection on Western modernity and reappraisal of Chinese cultures.[13] This Buddhist master also echoed Liang's call for fostering peace and happiness in this-worldly life.[14] Moreover, Taixu complimented Liang's knowledge of Buddhist thought, because Liang countered the common stereotypes of Buddhism as superstitious practices.[15] Nonetheless, Taixu admonished people against the tendency to misrepresent Buddhism as a nihilistic lifestyle.[16] He remained confident about the proposal of 'Buddhicizing' (*fohua* 佛化) the world, insofar as Buddhism could directly alleviate the crisis of Western modernity and advance this-worldly well-being.[17] For Taixu, Buddhist teaching allowed for a possibility of ending suffering in the this-worldly realm, a possibility that he envisioned to be the 'Buddhist theory of human life' (佛教人生學).[18]

This exchange between Liang and Taixu epitomizes how the problem of conventional reality can obstruct the project of humanistic Buddhism. More specifically, this problem presents two sets of intertwined questions to these Buddhist reformers. The first set of questions revolves around the philosophical, doctrinal understanding of conventional reality. What is this conventional reality of human life? How and why is it conspicuously illusory but nonetheless meaningful and, consequently, cannot be done away with? The second set of questions centres on the issue of authentic norms. Should Buddhists engage with this-worldly concerns in conventional reality? If they do, is their practice still consistent with the authentic norms of Buddhism? In this article, I explore how generations of humanistic Buddhists, like Taixu and Fazun, wrestle with the problem of conventional reality.[19] Due to the limited space, I confine my scope to these two monastics, partly because their reimagination of monastic identity distinguishes them from both modern Confucians and lay Buddhists. As I will argue, Taixu and Fazun not only reaffirm the value of conventional reality in rereading the Madhyamaka doctrine of twofold truth. More importantly, they reorient themselves with illusory conventions as their performative philosophy of renewing the Buddhist norms, especially those related to the Bodhisattva ideal.

Humanistic Buddhism is a movement that 'celebrates the possibility of individual and social changes through Buddhism (with Buddhism intended as Buddhadharma and moral paradigms, but also as a community of practitioners).'[20] Over the years, it has garnered the attention of intellectual historians, socio-cultural historians, sociologists, and cultural anthropologists. Coming from their respective expertise, scholars in these fields have investigated the life and work of the protagonists of this article, namely, Taixu and Fazun, especially their contributions to the modernization of Buddhist doctrine and praxis.[21] Drawing upon and developing their work, I enquire into how these proponents of humanistic Buddhism further the philosophical understanding of the twofold truth in their effort to reconceptualize conventional reality. In doing so, I follow Jessica Main and Rongdao Lai's suggestion to employ 'humanistic Buddhism' as an analytic category, which 'should be understood as the performance of action.'[22] Nevertheless, I intend to go beyond their scope on secularism and secularity. Therefore, I examine how these reformers reinterpret and reenact the doctrine of twofold truth as a way of inhabiting the norms of the Bodhisattva ideal. I speak of this way of doing philosophy as performative philosophy.

The term performative is evoked by Judith Butler to capture the discursive practice of reiterating and repeating regulatory norms, a practice that is 'not primarily theatrical' and through which a subject is formed.[23] Contemporary phenomenologists find Butler's portrayal of performativity, in terms of speech acts, too abstractly linguistic, thus redefining performance as an embodied activity of inhabiting norms.[24] If norms are always inhabited, then, as Muhammad Velji maintains, these norms cannot be fixed. Rather, 'it is inherent to becoming an expert that the expert necessarily changes norms yet still inhabits it.'[25] Like his source of inspiration, Saba Mahmood, Velji illustrates the elasticity of norms with the case of a piano player: a novice player goes through intense practice to become an expert in their music community and it is through this expert player that the norms of piano playing are enacted, refined, and modified.[26] The Butlerian conception of performativity, in its problematization of an essentialist view of reality, identity, and norms, shares several parallels with the Buddhist notion of emptiness. Drawing from the existing discussion of performativity, I extend the examination from one subject in a community to generations of subjects in a tradition.[27] In particular, I trace how monastics, like Taixu and Fazun, cultivate themselves through negotiations with their concrete situations to become exemplary persons of humanistic Buddhism throughout generations. Their skilful performance, in turn, renews the Buddhist norms related to the Bodhisattva ideal for alleviating this-worldly suffering. As such, these two monastics exercise their agency to skilfully map out new understandings of conventional reality and carve out different ways of practicing Buddhism. Revisiting humanistic Buddhism from the lens of performativity, readers will see how this movement goes beyond the theory-praxis distinction. Moreover, in rejecting essentialist views of Buddhist doctrines, identities, and norms, the performative philosophy of Taixu and Fazun reinforces the openness of the Buddhist tradition. It is primarily such openness that has been selectively glossed over, or even unfortunately dismissed, in Liang's adherence to a rigid conception of authenticity.

Perceiving humanistic Buddhism through the lens of performativity also lays the groundwork for rethinking Buddhist modernization. Quite often, modernity is presumed to create a rupture with the historical past of the tradition. Relating this presumption to Buddhist modernization, readers can understand Charles B Jones's surprise when he encounters 'a traditional picture of the Buddhist cosmos' in Taixu's writings on the pure land.[28] This sentiment of surprise arises from the conviction that a modern form of Buddhism, like Taixu's humanistic Buddhism, in order to override the traditional past, has to divorce itself from the past to undertake a more progressive, secular form. A similar characterization of Buddhist modernization is proposed by Holmes Welch. He proclaims that the revival of Buddhism in early republican China is 'a redirection from the religious to the secular.'[29] Both Jones and Welch employ a progress-centred approach to Buddhist modernization, an approach that is dubbed by Justin Ritzinger as the push model.[30] It is a model that, in reifying and fortifying the rift between secular modernity and traditional religiosity, casts religion in a passive light.[31] As a methodological intervention, Ritzinger proffers the pull model 'that approaches modernity as a source of attraction rather than compulsion.'[32] Therefore, the pull model accentuates how Buddhist modernization entails more than a creative adaptation of the tradition.[33] More needs to be said about the agency of the performers of the pull model

qua Buddhist modernizers. This task has been entertained but not completed by Ritzinger.

Indeed, what has been discounted by the progress-centered approach is the effort of these Buddhists who reform their tradition to sustain it so that the historical past is not renounced but reconfigured and recontextualized. Advancing Ritzinger's argumentation, I bring agency, as the embodied skilfulness, to the forefront of performative philosophy.[34] My investigation of Taixu and Fazun, hence, zooms in on their skilful performance of reconfiguring the past in their modern rearticulation of the twofold truth and the Bodhisattva ideal. For these two monastics, the cultivation of the Bodhisattva ideal facilitates the identity building process whereby a person and their community are intergenerationally interwoven. Thus, the performance of Taixu and Fazun resolves the essentialist rift between modernity and traditionality, concurrently remaking their monastic identity. When humanistic Buddhists reorient themselves with illusory conventions, their performance reintegrates the traditional past as an organic aspect of modern Buddhist norms. Following this line of reasoning, I find it plausible to redefine the modernization of Buddhism in early republican China as a renewal of the tradition through the performance of reformers in specific socio-political contexts.

To outline the performative philosophy of humanistic Buddhism, I will first analyze how Taixu makes a case for creating a pure land on Earth in his humanistic Buddhism. In his reimagination of the pure land, Taixu revisits Madhyamaka resources to account for the ways in which such a pure land is conventionally real and morally significant. As a disciple of Taixu, Fazun is renowned for his travel to Tibet and his translation of Tibetan Buddhist texts. For Fazun, a scholastic study of Buddhist doctrines prepares monastics for safeguarding the true dharma in this-worldly life. In section 2, I will explore how this scholar monk rereads the twofold truth to affirm the nominal, non-intrinsic existence of conventional reality. Fazun continues to institutionalize this doctrinal understanding through monastic education in modern Buddhist academies. Reorienting themselves with illusory conventions, Taixu and Fazun skilfully forge their respective ways of performing humanistic Buddhism in order to practice the Bodhisattva ideal. Their accomplishments will be discussed in the conclusion.

2. Taixu: transforming conventional reality for building a pure land on earth

In August 1926, Taixu published an editorial to advocate for 'building a pure land on Earth' (建設人間淨土), which marked the beginning of his detailed response to the problem of conventional reality in his humanistic Buddhism project.[35] Taixu frequently ruminated upon how to save people from their suffering in his time. Aside from the crisis of his country, a scholar monk like Taixu was also confronted with the dire state of his tradition qua Buddhism. Labeling Buddhism as counterproductive to Chinese modernity, local authorities confiscated monastic properties in order to build modern schools.[36] Taixu was resolved to reform monastic institutions to protect his tradition and preserve temples' financial self-sufficiency.[37] Mindful of the common need for life and financial security, this master commiserated with people whose lives and properties were also jeopardized by constant calamities in the warlord period.[38] He was supported by groups of vigorous lay followers who mobilized resources to conduct charity work as a way of relieving people's suffering and reviving Buddhism. One of them was Zang Guanchan 臧

貫禪 (d.u.),[39] whose letters prompted Taixu to expatiate on building a pure land on Earth.

In these letters, Zang enquires how Buddhism can apply its 'principle' (*li* 理) of emptiness to the concrete 'situation' (*ji* 機) of China.[40] Borrowing the language of the twofold truth, Zang interprets the conventional truth as a truth of 'the nominal' (*mingyan* 名言), which facilitates the transmission of the ultimate truth of emptiness in various situations.[41] Applying the twofold truth to warlord period China, Zang traces how people are compelled by their egoistic mindset to conduct actions for self-interest, eventually causing chaos and conflicts in their community, their country, and eventually the entire world.[42] To purify the 'world of foulness' (*zhuoshi* 濁世), Zang makes an appeal for 'establishing a sublime pure land in the this-worldly realm' (建立現世莊嚴淨土).[43]

In Zang's analysis of the formation and transformation of a world of foulness, he draws upon the Buddhist notions of 'karmic causality' (*yinyuan* 因緣) and 'karmic efficacy' (*yeli* 業力).[44] The theory of karma is systematized by Taixu when he sets out a comprehensive proposal for building a this-worldly pure land in his 1926 editorial and the subsequent lecture on the same theme in 1930. Quoting scriptural resources on Buddhist cosmology, this Buddhist master reimagines Uttarakuru, a mystical kingdom in the north of Mount Sumera, into a modern nation with a highly industrialized economy, well-developed infrastructure, and all-encompassing social welfare.[45] Such an ideal society is a joint achievement of people who rectify their minds, restrain egoistic tendencies, and regulate their actions in accordance with the ten wholesome precepts.[46] In his 1930 lecture, Taixu straightforwardly refers to a pure land as an 'ideal society' (良好之社會) and a 'beauteous world' (優美之世界).[47] In contrast, a polluted land amounts to an 'undesirable world of five types of foulness' (五濁惡世之土): social chaos, deceptive viewpoints, mental defilements, moral unwholesomeness, and life precariousness.[48] Regarding the genesis of a pure land, Taixu shuns the narratives of naturalism and theism.[49] In his terms, 'a pure land neither comes to fruition naturally by itself nor becomes produced by the divine' (淨土非自然而成就的, 亦非神所造成的).[50] Rather, a pure land as an ideal society is karmically formed through the activities of its members.[51] Sentient beings, like humans, first awaken their 'wholesome mind' (好的心), which guides them to acquire 'clear knowledge' (明確之知識). Driven by clear knowledge, sentient beings will generate 'proper thoughts and theories' (正當之思想) for 'reasonable actions' (合理的行為).[52] From there, a variety of 'good causes and karma' (善的事業) will stem, throughout time, to bring about 'an ideal society as a beauteous world' (良好之社會與優美之世界).[53]

Outlining the mechanism by which karmic efficacy moves from the mind to purposeful action and eventually to social construction, Taixu furnishes a framework of the constructed nature of society. To be more specific, a society appears by virtue of 'karmic causality' (*yinyuan* 因緣) that is mediated through the 'minds of sentient beings' (各個有情的心).[54] It can be deduced that if sentient beings awaken the compassionate and wholesome mindsets, their proper knowledge and action subsequently arrive to build a society of human flourishing.[55] On the contrary, once sentient beings are entrapped in egoistic mindsets and possessed by miscomprehensions, turmoil and suffering become entrenched in their society.[56] Positioning the Chinese society in this framework, Taixu propounds that 'if [the Chinese people] nowadays can correct their mindsets and knowledge, cultivate impeccable thoughts, and strenuously carry out proper undertakings, how

can it be difficult to transform the China of foulness into a China as a pure land?' (今日若能以良好之心知, 發純正之思想, 努力建設一切正當之事業, 亦何難轉濁惡之中國, 一變而為淨土之中國耶).[57] Thus, just because a society is constructed by causes and conditions, it does not mean that it is predetermined. A pessimist may consider a society as fixed and unable to change, whereas an optimist may be content with the society as it already is.[58] Regardless, Taixu cautions against the conviction for what I would describe as predetermined sociality. He encourages people to harbour trust in, what I would refer to as, transformative sociality.[59] Since karmic causality is mediated by the minds of sentient beings, it is always possible to reconstruct a society and transform it into a pure land in the human realm devoid of suffering.

While Taixu deploys the language of karmic causality to justify the feasibility of a this-worldly pure land, he does not specify whether and how such a karmically originated society is real. In his lecture on pure land delivered in the spring of 1926, he leaves a concise answer. This lecture centres on Yogācāra Buddhism, a school known for its doctrine of consciousness-only. For followers of this school qua the Yogācārins, the mind is a synergy of various types of consciousness, which gives rise to every phenomenon in the experience. According to Taixu, Yogācāra Buddhism portrays a pure land as the manifestation of the minds of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.[60] It soon begs a question, 'if the pure land is a manifestation of the minds, should it be illusory?' (淨土既由識變, 應是虛幻).[61] There, Taixu does not elucidate what it means to describe the pure land as a mental manifestation. I would conjecture that, given this master's account of transformative sociality, the 'manifestation' (bian 變) of the minds is a karmic result. Then, the previous question can be reformulated in this manner: If a pure land is karmically co-constructed by sentient beings with enlightened mindsets, is it illusory? Taixu responds that 'the pure land is manifested by the pure minds of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, which, just as the currently polluted land, is existent and not non-existent' (淨土是佛菩薩清淨識變, 與當前穢土, 是有非無, 相同).[62] In this confirmation of the transformative nature of society, Taixu designates the ontological status of both the pure land and the polluted world as existent.

The ontological status of a karmically produced phenomenon remains a central theme in the Madhyamaka discussion on conventional reality. From the Madhyamaka perspective, anything that arises from causes and conditions is illusory and, thus, empty of intrinsic nature. Even though Taixu speaks of a pure land to be just as existent as a polluted world, he has yet to elaborate on the illusory existence of these karmically shaped worlds. A more thorough analysis of this topic appears in Taixu's later work on Madhyamaka, when he familiarises himself with Tibetan Buddhist thought through his disciple Fazun. In his 1942 lecture 'Faxing konghui xue gailun' 法性空慧學概論 [The Primer of the Doctrine of Dharma Nature and Wisdom of Emptiness], Taixu highlights the notion of 'occurrent existence' (shiyou 事有):

> Regarding the tenet of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārika*, if someone obstinately attaches to the ultimate truth as absolutely real, this viewpoint shall also be criticized and refuted. Thus, for the dependent-arising through *ālaya* in Yogācāra, as well as the dependent-arising through dharma nature or dependent-arising through *tathāgatagarbha* and so on in other schools, all these viewpoints are refuted [by the Mādhyamikas]. That is why it is known as ultimate emptiness. However, if it is for awakening oneself and others, [the Mādhyamikas will] from their position of non-attachability, correspond to the situation and choose the appropriate

way to skilfully designate, sometimes in terms of Yogācāra, sometimes by means of dharma emptiness, and other times through non-nature. All of them can become teachings commensurate with the situation ... The Mādhyamikas can declare that they intend to refute intrinsic existence together with the attachment to the intrinsic existence of dharmas. Since dharmas are illusory events that arise from conditions, they will not be repudiated. The ultimate emptiness established by the Mādhyamikas refers to the perceptual field of the ultimately correct wisdom, which does not demolish this-worldly and other-worldly conventionally occurrent existence but mutually encompasses one another without harming.

在《中論》的本義上, 如果固執一義為定實, 無不遭破. 故對唯識之賴耶緣起, 以及其餘法性緣起, 如來藏緣起等義, 亦無不破. 所以說是畢竟空. 要是為自悟悟他, 從無所執中, 應機所宜, 方便施設, 則或說唯識, 或說法空, 或說無性, 都可成為當機的法益 ... 中觀可云所破自性有, 乃執法各定有自性. 既為緣生幻事, 則非所破. 所立勝義空, 乃第一義智境, 不壞世出世俗事有, 則互容無害矣.[63]

In this excerpt, Taixu distinguishes occurrent existence from 'intrinsic existence' (*shiyou* 實有). It is such intrinsic existence of various types of dharmas qua phenomena and the related attachments to such intrinsic existence that Madhyamaka masters refute. Anything that arises from causes and conditions possesses no intrinsic nature and is not absolutely real. However, the rejection of intrinsic nature does not yield nihilism. After removing intrinsic nature, a phenomenon still pertains to conventional reality, because it is born out of conditions and exists as an illusory occurrent. Once conditions disappear, this occurrent vanishes accordingly. Instead of reducing conventional reality to nothingness, Taixu reaffirms this illusory reality as a valid reality of conditional, occurrent existence.

According to Taixu, it is true that the 'utmost' (*jiujing* 究竟) aspiration of non-attachability and non-attainability points to the ultimate truth of emptiness.[64] Nonetheless, the Bodhisattvas' compassion to 'skilfully' (*fangbian* 方便) teach and guide others presupposes the value and worth of the occurrent existence of illusory phenomena that karmically arise in conventional reality.[65] Furthermore, the conventional and the ultimate in the twofold truth carry out different roles in the Madhyamaka doctrine of emptiness. As Taixu explains, if sentient beings remain ignorant of the ultimate truth, they will 'generate attached views and perplexities' (生執見和疑惑).[66] However, if they refuse to acknowledge any existence whatsoever, they fail to grasp the 'conventional truth of the retribution of wholesomeness and unwholesomeness' (善惡報應的世俗諦).[67] Thus, the acknowledgement of the occurrent existence of conventionally real phenomena brings about more than an epistemic achievement. When someone perceives a karmically born phenomenon as occurrently existent, this person also embraces the mechanism of dependent-arising and embodies the retribution of moral actions. Subsequently, the conviction in karmic efficacy arises.

As seen in the previous excerpt, Taixu recommends that the Mādhyamikas approach Yogācāra teaching as a skilful means suitable to specific situations. Such a recommendation, as the application of the twofold truth, corresponds to his dictum that Buddhist practitioners shall be good at 'complying with the principle of the Buddhist teaching to make this teaching fit concrete situations' (*qili yingji* 契理應機).[68] Considering the dynamic relationship between the principle and the situation, Buddhists shall not downplay this-worldly concerns for other-worldly liberation. Rather, as Taixu reappraises, when sentient beings manage to build a pure land on

Earth, 'their progress in morality [for this creation] counts as the most preliminary Bodhisattvas' practice in Mahāyāna Buddhism' (其進步至於道德, 即大乘佛教中最初步之菩薩行為).[69] Hereby, the acknowledgement of conventional reality as a reality of occurrent existence and the subsequent action in conformity with karmic efficacy to build a pure land on Earth can be translated into the performance of renewing the Buddhist norms related to the Bodhisattva ideal.

Now, readers can understand why Taixu maintains that once people 'comprehend how everything in the world becomes complete due to karmic causality' (了之世界一切事物, 皆因緣所成), they will obtain the aspiration and principle of constructing a pure land.[70] This aspiration, together with its underlying principle, stems from the mind that mediates karmic causality as the leading power of causes and conditions. Their collaborative construction of a pure land yields the most preliminary practice of the Bodhisattvas. Envisioned in this manner, the performance of humanistic Buddhists renews the norms related to the Bodhisattva ideal. Moreover, humanistic Buddhists reaffirm the doctrinal significance of conventional reality, further restoring their normative aspiration to engage with such a reality. Resolving the problem of conventionality, Taixu skilfully reorients himself with illusory conventions through his Buddhist reform. Under Taixu's leadership, humanistic Buddhists have welcomed the dictum of 'complying with the principle of the Buddhist teaching to make this teaching fit concrete situations' (契理應機) as the hallmark of their enterprises.[71]

3. Fazun: translating conventional reality to institutionalize the true dharma in monastic education

When Taixu passed away in 1947, Fazun penned a memorial article to commemorate how his master acted out 'the true Mahāyāna spirit of saving the world' (大乘佛教救世之真精神) in various Buddhist reforms.[72] Fazun was also determined to safeguard this true spirit. In the spring of 1934, he opined in a letter to Fafang 法舫 (1904–1951) that 'I think, now, the future of Buddhism is in peril' (我覺得現在佛教的前途很危險).[73] At that time, Fazun was about to end his systematic study of Buddhism in Tibet. To save Buddhism from its crisis, he sought to reestablish the 'true dharma' (*zhengfa* 正法), namely, the true Buddhist teaching, through 'a rigorous study of Buddhist doctrines and meticulous cultivation of practices' (精細的學習及修證).[74] Since the fall of 1934, Fazun started directing the Sino-Tibetan Academy of Buddhist Studies (漢藏教理院).[75] Reviewing the 'flourishing and decline of Tibetan Buddhist schools' (西藏佛教學派興衰) in 1936, Fazun 'reflected' (*fanguan* 反觀) upon the development of mainstream Chinese Buddhism.[76] Two factors conspired to render the true dharma degenerate in early republican China: the 'corruption of monastic communities' (僧伽之不振) and the 'disorganization of governmental politics' (國家政治之無軌道).[77] Reiterating his call for rigorous study and meticulous practice, Fazun unpacked this undertaking as 'teaching the true dharma' (教正法) throughout an intergenerational transmission and 'realizing the true dharma' (證正法) in compliance with monastic rules.[78] This process would necessitate 'the Bodhisattvas' practice' (菩薩之行) to manifest the true Mahāyāna spirit of saving the world.[79] While Fazun placed hope in the republican government, he mostly dedicated his life to teaching and translating Buddhist texts, as his way of upholding the true dharma in this-worldly life.[80]

Prima facie, readers might not find Fazun's scholastic approach to be exemplary of humanistic Buddhism. Indeed, compared with Taixu's holistic architectonics of building a pure land on Earth, Fazun's activities are representative of professional scholasticism, a scholasticism that turns monastics into professional experts at teaching the Buddhist doctrines of emptiness and cultivating practices of the Bodhisattvas. Since the salient feature of humanistic Buddhism is its association with 'forms of social activism and political involvement,'[81] readers might get the impression that Fazun's professional scholasticism is not overtly humanistically Buddhist. Nonetheless, this impression evinces only a parochial conception of humanistic Buddhism, which can obscure the internal diversity of this movement. To reassess Fazun's scholastic approach, we shall position his performance at the intersection of two burgeoning trends in early republican China: the revival of Buddhist scholasticism and the reform of monastic education.

Fazun was among generations of intellectuals who rekindled their enthusiasm for Buddhist scholastic philosophy in the advent of China's modernization. Nevertheless, why would scholasticism matter? This question has been foregrounded by Eyal Aviv in his study of another Buddhist scholastic named Ouyang Jingwu 歐陽竟無 (1871–1943). As succinctly put by Aviv, 'why would Chinese intellectuals generate an interest in medieval Indian philosophy during a large-scale crisis such as the transition from the Qing dynasty to the early Republic?'[82] As per Aviv, the allure of Buddhist scholastic philosophy derived from its 'redemptive potential' that was thought to be able to save China and its people from suffering beyond the Western paradigm.[83] Discerning the dearth of scholastic practices in mainstream Chinese Buddhism, Ouyang reclaimed such redemptive potential through his research on Yogācāra, a school he identified as the epitome of the systematic epistemology, metaphysics, and soteriology in Indian Buddhism.[84] Just like Ouyang, Fazun invested in Buddhist scholasticism for its redemptive potential, although he turned to (Indo-)Tibetan Madhyamaka.

As will be seen shortly, the core teaching of Madhyamaka is 'dependent-arising qua emptiness' (*yuanqi xingkong* 緣起性空), which secures the functionality of karmic causality in dependent-arising without reifying such arising into an unchanging entity. Dependent-arising qua emptiness continues to open the door to the Bodhisattvas' practice in this-worldly life, since the embodied knowledge of karmic causality amounts to a robust performance of extirpating misconception, attachment, and suffering. Instead of informing social activism, scholasticism *is* a social activism that rediscovers and reintroduces the redemptive potential of Buddhism to heal the crisis of modernity in early republican China.

For Fazun, a rigorous study of Buddhist doctrines enables people to comprehend the Madhyamaka maxim of dependent-arising qua emptiness. To expound on this rigorous performance, Fazun draws from the doctrinal debate on conventional reality that remains pivotal in Tibetan Madhyamaka but less well-known in mainstream Chinese Buddhism.[85] Since the Yogācārins establish that all phenomena arise from the mind, their approach has been criticized by the Mādhyamikas for turning the mind into a foundational entity. It is due to their reification of the mind that the Yogācārins are dubbed as 'realists' (*shishi shi* 實事師) and Yogācāra is ranked lower than Madhyamaka,[86] as Fazun details in his 1949 'Sizong yaoyi jiangji' 四宗要義講記 [Lectures on the Gist of Four Schools][87] and his 1959 essay on the refutation of particular characteristics in Candrakīrti's 月稱 (ca. 600s) Madhyamaka. By 'realists,' Fazun has in

mind the Buddhists for whom 'the fictitiously existent [conventional phenomena] must be posited on a real entity' (假必依實),[88] and 'this real entity defines the particular characteristics [of these phenomena]' (實有自相).[89] The realists include the Vaibhāṣikas, the Sautrāntikas, and the Yogācārins.[90] I consider the critique of realism more precisely as a Madhyamaka rejection of a two-tiered view of reality, where a real entity is postulated as a foundation to undergird conventional reality. From the Madhyamaka perspective, the Yogācārins reify the mind into such a foundational entity to consolidate a two-tiered view of reality at the expense of making the mind intrinsically real.

For this reason, the Mādhyamikas advocate for removing the foundational role of the mind to account for conventional reality through causes and conditions, namely through karmic causality. Nevertheless, they are still cornered by the question of how to establish the efficacy of karmic causality without any underlying foundational, real entities. According to Fazun, this question remains the crux of the Madhyamaka teaching.[91] Fazun provides an answer in the context of the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika debate on the twofold truth toward the end of his 1938 lecture 'Weishi sanshisong xuanlun' 唯識三十頌懸論 [On the Thirty Verses of Consciousness-only] and the previously mentioned 1959 essay.

In presenting the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika debate, Fazun first delineates a group of notions. The first conceptual pair is 'ultimate truth' (*shengyidi* 勝義諦) and 'ultimate reality' (*shengyiyou* 勝義有).[92] Ultimate truth refers to the 'correct wisdom of the emptiness of phenomena as suchness' (緣法空真如的正智), whereas ultimate reality captures the real existence of the particular characteristics of phenomena to be observed by this correct wisdom.[93] The second pair is 'conventional truth' (*shisudi* 世俗諦) and 'conventional reality' (*shisuyou* 世俗有).[94] Since the conventional occludes (*zhangfu* 障覆) suchness, conventional truth amounts to 'what has been conventionally grasped to be true' (世俗所執為諦) and conventional reality is tantamount to the 'nominally designated' (*mingyan jiali* 名言假立) existence unchecked by the correct wisdom of emptiness.[95]

Given this delineation, the Svātantrikas, championed by Bhāvaviveka 清辯 (ca. 500s), repudiate the intrinsic nature at the ultimate level while postulating the 'particular characteristics' (*zixiang* 自相) as the intrinsic nature of nominally designated conventional reality. According to Fazun, such a stance toward conventional reality aims to establish karmic causality:

> For all the dharmas in the cosmos, if they are observed by the correct wisdom at the ultimate level, they have no intrinsic nature whatsoever, but when they are intuitively perceived by conventional knowledge, like that of the sense organs and so on, they need to be more or less intrinsically real to establish themselves. If this minimal sense of intrinsic nature were disregarded, then all the dharmas in the cosmos would be in principle chaotic and confusing. How then are they so well-organized and orderly?
>
> 這宇宙萬有的諸法, 若以勝義的正智觀察, 雖沒有一絲兒自性可得, 但是以根現量等諸世俗量觀察, 則須得到一點自性才好安立. 假若這一點自性也不承認, 則宇宙萬有諸法, 理應雜亂混淆. 又何能夠這樣井井有條毫不紊亂呢?[96]

Rephrasing the viewpoint of Bhāvaviveka, Fazun indicates that for the Svātantrikas, conventional dharmas qua phenomena, though nominally designated, can be directly cognized by the mind of ordinary sentient beings. When consciousness, like the sensory

consciousness of sense organs, intuitively perceives a phenomenon as it is and grasps its particularity qua intrinsic nature, non-erroneous knowledge of conventional reality can be proved.[97] As such, the epistemological argument of perceiving a particular phenomenon as it is presumes the intrinsic nature of this phenomenon in the conventional world, which ontologically establishes the functionality of causes and conditions.

Such a viewpoint has been problematized by Candrakīrti. Summarizing the outlook of this Prāsaṅgika master, Fazun reports that if at the conventional level, a phenomenon should have its particularity, would be intrinsically real, and could be accurately cognized by ordinary sentient beings, the sages, by virtue of their correct wisdom of emptiness, would eliminate such particular characteristics in seeing this conventional phenomenon as empty.[98] It is untenable that 'the pure root wisdom [of emptiness] of the sages would turn out to be the primary cause of demolishing the particular characteristics of a conventional phenomenon' (聖人的無漏根本智, 反而成為破壞諸法相的主因).[99] Furthermore, the conventional is, by its definition, 'illusory and false' (miluan 迷亂), in which ordinary sentient beings are foreclosed from correctly seeing the true mode of existence of things qua their suchness.[100] It follows that ordinary sentient beings with their current mindsets can never truly secure correct knowledge of a conventional phenomenon and see it as it really is. Fazun explains that, for Candrakīrti, since the minds of these sentient beings have been perfumed and cultivated by ignorance, their sensory consciousness 'cannot perceive the intrinsic nature of a phenomenon' (不能緣境界自性) but can only experience 'the appearance of that phenomenon' (所見境相) at the conventional level.[101] That is to say:

> [Conventionally], even though there is no intrinsic nature of phenomena in the perceptual field, all sentient beings who are perfumed and cultivated by ignorance and false attachments throughout beginningless time can still perceive these phenomena to be intrinsically real and preserve the orderliness of a myriad of dharmas in the cosmos ... As long as a plurality of conditions assemble, various phenomena will appear. It is really not necessary to attach falsely to the intrinsic nature of phenomena to establish a myriad of dharmas.
>
> 境上雖沒有一點自性, 但由有情無始以來的無明和妄執的熏習, 也可以見為有自性, 也可以成立條然不亂的宇宙萬法 ... 只要有眾緣湊和便能有各種的境界顯現, 實不須妄執諸法各有自性, 然後才能安立萬法也.[102]

As depicted in this excerpt, it is unnecessary to locate a foundational, real entity for karmic causality, because causes and conditions arise to construct the appearance of various phenomena and coalesce conventional reality. It is a reality because it is nominally designated by ordinary sentient beings. Although these sentient beings do not perceive a phenomenon as it really is and are, thus, precluded from the ultimately correct wisdom of emptiness and suchness, they still see this phenomenon as it appears to enact karmic causality and ensure karmic efficacy. Given how the perception of a phenomenon is accomplished conventionally, ordinary sentient beings can arrive at an epistemic judgment of this phenomenon. In Fazun's words, unlike the Svātantrikas, 'Candrakīrti holds that the non-erroneous and erroneous knowledge at the level of conventional truth is contingent on both the perceiving mind and the perceived phenomenon; it cannot be that only the perceived phenomenon, not the perceiving mind, is non-erroneous or erroneous' (在月稱論師看來, 要世俗諦分正倒, 心和境俱需分出有正有倒, 不只是境有正倒而心無正倒).[103] Jointly completed through the mind and its perceived

phenomenon, an epistemic judgment at the conventional level conforms to what the eminent nun, Longlian 隆蓮 (1909–2006), refers to as the 'customarily agreed and commonly accepted' (*sucheng gongxu* 俗成共許) criteria.[104]

What is conventionally true reflects and reinforces the 'power of innate ignorance' (俱生無明之力) in contrast to the ultimate truth, where there is no mismatch between existence and appearance.[105] Such an interplay is encapsulated in Tsongkhapa's (1357--1419) maxim that the conventional truth and the ultimate truth are 'identical in nature but have distinct conceptual identities.'[106] Fazun reformulates this interplay in the following way:

> The twofold truth encompasses two aspects of dependently arising dharmas. That which is born out of karmic causality and has the functionality of producing and being produced and so on, is the aspect of the conventional truth; That which is devoid of any real intrinsic nature is the other aspect of the ultimate truth. Concisely but also comprehensively, this is the teaching of 'dependent-arising qua emptiness.'
>
> 這二諦就是緣起諸法的兩方面, 因緣所生有能作所作等作用的一面, 是世俗諦; 無實自性的一面, 就是勝義諦. 極概括而及全面地說, 即 '緣起性空.'[107]

Dharmas qua phenomena, thus, have no intrinsic nature at the ultimate level but remain nominally existent at the conventional level. Doctrinally, conventional reality is not a non-existent illusion but rather retains its nominal, non-intrinsic existence. Acknowledging such existence of conventional reality, the Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamikas secure karmic causality to encourage wholesome actions in this-worldly life. Given the efficacy of karma, Fazun foregrounds the importance of 'aspiration' (*faxin* 發心) in Buddhist practice as the cause of transformation.[108] In particular, he prioritizes the aspiration of the Bodhisattvas.[109] Like his master Taixu, Fazun extrapolates that the change of mindset will result in the change of intentionality behind action, further exerting a different consequence on this-worldly life.[110] Advancing Taixu's reasoning, Fazun uses karmic efficacy to argue for the importance of abiding by monastic rules.[111] Normatively, Buddhist practitioners cannot do away with conventionality but shall aim for its transformation.

Hence, the performance of a rigorous study of Buddhist doctrines allows for the reconceptualization of conventional reality, where dependently arising phenomena are not reduced to non-existence but reaffirmed as nominally existent. As detailed by Fazun, this reconceptualization establishes the functionality of karmic causality to reinstate the Bodhisattvas' practice and restore the redemptive potential of Buddhism. It is the revitalization of this redemptive potential during the national crisis that makes the Buddhist scholasticism of Fazun, as well as that of Ouyang, a social activism.

However, Fazun is not just a Buddhist scholar. Different from the lay practitioner Ouyang, Fazun is an ordained monk. He proffers that monastics shall 'not only contemplate the Buddhas in rebirth and aspire to be released from saṃsāra, but also, within saṃsāra, translate Buddhist sūtras and śastras and establish the true dharma and so on' (不但是念佛往生和出離生死, 就是在生死之中, 也還有翻譯經論, 主持正法等).[112] Therefore, the monastic aspiration demarcates Fazun's vision of Buddhist education from that in Ouyang.[113] For Fazun, Buddhist education is the means of institutionalizing the scholastic study of Buddhist thought, which alludes to

the monastic performance of engaging with conventionality and reorientating oneself with illusory conventions.

Throughout his life, Fazun committed himself to the aforementioned causes, both as an expert translator himself and as an educator of training future generations of experts. He valued role models in his tradition who embodied the norms related to the Bodhisattva ideal. In particular, Fazun expressed his reverence for previous scholar monks, like Xuanzang 玄奘 (ca. 602–664) and Yijing 義淨 (635--713), since they journeyed to South Asia to study Buddhism and completed translations of Buddhist texts upon their return.[114] Empowered by these role models, Fazun was undeterred in traveling to Tibet to learn Buddhist texts, especially those that used to be unavailable in the Chinese canon.[115] His translation project covered both esoteric and exoteric texts and consisted of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra treatises. Back in the 1930s, the translated Yogācāra scriptures provoked a heated debate between Fazun and Ouyang.[116] Throughout these debates, Fazun managed to deepen the public understanding of Tibetan Madhyamaka in China proper.[117]

Aside from these historical figures, Fazun admired another role model, namely, Taixu. In particular, Fazun identified 'monastic education' (*sengjiaoyu* 僧教育) as a significant legacy of his master.[118] Calling for inheriting this legacy, Fazun restated the prominent role of Buddhist academies in 'producing the experts who can revitalize Chinese Buddhism' (造成復興中國佛教之人才).[119] Indeed, Taixu reformed monastic education in a systematic and scientific way to make it on par with modern, secular pedagogy.[120] Fazun was positive that the reformed monastic education could even surpass modern, secular pedagogy, considering how the former cultivated virtue and morality as embodied knowledge whereas the latter was decoupled from virtue development.[121] Monastic education, thus, was expected to train experts in the Bodhisattvas' practice for a modern China.[122] Far from being narrow-minded patriots, these experts should champion the initiative to unlock the universal redemptive potential of Buddhism as promoters of regional and global peace.[123] In his description of Taixu's Global Buddhist Movement 世界佛教運動, Fazun deployed the language of karmic efficacy to explicate the interdependence of conventional phenomena and encourage peaceful co-existence of nations in the world.[124] Due to the hope for global peace, Taixu founded the Global Buddhist Academy 世界佛學苑 in the 1930s.[125] Fazun was a tenacious supporter of his mentor. Although he did not succeed in inviting his Tibetan Lama Amdo Geshe 安東格什 (1888–1935) to direct the Tibetan Department at the Global Buddhist Academy,[126] Fazun remained a leading educator there who trained professional experts to study Buddhist doctrines and cultivate the Bodhisattvas' practice.[127]

As mentioned in the previous section, Buddhism used to be painted as inimical to modern education, which justified the confiscation of monastic properties for building schools. In this socio-political climate, when Buddhist reformers embarked on reorganizing monastic education to make it on par with modern, secular pedagogy, they were also correcting the narrative that typecast Buddhism as the obstacle to Chinese modernity, as shown by Rongdao Lai's incisive analysis.[128] Lai details that through educational reforms, monastics more proactively made their tradition conducive to the modern Chinese nation.[129] Hence, Buddhist education in early republican China, as a way of training modern citizens, facilitated the reconceptualization of the collective identity of

the monastic community.[130] In this sense, monastic education is *also* a form of social activism.

Skilfully, Fazun stands at the intersections of the revival of Buddhist scholasticism and the reform of monastic education. For this scholar monk, a rigorous study of Buddhist doctrines reaffirms conventional reality as a valid reality for the Bodhisattvas' practice, which should be institutionalized through Buddhist education. As such, the scholastic reappraisal of conventional reality is buttressed through the normative reform of monastic education. Reestablishing the true dharma in this manner, monastic performance renews the Bodhisattva ideal as a transformative practice to restore the redemptive potential of Buddhism and remedy the national and international crisis. Such a skilful performance is self-benefiting and other-benefiting in this-worldly life. It allows for a remaking of monastic identity for the practitioners themselves and a revitalization of the redemptive potential of Buddhism for all sentient beings. Given its antidotal value in resolving the problem of conventional reality, I contend that Fazun's scholastic approach is, impeccably, humanistically Buddhist.

Cultivating himself to become a proficient translator and an erudite educator, Fazun performed skilfully his scholastic version of humanistic Buddhism to reestablish the true dharma in this-worldly life. On the day when Fazun was about to enter nirvāna, he received a group of visitors. Being asked about the destination of his rebirth, Fazun reassured his visitors that 'I am not going anywhere else but will return to the human realm' (我哪兒也不去, 要再來人間).[131] Following his mentor Taixu, Fazun carved out a scholastic path for monks and nuns to practice humanistic Buddhism.

4. Conclusion

When Liang Shuming deems socially engaged Buddhism to be conceptually implausible and normatively infeasible, his argument is premised on a twofold presumption: in Buddhist doctrines, conventional reality in this-worldly life is negated as a non-existent illusion, and in Buddhist norms, conventional reality needs to be eschewed in the pursuit of other-worldly liberation. Hence, Liang's presumption points to the problem of conventional reality for the project of humanistic Buddhism. However, conventional reality becomes a problem if and only if this reality is essentialized as absolutely non-existent to make the normative pursuit of other-worldly transcendence into another fixed mandate. The problem of conventional reality, which exposes the threat of nihilism, is also an issue of essentialism. As discussed above, generations of humanistic Buddhists have worked through concrete negotiations to forge their respective paths to dispel the issues of essentialism and nihilism undergirding Liang's argument. Their proposals showcase the diversity within humanistic Buddhism.

In Taixu's initiative to build a pure land on Earth, he navigates the socio-political climate of early republican China, together with energetic lay followers. Through these exchanges, this master reconceptualizes the existence of conventional reality through a comprehensive analysis of karma. He further proposes a skilful engagement with this-worldly affairs in line with karmic efficacy as the Bodhisattvas' practice. Taixu's resolution to the problem of conventional reality is not just a theoretical construct. Informed by his philosophical understanding of conventional reality, Taixu performs the philosophy of twofold truth in his humanistic Buddhism to act out such skilful engagement.

Therefore, Taixu embodies and inhabits the Buddhist norms of the Bodhisattva ideal to relieve this-worldly suffering.

Following in the footsteps of his mentor, Fazun maps out a more scholastic version of humanistic Buddhism. Admiring previous legendary traveler monks as his role models, Fazun vows to promote the true dharma through teaching and translating. This is his way of alleviating this-worldly suffering on the Bodhisattvas' path. Skilfully, he introduces the Chinese audience to the doctrinal debate on the twofold truth in (Indo-)Tibetan Madhyamaka, subsequently clarifying how conventional reality is nominally existent without intrinsic characteristics. For Fazun, this clarification contributes to quelling misconceptions about conventional reality and karmic causality. Developing faith in the efficacy of karma, sentient beings will abstain from unwholesome actions. To advance the understanding of conventional reality, Fazun joins his master, Taixu, to institutionalize the rigorous study of Buddhist doctrines through monastic education in modern academies. Thereby, Buddhist education trains expert performers of the Bodhisattva ideal. Fazun's effort to correct doctrinal mischaracterization of conventional reality and clear out normative misgivings over monastic education, ultimately, culminates in his scholastic version of humanistic Buddhism.

Having lived through a time of crisis, these two generations of humanistic Buddhists share the aspiration to save their tradition and nation from socio-political calamities. Nevertheless, they cultivate themselves differently to enact the Bodhisattvas' practice. Intergenerationally, they manage to reconceptualize conventional reality and repurpose its value and worth, which bespeaks how norms are always elastic and open in a lived tradition like Buddhism. Perceived from the lens of performative philosophy, which is also in line with the Madhyamaka notion of the twofold truth, monastic identity and norms have no fixed essence. Rather, it is the performance of Buddhist reformers that remakes the monastic identity and renews norms related to the Bodhisattva ideal. More specifically for Taixu and Fazun, they cultivate themselves to become exemplary experts in humanistic Buddhism, further making it possible to reimagine a modern form of Buddhism devoid of any explicit rupture with the historic past. While Liang Shuming casts doubt on the applicability of Buddhism in this-worldly life, Taixu and Fazun inhabit skilfully the norms for its renewal. Through their skilful performance, humanistic Buddhism eventually becomes the modern, new normal.

Notes

1. *Dasheng xuanlun* 大乘玄論, *T* no. 1853, 45: 1.15a18. All the translations in this article are done by the author. If there is another existing translation available for one of the cited texts, I specify it accordingly.
2. In the East Asian context, neo-Confucian literati championed this critique of Buddhist nihilism. See Li, 'Meta-Ethical Pluralism.' For the doctrinal debate over conventional truth in Indo-Tibetan Madhyamaka, see The Cowherds, *Moonshadows*; The Yakherds, eds., *Knowing Illusion*. More recently, Dan Zahavi has interpreted the Buddhist, especially the Madhyamaka, theorization of social ontology as a version of social constructivism with a nihilist undertone. See Zahavi, 'Being-You.'
3. Grammatically, it is indeed more common to pair '(re)orient' with 'to/toward.' However, the preposition 'to/toward' seems to turn illusory conventions into fixed entities or external directions that monastics shall conform to. For Taixu and Fazun, it is quite the opposite

since illusory conventions are always fluid and dynamic. When monastics reorient themselves by virtue of karmic causality, their performances redefine both the subject and the conventions. Thus, the preposition 'with' highlights how their reorientation is both within the conventional reality and together with these conventions.

4. For a more general critique of this progress-centred approach in the study of modernity and modernization, especially how such an approach showcases a secular, Enlightenment understanding of history, see Allen, *The End of Progress*; Bhambra, 'Decolonizing.'

5. Liang, *Dong-Xi wenhua*, 536–537.

6. Liang's relationship with Buddhism throughout his life was admittedly more complicated than that which has been presented in his early work. Such a complicated relationship has been detailed by Thierry Meynard in his monograph on Liang. See Meynard, *The Religious Philosophy of Liang*. For Liang's engagement with Buddhist thought in his early work, see Li, 'Liang, The Buddhist.'

7. Liang, "Wode zixue," 689.

8. Ibid., 691.

9. Liang, *Dong-Xi wenhua*, 534–35.

10. Ibid., 537–38.

11. Ibid., 526.

12. Taixu, "Lun Liang," 278.

13. Ibid., 279.

14. Ibid., 282.

15. Ibid., 281.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., 282.

18. Ibid., 283.

19. Regarding the importance of monastic identity in humanistic Buddhism, readers will find more discussions in the third section below on Fazun. I want to thank one of the reviewers for asking me to elaborate on the pivotal role of monastic identity in this article. I, myself, also call for more research on the performance of humanistic Buddhism by lay practitioners. For a preliminary study of this topic, see Lai, 'The Wuchang Ideal.'

20. Travagnin, "Fostering Education," 102. As Travagnin has clarified, humanistic Buddhism is 'a rather vague term used to label a variety of Buddhist practices and outreach that focus on the present world and challenges of everyday existence.' See Travagnin, 'Humanistic Buddhism.' Instead of delving into an etymological analysis of this concept, I evoke it to capture the socially engaged spirit of this initiative.

21. Instead of providing a comprehensive review of this scholarship, I want to highlight their research methodologies. Structural themes such as state-religion relations and secular-modern transitions have animated scholarly interest in the study of key players of humanistic Buddhism. See Bianchi, *The Iron Statue*; Tuttle, *Tibetan Buddhists*; Welch, *The Buddhist Revival*. Besides, the intellectual trajectory and personal accomplishment of key reformers have also been examined. See Aviv, *Differentiating*; Jones, *Taixu's*; Ritzinger, *Anarchy*; Sullivan, 'Venerable Fazun'; Zu, *Just Society*. Recently, the dynamics of the local-global network have also received extensive attention. See Chia, *Monks in Motion*; DeVido, *Taiwan's Buddhist Nuns*; Hammerstrom, *The Huayan University Network*; Wu, *Esoteric Buddhism*. These studies have made significant contributions to the field. Building on their work, I want to explore the in-between zone of the macro/social level and the micro/personal level of humanistic Buddhism. Velji refers to this in-between zone as the meso-level, where individuals form a community to navigate social life and 'where the structural level and individual level interact.' See Velji, 'The Philosophy of Piety,' 26. Nevertheless, as will be seen shortly, I wonder why Velji considers community without its intergenerational history, given his proficiency in Henri Bergson's thought. That is why I intend to bring this intergenerational aspect to the fore.

22. Main and Lai, "Introduction: Reformulating," 7.

23. Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, xxi.

24. Wehrle, "'Bodies (that) matter'," 372–73.
25. Velji, 'The Philosophy of Piety,' 217.
26. Ibid., 242–44.
27. Norms are also at the centre of Don A. Pittman's study of Taixu, where the former interprets the latter as an 'ethical pietist.' See Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism*, 3–8. I find his discussion of norms inside a Buddhist community crucial for understanding Taixu's commitment to the Bodhisattvas' path. Nevertheless, I wish that Pittman could have elucidated how Taixu's reform displays his own agency in renewing and reforming his tradition. And this is the contribution I intend to make in this article.
28. Jones, *Taixu's*, iix.
29. Welch, *The Buddhist Revival*, 264.
30. Ritzinger, *Anarchy*, 3.
31. Ibid., 4.
32. Ibid., 7.
33. Ibid., 3.
34. Butler has not directly unpacked the notion of agency, although later scholars find the Butlerian agency pivotal for the theory of performativity. See Zaharijević, 'On Butler's.' Agency has been foregrounded in Mahmood's critique of the discourse of resistance in the discussion of the subject of freedom. See Mahmood, *Politics*, 153–188. Now, it should be clear to the readers that if agency would be merely defined as the capacity to resist norms, then the effort of Buddhist reformers in early republican China could only be imagined as a push against the past toward modernity or vice versa. To go beyond the push model, we need a more inclusive account of agency. Building on Mahmood's account, Velji draws from Bergson to redefine agency in terms of creativity. See Velji, 'The Philosophy,' 216–290. From the Buddhist perspective, agency entails the skilfulness as the capacity that makes both creativity and resistance possible. That is why I proffer to define agency in terms of the skilfulness of renewing norms, a skilfulness as the embodied knowledge of the twofold truth. Since a comprehensive analysis of agency is beyond my current scope, I will detail it elsewhere.
35. A complete translation of this editorial, together with the subsequent lecture on the same theme in 1930, has been offered by Jones. See Jones, *Taixu's*, 55–126.
36. For this historical context, see Welch, *The Buddhist Revival*.
37. Taixu, 'Jianshe,' 280.
38. Ibid.
39. Even though in *Taixu dashi quanshu* 太虛大師全書 [The Collected Writings of Master Taixu], his name is documented as 藏貫禪, I checked his original letter published in *Haichaoyin* 海潮音 to confirm that it should be 臧貫禪 from Zhucheng 諸城 in Shandong province. See Zang, 'Jianshe,' 1–4. Little is known about Zang, such as his dates of birth or his career, but he was a regular contributor to *Haichaoyin*.
40. Zang, 'Jianshe,' 1.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid., 2.
43. Ibid., 4.
44. Ibid.
45. Taixu, 'Jianshe,' 286–299. It seems that Taixu changed his view on family organization later on when he started promoting the project of Buddhicizing family. At least in this 1926 editorial, Taixu proposes to outsource familial care, childcare for instance, to public institutions, which does not indicate a gendered division of labour.
46. Taixu, 'Jianshe,' 299–300. As Taixu clarifies in his 1926 editorial, such a construction of an ideal society entails a balance between esoteric and exoteric practices. Exoterically, he concurs with Zang's proposal of building international Buddhist communities, and esoterically, he confirms the efficacy of mantras in protecting people from evil. Nevertheless, in such an ideal society, although people can attain personal flourishing to the utmost, they still suffer from the precariousness of life.

Thus, Taixu recommends that we aspire to rebirth in the other-worldly pure land upon death, where ultimate joy is ensured. However, in his 1930 lecture, Taixu seems to consider these other-worldly pure lands also as ideal societies in different spatiotemporality.

47. Taixu, 'Fulu,' 348.
48. Ibid., 348–49.
49. Ibid., 349.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid., 351.
55. Ibid., 349.
56. Ibid., 350.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid., 351.
59. I have coined the term transformative sociality to capture the Buddhist approach to social ontology that comes with its critical and transformative ethos. See Li, 'What is shared.'
60. Taixu, 'Weishi,' 362.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid.
63. Taixu, 'Faxing,' 300–01.
64. Ibid., 301.
65. Ibid., 301.
66. Ibid., 262.
67. Ibid.
68. Ibid., 308.
69. Taixu, 'Fulu,' 353.
70. Ibid., 351.
71. For this aspect of humanistic Buddhism, see Travagnin, 'Humanistic Buddhism.'
72. Fazun, 'Lüeshu,' 356.
73. Fazun, 'Yu Fafang,' 380.
74. Ibid.
75. A detailed study of Fazun's work in the Sino-Tibetan Academy of Buddhist Studies has been provided by Brenton Sullivan. See Sullivan, 'Venerable Fazun.' Xianyue Wang conducts a more general survey of Fazun's contribution to monastic education. See Wang, 'Interpreting Fazun.' Advancing their argument, I go beyond socio-cultural history to investigate the doctrinal philosophy in the Gelug presentation of Madhyamaka, through which I elaborate on Fazun's performative philosophy of monastic education.
76. Fazun, 'Cong xizang,' 27.
77. Ibid., 29.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid.
80. It is out of this aspiration to promote the true dharma in the human realm that Fazun decided to travel with his fellow monks to Tibet. In Gray Tuttle's words, they represent a group of Chinese monks who 'embraced Tibetan Buddhism as a source of authentic and potent teachings in order to redress perceived inadequacies of Chinese Buddhism' See Tuttle, *Tibetan Buddhists*, 98. Such an embracement alludes to the growing popularity of esoteric Buddhism in early republican China. As examined by Wei Wu, Taixu contributed to the rise of esoteric teachings, partly because of his vision of restoring various schools of Chinese Buddhism including the esoteric school. See Wu, *Esoteric Buddhism*, 34–37. It is also partly due to nationalistic discourses in the state religious policy of the new government in Nanjing in 1928, after the warlord period. See Wu, *Esoteric Buddhism*, 66–71. As Wu insightfully noted,

Taixu and his disciples are interested not only in the esoteric elements of Tibetan Buddhism, but also in its 'exoteric or Mahāyāna teachings' of Tibetan Buddhism. See Wu, *Esoteric Buddhism*, 40.

81. Travagnin, 'Humanistic Buddhism.'

82. Aviv, *Differentiating*, 19.

83. Ibid., 20.

84. Ibid.

85. As reviewed by William Edelglass, the competition between these two strands of Madhyamaka thought can be traced back to their methodological disputes, beginning in the sixth century. For Bhāvaviveka, Mādhyamikas are missing out when they do not incorporate the burgeoning *pramāṇa* theory into their reasoning, a theory that differentiates modes of knowing into intuiting, conceptualizing, and erroneous knowledge. In contrast, Candrakīrti insists that the only plausible method for the Mādhyamikas should be the *reductio*. Their debates result in the divide between Bhāvaviveka's promotion of the Svātantrika's autonomous argumentation and Candrakīrti's advocation for the Prasaṅgaika's *reductio* argumentation. Nevertheless, the debate soon went through a paradigm shift, insofar as Tsongkhapa 'claimed that Svātantrikas were crypto-realist.' See Edelglass, 'Review,' 415–416. Hence, for Tsongkhapa, this debate is ultimately about metaphysics. Since Fazun was trained in the Gelug School, he sides with Tsongkhapa to argue for the critique of the Svātantrikas, which I will present shortly. Tom Tillemans draws parallels between the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika debate and the contemporary dispute over the myth of the given. See Tillemans, 'Metaphysics,' 93–100. For readers who are interested in this distinction, see the edited volume by Dreyfus and McClintock, *The Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika Distinction.*

86. Fazun, 'Zhongguan,' 130.

87. According to Fazun, 'Sizong yaoyi' is a selection from Thuken Losang Chöyi Nyima's *The Crystal Mirror of Philosophical Systems*. See Fazun, 'Sizong yaoyi jiangji,' 10. The lecture notes were compiled by Fazun's student, Longlian, and published as a series of articles from 1951 to 1952 in the journal *Xiandai foxue* 现代佛學 [Modern Buddhism]. It should be noted that, in the journal, Longlian used a pseudonym Hongbei 弘悲. However, she confirms her authorship in her lecture notes on the *Heart Sūtra*. See Longlian, 'Xinjing qianshi,' 197.

88. Fazun, 'Sizong yaoyi xu,' 13.

89. Fazun, 'Zhongguan,' 131.

90. Ibid., 130.

91. Ibid.

92. Fazun, 'Weishi,' 122.

93. Ibid.

94. Ibid., 123.

95. Ibid.

96. Ibid., 125.

97. Although Fazun does not specify, readers can probably see how Bhāvaviveka incorporates the *pramāṇa* logic here in his affirmation of the possibility of direct intuition. The intuitive mode of knowing affirms a phenomenon that is directly given to consciousness from a real world out there. Their argument, thus, becomes construed by the Prāsaṅgikas as a way of reifying conventional reality into the pregiven and self-determined entity. Readers now can understand why Tsongkhapa deems the Svātantrikas to be crypto-realist, as previously seen in Edelglass's precis.

98. Fazun, 'Zhongguan,' 131.

99. Ibid.

100. Ibid., 132.

101. Fazun, 'Weishi,' 126. In contemporary scholarship on Tibetan Madhyamaka, Geshe Yeshes Thabkhas has elucidated the Prāsaṅgika position succinctly: 'cognition is not an epistemic warrant with respect to objectively real material form; but it is epistemically reliable insofar

as it warrants knowledge of an efficacious material form.' See Geshe Yeshes Thabkhas, 'How to think philosophically,' 238. I want to thank Jay Garfield for pointing me to this resource.

102. Fazun, 'Weishi,' 126.
103. Fazun, 'Zhongguan,' 132.
104. Longlian, 'Xinjing qianshi,' 197.
105. Fazun, 'Zhongguan,' 133.
106. Tsongkhapa, *Illuminating the Intent*, 148. Fazun translates it as 一體觀待為異. *B* no. 44, 9: 6.653a14.
107. Fazun, 'Zhongguan,' 133.
108. Fazun, 'Weishi,' 128.
109. Ibid., 129.
110. Ibid.
111. Ibid.
112. Fazun, 'Zhuzhe ruzang,' 358.
113. Ouyang and his student, Lü Lü Cheng 呂澂 (1896–1989), developed a lay approach to Buddhist education in Chinese modernity. For Ouyang's proposal, see Aviv, *Differentiating*. For Lü's project, see Zu, *Just Awakening*.
114. Fazun, 'Zhuzhe ruzang,' 361.
115. Ibid.
116. Their debate revolves around the *Dharmadharmatāvibhānga* 辨法法性論 [Distinguishing Dharma and Dharma Nature]. Since this debate is beyond the scope of this article, I will not delve deeper into it.
117. I follow Wei Wu in using the term 'China proper,' which serves to 'differentiate the territory dominated by Han Chinese from the frontier regions of ethnic minorities.' See Wu, *Esoteric Buddhism*, 203.
118. Fazun, 'Lüeshu,' 356.
119. Ibid.
120. Ibid., 351–352.
121. Fazun, 'Lun xueseng,' 322. That is why Fazun refers to secular pedagogy qua 'national education' (國民教育) as 'unbalanced' (畸形).
122. Fazun, 'Lüeshu,' 353–355.
123. See Fazun, 'Huanying,' 328–329. In this welcoming speech to the delegation from Burma in 1940, Fazun castigates Japanese Buddhists for being complicit in their country's invasion of China and other Asian nations. The participation of Chinese Buddhists in defending their country, thus, fulfils a threefold goal: safeguarding the redemptive potential of Buddhism, protecting the Chinese nation, and promoting peace in Asia.
124. Fazun, 'Lüeshu,' 353.
125. Ibid.
126. Fazun, 'Zhuzhe ruzang,' 366.
127. The department eventually becomes known as the Sino-Tibetan Academy of Buddhist Studies. See Fazun, 'Lun xueseng,' 323.
128. Lai, 'Praying,' 69–118.
129. Ibid., 182–246.
130. Ibid., 118.
131. This conversation is documented by Ching Hsuan Mei after interviewing Fazun's disciple, Jinghui 淨慧 (1933–2013). See Mei, 'Xianshen yijing shiye de Fazun fashi,' 46.

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Abbreviations

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