

journal of global buddhism

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## Research Article

*Journal of Global Buddhism* 1 (2000): 82-111



Buddhism and Marxism in Taiwan:  
Lin Qiuwu's Religious Socialism and  
Its Legacy in Modern Times.

By Charles B. Jones

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**Buddhism and Marxism in Taiwan:  
Lin Qiuwu's Religious Socialism and Its Legacy in Modern Times**

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INTRODUCTION

**F**rom 1895 to 1945, Taiwan was part of the Japanese empire, having been freely ceded by the Qing court at the conclusion of the Sino-Japanese War. The memoirs of the Chinese official who signed the treaty of Shimonoseki, Li Hongzhang (1823-1901), indicate that China gave the island away with no hesitation or regrets, seeing Taiwan as a pestilential frontier inhabited only by riffraff and headhunting aboriginal tribes (Jones 1999:33). However, the Taiwanese themselves were not consulted, and felt betrayed. Consequently, they put up much resistance, first in the form of armed rebellions, and, after the ruthless suppression of the last major uprising in 1915, with political and cultural movements to maintain some degree of autonomy in local affairs. This created a political climate that affected all aspects of life on the island, including the religious.

At the same time, various developments proceeded apace in Taiwan as in other territories: modernization, secularization, and the ferment occasioned by the rise of Marxist thought. These movements also affected various areas of cultural life, including religion. In most cases, those who adopted Marxism followed Marx's wholesale critique and rejection of religion, and those whose worldviews were shaped primarily by religion tended to reject Marxism out of hand. There were, however, some who chose the middle ground, and tried to hold both Marxism and religion together, in tension or in synergy. In the area of Chinese Buddhism, the most well-known and best-documented case is that of the Venerable Taixu (1889-1947), the most celebrated reformer and modernizer of the twentieth century.

In this article, I wish to call attention to another, less prominent figure: Lin Qiuwu, also known by his monastic name as Venerable Zhengfeng (1903-1934), a man who is often referred to as “Taiwan’s revolutionary monk.” In his brief but intense life, he was involved in many of the cultural and political currents outlined above. A staunch partisan of Taiwan autonomy, he put his talents to work helping the local population deal with the hardships of the Japanese colonial regime. Heavily influenced by Marxist historical analysis, he labored tirelessly to educate the workers about the pernicious nature of the capitalist and imperialist system under which they lived. As a modernizer, he took to the road as a lecturer and wrote many articles decrying superstition and advocating gender equality. As an ordained Buddhist monk, he faced the daunting task of putting Buddhism to work as a force for social and political change while simultaneously trying to convince other Marxists that it was different from other religions and could actually be a useful weapon in the Marxist revolutionary arsenal.

Lin Qiuwu has become an object of academic study in Taiwan itself in the last two decades for a couple of reasons. His life has been particularly well-documented because of the efforts of his nephew, Li Xiaofeng, a professional historian who has been particularly active in researching and publishing studies of his uncle’s life and work. Li’s efforts have made a wide variety of documentary sources available in a convenient form. Partly as a result of Li’s efforts, Lin has lately become something of a folk hero to two distinct, but related, groups: First, he has become a revered precursor to latter-day Buddhist political radicals in Taiwan who read his works and study his life to learn about his way of combining a progressive political agenda with religious convictions. This group’s determination to emulate his example provides evidence of his continuing influence in the modern Taiwan scene. Second, for promoters of Taiwan history and culture, he is a native figure worthy of study and a useful counterpoint to the better-documented mainlanders who claim credit for shaping Taiwan since 1949. He is significant for them because his life story shows that progressive and modernizing movements were present

within Taiwan prior to the arrival of the Nationalists in 1949, thus countering the Nationalists' post-1949 propaganda that justified mainland dominance by portraying the island's people as backwards and benighted.

However, Li Xiaofeng freely admits his own ignorance with respect to religious studies and Buddhist studies, and so it must fall to others to assess the specifically religious dimension of Lin Qiuwu's life and thought. Though two scholars in Taiwan have taken up this task (Yang 1991 and Jiang 1990, 1996), no one has yet done so outside of Taiwan. As I hope to show, such a study pays dividends in two forms: it opens another small window into the interaction of Marxism and Buddhism in the Chinese cultural sphere during the first half of the twentieth century, and it casts a light on one of the fountainheads of a significant strain of religio-political thought and action in modern-day Taiwan. Thus, consideration of his career not only illuminates events and trends of his own time, but provides the background of, and delineates the model and inspiration for, important movements in modern Taiwanese Buddhism. In short, he shows us aspects of both the past and the present of Taiwan Buddhism.

Thus, this article will serve two purposes. It will introduce Lin Qiuwu's life and work to a Western audience, and it will provide a careful analysis of the rhetoric and arguments that he deployed in order to redefine Buddhism in such a way that it would serve a progressive political and social program. We will begin with an examination of Lin Qiuwu's biography, and conclude with a consideration of his thought and work.

#### LIN QIUWU'S LIFE AND TIMES

Although the scholarly sources consulted for this study all contain biographical sketches of Lin Qiuwu, they all draw their materials from the work of Li Xiaofeng. His research, carried on over a period of some decades and based on a thorough survey of Lin Qiuwu's extant works and a solid grounding in Taiwanese history, is not easily surpassed or even supplemented. Because other scholars closer to the scene have found him reliable, I shall follow their example and summarize his account, with additional input from Harry J. Lamley's recent and very complete

survey of Taiwan's history during the Japanese period.

Lin Qiuwu was born in 1903, eight years after China ceded Taiwan to Japan in 1895. His father was an illiterate fruit vendor in Tainan with roots in Fujian province. Though lacking in education and material prosperity, Lin's father was nevertheless a very moral and upright man who entertained his children with tales of the Taoist Immortals coming to the aid of the poor and downtrodden (Li 1991:8). Lin went to the Japanese public schools during the day, and attended a traditional Chinese Confucian school after hours. He proved a very bright and gifted student, and eventually tested into Taipei Teacher's College (*Taihoku Shihan Gakkō*), the only publicly-funded institution of higher education open to ethnically Chinese residents in Taiwan (Li 1991:10; see also Lamley 1999:211 for an account of the discriminatory educational policy enacted by the Japanese viceregal government during this period).

Lin was part of a new generation of Taiwanese youth who distinguished themselves from their parents in two ways. First, they had more access to education due to the modernizing policies of the Japanese administration. At the same time, they were exposed to political currents emanating from the mainland: Sun Yat-sen visited Taiwan as early as 1900, and the constitutional reformer Liang Qichao came in 1911. The combination of education and exposure to progressive political ideas inclined members of Lin's generation to more direct community involvement (Lamley 1999:217-218). Lin's literacy enabled him to intervene with the Japanese authorities on behalf of Taiwanese who found themselves in trouble, advocating for them and disputing charges when necessary. The police at this time served a variety of civil functions beyond simple law enforcement (Lamley 1999:213), which means that Lin was kept quite busy with this. This activism made him a hero to the local Taiwanese population, but the Japanese came to regard him as a troublemaker and placed him under surveillance. His penchant for direct action carried over into his student days at Taipei Teacher's College, where he studied philosophy and often took part in student symposia. At informal student gatherings he spoke against Japanese imperial policies in Taiwan. His

fellow Taiwanese students appreciated this, but the school's administrators did not (Li 1991:32,33).

Outside of the schoolyard, Lin also became involved in Taiwan populist movements during his days at the Teacher's College. In the early 1920s, Taiwanese students studying in Japan proper (Jpn.: *naichi*, lit. "inner lands," a term meaning the home islands) were exposed to all the intellectual and political currents of the day, including socialism, communism, and other movements. Some of these students began writing about these ideas in a magazine called *Taiwan Youth (Taiwan Qingnian)*. Harry J. Lamley points out that the intellectual atmosphere in Japan at that time was fairly free, and that Taiwanese students studying in Tokyo or other places enjoyed greater freedom from discrimination there than back home in Taiwan (Lamley 1999:230). Thus, the students suffered no reprisals while in Japan itself, but the magazine was considered too inflammatory for the unsettled situation in Taiwan, so its importation into the island was forbidden. Nevertheless, copies did come in through clandestine channels, and Lin Qiuwu numbered himself among its avid readers.

When the Taiwanese students returned home from their studies, they made contact with like-minded students and young professionals, and some eventually decided to establish an organization to promote socialist political goals and to agitate for the rights of the native population. Thus, the "Taiwan Cultural League" (Ch: *Taiwan wenhua xiehui*; Jpn: *Taiwan bunka kyōkai*) was born on October 17, 1921, and Li Xiaofeng reports that over 1,000 students at Taipei Teacher's College joined. Lin Qiuwu, of course, was prominent among them. The following month, Lin made a trip to Japan proper, where he obtained several copies of *Taiwan Youth* as well as other contraband literature to smuggle home. Unfortunately, he was caught, all of his literature was confiscated, and the police notified the school of the incident.

While this cloud still hung over him, a student protest broke out spontaneously at the Teacher's College. The police arrived to report some students to the school administration, but the students barred their way, pushed them back, and threw stones. Some twenty or so students were

detained and questioned in connection with this incident. Although Lin was not among them, he made some inflammatory speeches in the following weeks, and it was for this activity that he was also detained. Although the police let him go with only a stern lecture, the incident led in the end to his expulsion from the school in the middle of his final semester. The Japanese authorities did not want him credentialed to teach in a school system whose mission included the acculturation of the Taiwanese and their transformation into good, law-abiding citizens of the Empire (Li 1991:27-43). Lin would have graduated only eleven days after the time of his expulsion.

After this, the authorities kept Lin under constant surveillance. Whenever he found a job, the police would intervene and tell his prospective employer that he was a troublemaker. Lin, for his part, kept himself at the forefront of the authorities' consciousness. He continued going to the police station and working on behalf of Taiwanese detainees, taking care of their paperwork, and guiding them through all the necessary procedures. Six months after his expulsion, he migrated to Kobe to work, but returned in 1922, less than a year after his arrival. Contrary to his expectations, police interest in him had not slackened during his time away. His former schoolmates and fellow revolutionaries had been busy with their organization, the Taiwan Cultural League, and with efforts to establish a Taiwan Assembly with full legislative authority. Their activities sparked a police crackdown in 1923, and although Lin himself was not directly implicated, his close association with many of the protagonists put him back under government surveillance (Li 1991:55-56).

Disillusioned, he then went off once again, this time to Xiamen where he is rumored to have studied philosophy at Xiamen University. According to Li Xiaofeng, this is difficult to verify, because Xiamen University has no record or transcript corroborating his attendance there. It may be, however, that he went under an assumed name during this time, or he may have simply audited classes without actually registering (Li 1991:57). Yang Huinan quotes from essays that Lin wrote under an assumed name, giving some credence to this theory (Yang 1991:57, no. 19). On the other

hand, Lamley notes that Taiwanese living in mainland China were technically Japanese citizens, and so enjoyed privileges of extraterritoriality. This aroused resentment from native Chinese in the areas where they lived, and so Taiwanese traveling outside the safe zones of the treaty ports frequently tried to blend in so as to avoid discrimination and abuse (Lamley 1999:230). Xiamen at that time was a haven of Marxist-Leninist thought and anti-Japanese sentiment. The school in which Lin (may have) taught, the Jimei School (*Jimei xuexiao*), was home to the Minnan-Taiwan Student Federation (*Minnan Taiwan xuesheng lianhehui*), a group organized to agitate against Japanese rule in Taiwan. Although we do not know for certain that Lin participated actively in this or any other group, we do know that many of his close associates did.

Though his sojourn in Xiamen allowed Lin greater exposure to currents of socialist and communist thought, he also began at this time frequenting Buddhist temples, and talking to the monks about Buddhist thought and practice. These visits inspired an outpouring of poetry that suggests the affinity that he felt, not only with Buddhist teachings, but with the whole atmosphere and way of life at Buddhist monasteries.

His stay in Xiamen was cut short by news of his mother's death in 1925. Returning home once again, he tried to follow her deathbed instructions that he remain close to home and assist his father, but again the plight of his fellow Taiwanese under the Japanese viceregal government called him out. He became involved in one of the Taiwan Cultural League's more successful activities: the lecture tour. Starting in late 1925, he began touring small towns and villages giving regular Saturday and Sunday night lectures. These talks, expressly intended to stir up nativist sentiments and to decry Japanese abuses against the Taiwanese, aroused great suspicion on the part of the government. A policeman or two always attended in case things got out of hand, and would sometimes order the assembly to disperse if the speaker became too impassioned or the crowd too unruly. During one such talk, Lin actually slapped a policeman who ordered a halt to the proceedings, and he spent the day in jail (Li 1991:70). These events became even more popular later in the year when the League

acquired a movie projector. At this point, they began showing silent films with the designated speaker narrating. Even though they charged a nominal admission fee for these showings, they had no problem filling the hall.

The lectures and film presentations kept Lin very busy from 1925 to 1927, but in 1927 the Taiwan Cultural League suffered a schism (Lamley 1999:234). As radical as the Japanese authorities regarded them, the original members seemed too conservative for some of the more left-leaning younger members, and the latter group staged a coup in that year and seized control of the League's agenda. The more moderate group split to found a rival organization (the Taiwan People's Party), but at this point, with the lecture tour on hold while both groups re-consolidated their positions, Lin had some free time to think and reflect. In the end, Lin astonished all of his compatriots by reporting to the Kaiyuan Temple in Tainan and submitting himself to the abbot, Ven. Deyuan (1882-1946), for ordination as a Buddhist monk. He took the *Dharma* name Zhengfeng ("realizing the summit"). As we shall shortly see, however, his entrance into religious life did not entail a decisive break with secular political affairs.

Lin's compatriots in the Taiwan Cultural League were naturally puzzled by this move, but in fact Lin had been thinking about it for a long time. As mentioned above, he had begun visiting Buddhist establishments during his time in Xiamen. After returning to Tainan, he spent his free time reading both in Buddhism and in Western thought. At the same time, he had spent a good deal of time at the Kaiyuan Temple, an eminent temple that dated from the Qing dynasty, and had developed a very close friendship with the abbot Deyuan. Both men were progressive and modernist in spirit, and both were concerned about Japanese encroachments into the rights and property of the Taiwanese, Lin with civilian properties, Deyuan with attempts by Japanese missionaries to commandeer the Kaiyuan Temple itself. (One modern author, Kan Zhengzong, asserts that at least some of the problems that Deyuan faced in his dealings with the authorities actually came about precisely because of his connection with Lin Qiuwu. However, he gives no specific instances

of this. See Kan 1999:85.)

Lin's desire to advance his education had not changed with ordination, and Deyuan, who was committed to monastic education (Kan 1999:84), was willing to accommodate him on this. Deyuan arranged for Lin to travel to Japan to study at Komazawa University, and for the next three years Lin sat at the feet of another master whose religious and political views comported well with his own. While at Komazawa, Lin studied with professor Nukariya Kaiten, a well-known authority on Zen Buddhist history and doctrine, and a modernizer in his own right. Like most Japanese clerics, Nukariya, though a Sōtō Zen priest, was married, wore street clothes, and did not adhere to a vegetarian diet; unlike many of his contemporaries, he also chose to open his interests beyond a narrow antiquarian study of Zen and acquainted himself with modern currents of thought as well, including Marxism and socialism. Needless to say, Lin and his teacher got on quite well, and for the first time in his life, Lin was able to complete a course of study and receive his diploma (Jiang Canteng 1990:5/7).

Even while engaged in his studies at Komazawa, Lin continued to think about issues of social justice. His outpouring of books and articles all reflect a Marxist, historical-materialist view of politics and even religion itself. He foresaw the development of a "purified" Buddhism that would abjure religion's historical function as a tool that feudalists, imperialists, and capitalists could use to pacify the masses, and assume a new function in reorienting people away from otherworldly concerns to very this-worldly action. He expressed this hope in a four-line poem that has become his best known epigram:

Wisdom realizes the 3000 [worlds] in a single thought;  
 a consciousness that reflects on the currents of the times is the highest Chan.  
 A deep understanding of the Tathāgata's fearless teaching:  
 the vow to struggle alongside the weak minority for their rights!  
 (Li 1991:94)

By the time he returned to Taiwan in April, 1930, he had set the task for himself of reforming Buddhism in order to fashion it into an effective

tool for the liberation of the masses.

In the four years remaining in his life, he was very active on several fronts. He became an official lecturer at the Kaiyuan Temple in Tainan, a missionary for the South Seas Buddhist Association (*Nan'e Bukkyō Kai*),<sup>1</sup> and joined several secular political organizations as well: the Taiwan People's Party (*Taiwan minzhong dang*) and the Alliance of Taiwan Friends of the Worker (*Taiwan gong you zong lianmeng*). He also edited a magazine, the *Red Path News* (*Chi dao bao*), a journal published in Chinese that the Japanese authorities deemed subversive and shut down. Surprisingly, given his views, Lin published a series of articles in the SSBA's official newsletter, *The South Seas Buddhist* (*Nan'e Bukkyō*) with no apparent qualms on the part of the editors. In addition, he served as secretary of the Kaiyuan Temple, and was involved in its own struggles with internal factionalism and attempts by the authorities to expropriate its properties. Finally, he carried on many activities to discourage and ultimately put an end to Buddhist practices that he considered "superstitious." These included the Ghost Festival (*yu lan pen*) held every year on July fifteenth and involving massive (and in Lin's view, wasteful) prestations of food to the dead; and the ritual called "the Yogic Release of the Flaming Mouths" (*yuqie yankou*), a long and costly ceremony for feeding the hungry ghosts who roamed the world and accounted for hauntings.

Lin was still relatively young when he returned from his study at Komazawa, and given his idealism and prodigious energy, he might have become a tremendous force for social change in Taiwan, or he may have spent his days in prison. (The latter is more likely, given that the viceregal government displayed progressively less tolerance for left-wing political activism as military mobilization and the outbreak of war on the Chinese mainland moved forward; see Lamley 1999:234.) However, in August 1934, he detected the first signs of the onset of tuberculosis. His illness progressed rapidly, and he succumbed to it on October 10, 1934, at the age of thirty-two (by Chinese reckoning). Today, his ashes rest in a pagoda that he himself had designed at the Kaiyuan Temple in Tainan.

## LIN QIUWU'S RELIGIOUS SOCIALISM

Lin Qiuwu's writings leave the reader with the distinct impression that his was a gifted and fertile mind not satisfied with easy solutions. In a very real sense, his intellectual and political tasks would have been much easier had he chosen *either* Marxism *or* Buddhism, two distinct worldviews that are usually opposed to each other. Had he been able to say with Buddhism that social oppression is part of the larger problem of *samsāra*, to be transcended through liberating insight, or with Marxism that religion is a tool of oppression to be opposed and eliminated, then his task would at least have been unencumbered by the need to reconcile apparent contradictions. But he chose to embrace both, and the tension generated by this choice led him to explore avenues unnoticed by his religious and political compatriots.

A comprehensive analysis of both the political and religious sides of Lin's thought would make this article quite unwieldy. It can make its most positive contribution by closely analyzing the way Lin used Buddhist terms and concepts in fashioning his political discourse. Thus, we will look at some of the specifics of Lin's religio-political synthesis with special attention to his co-option of the Buddhist notion of the Pure Land, his development of the ideal of *bodhisattva* conduct, and his use of the unity of the *dharmadhātu* as the philosophical justification for class struggle. I hope to present the Buddhist content of Lin's thought in enough detail that scholars who study the general impact of Marxism on religion will be able to draw upon the material given below for their own analyses, although scholars of Buddhism may find it convenient to skip some of the more elementary material.

*A Pure Land on earth*

Historically, the most popular form of Buddhism in China and Japan is not Zen, but Pure Land. Briefly, Pure Land Buddhism, as understood by the majority of its devotees, teaches that far, far to the West of our present world of suffering, a Buddha named Amitābha dwells in a land made

pure by the purity of his own conduct and consciousness. There are no temptations there, all its inhabitants obtain what they need just by thinking about it, and the Buddha and his attendant *bodhisattvas* stand ever ready to provide perfect teachings aimed at each inhabitant's individual level of readiness. Even the songs of the birds in the trees and the babbling of the streams preach the *Buddha-dharma* continually. It is a place where conditions are ideal for meditation, study, and the eventual (and guaranteed) attainment of Buddhahood.

The good news of Pure Land Buddhism is that Amitābha created this Pure Land for the express purpose of drawing to it beings who, because of the less-than-perfect circumstances of life in this world, have no chance of escaping the vicissitudes of birth and death through their own study and practice. As represented in the *Wuliangshou Fo Jing* (T. vol. 12, no. 360), Amitābha, while still a monk cultivating the religious practices that led to his own eventual attainment of Buddhahood, made a series of forty-eight vows that set forth the conditions under which he would accept enlightenment. Among these, the eighteenth states that he would not accept Buddhahood unless even impure and unenlightened beings, by having faith in him and calling his name as few as ten times, could gain rebirth there (Inagaki and Stewart 1995:34). In the course of time, the monk who made these vows did achieve Buddhahood under the name of Amitābha, indicating that these vows have been fulfilled by definition.

For millions of Chinese and Japanese Buddhists, this opened an “easy path” to religious cultivation, giving them hope that, even if they lacked the intelligence, motivation, leisure, and resources to practice and attain perfect Buddhahood in this world, they could, by the power of Amitābha's vow, come to the Pure Land in the next life and be assured of attaining final liberation there. The only requirement for the present was that they entrust themselves to Amitābha's compassionate vow and recite his name tirelessly.

From a Marxist perspective, of course, such a conception of religious practice represented a “false consciousness.” A Marxist analysis would point out that this mode of Buddhism saw the present human situation as

utterly unsalvageable, and thus encouraged a passive acceptance of all the ills of life, including the existence of oppressive social structures. By encouraging the masses to give up hope of ever improving their lot in this life and turning their attention to a golden land in the hereafter, Pure Land thought seemed to demonstrate quite aptly that religion was indeed the opiate of the masses.

Rather than simply dismiss Pure Land devotionism as counter-revolutionary, Lin chose instead to appropriate its vocabulary and redefine it for his own purposes. Quoting Lenin in an article in his magazine *Red Path News*, he wrote:

From each according to his ability, to each according to his need, without a trace of selfish intention, each and every person strives to produce in common. In this kind of society, everyone will have enough, and thievery will disappear all by itself. Buddhism has a name for this kind of world: the Pure Land of Utmost Bliss. (quoted in Li 1991:163)

This indicates that Lin wished to redefine the Pure Land as something that had to be built here in this world rather than sought after in the world to come. Furthermore, the wording in this passage and the one below shows that, for Lin, this was not an innovation, but the proper understanding of what Buddhism had always meant by the “Pure Land” and the practices that called it into being. In another place, Lin made clear the means by which the masses can build this Pure Land in the here and now: class struggle. In an article published in *The South Seas Buddhist* in 1929 called “Class Struggle and Buddhism,” he wrote:

When Buddhism calls people to construct a Pure Land in this world, . . . it does not mean to utilize some outside, artificial power, or to bind oneself with ritualistic practices, or to bring the masses to make only surface changes. . . . Rather, it means to concentrate on taking firm and steady steps with a passionate attitude to call people to awake to their original nature in the midst of their daily activities, calling forth their dormant strength and faith! . . . In sum, the Buddhist attitude toward the class struggle is of a piece from start to finish: It means to stand within the no-self that is also the Great Self, to take as one’s purpose that one will cherish the propertyless masses and

liberate the deprived classes, using methods that exclude military force and violence, and especially taking as one's basic principle the resistance that is non-resistance. (reproduced in Li 1991:171-172)

Thus, for Lin, the Pure Land represented the final goal of establishing the perfect classless society on earth, where everyone gets what they need. His primary difference with other Marxists lay in his deliberate exclusion of violent means to attain this end and his appropriation of paradoxical Buddhist wisdom language—such as “the non-self that is the Great Self” and “resistance that is non-resistance”—in order to oppose those who sought too-easy solutions to deep and intractable social problems.

### *The conduct of the bodhisattva*

It is entirely possible to belittle Lin's use of Pure Land thought as a mere rhetorical co-opting of Buddhist terminology. Rather than truly engaging traditional Pure Land thought and adapting it for his social program, he merely took “Pure Land” and “Amitābha Buddha,” terms with which his audience would already be familiar and to which they were likely to respond favorably, and re-directed them to other referents. His remarks on the Buddhist ideal of the *bodhisattva*, however, are more substantive.

From the beginning of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India between the first centuries B.C. and A.D., devotees and practitioners have looked to the figure of the *bodhisattva* as a model and ideal. The single most important distinguishing feature of the *bodhisattva*, that which sets him apart from the so-called “Hīnayāna” Buddhist, is his compassion. Although their religious training may look the same in form (meditation, study, scripture chanting, and so on), the *bodhisattva* is motivated by impartial, altruistic compassion toward sentient beings. The *bodhisattva* sees them all as suffering in the sea of birth and death, and desires to liberate them all into the bliss of *nirvāṇa*. In traditional Chinese Buddhism, this motivation was formalized in a series of “four great vows” (*si hong shiyuan*) that each new initiate into Mahāyāna practice undertook, the first of which reads: “[Although] sentient beings are innumerable, I vow to save [them

all].” (See the entry “*si hong shiyuan*” in the *Foguang Da Cidian*, p. 1677c<sub>ff</sub>.)

This did not always imply that the Mahāyāna follower immediately went forth to take an active role in relieving social problems. Often devotees felt that they lacked the ability to do anything in the present world, and concentrated instead on practices leading to Buddhahood, the attainment of which would confer upon them supernatural abilities that would render them capable of effective action to relieve suffering. Also, this relief did not always consist of ameliorating or improving anyone’s situation in the world, but rather of getting them out of the world. In traditional Pure Land thought, for example, people would recite the name of Amitābha Buddha with the intention of getting themselves out of *samsāra* and into the Pure Land. Once there, they would practice and attain Buddhahood, at which point they would construct their own Pure Land as a base from which to save sentient beings. (See, for example, Yuan Hongdao [1568-1610], *Xifang Helun*, T.1976, 47:392a2-10 for a passage stating the traditional goal of becoming a Buddha in the Pure Land and then returning to save all sentient beings.)

Needless to say, Lin was not satisfied with this way of construing *bodhisattva* practice, and sought to inculcate in Taiwan’s Buddhists a more active stance with regard to social ills. At times, his handling of this issue did not go beyond the arguments advanced in the above section; that is, he simply took the term “*bodhisattva*” and transplanted it into a Marxist context, as when he wrote:

The one who cultivates bodhisattva conduct is thereby a harbinger of social revolution. His fundamental purpose is to build a heaven on earth, a western [Pure Land] in this land, to enable all of humanity (and eventually all beings whatsoever) to escape all suffering and attain all bliss. (quoted in Jiang 1990:5/4).

Had this been the extent of his remarks, then we would simply have another case of rhetorical appropriation, where, in speaking to a Buddhist audience, he bent their terminology to his own ends.

However, in defining the proper course of action for the Buddhist in

the world, Lin had to face squarely the contradiction that others would surely perceive in his life and work: that he, an avid Marxist, had taken up the religious life. He was not a secular reformer castigating Buddhists from the outside, as so many others in China and Taiwan did at that time. Rather, he was a Buddhist monk himself who had the dual tasks of criticizing Buddhism for its neglect of social issues *and* of convincing secular Marxists that Buddhism could be a tool in the service of a humane program of social reform. How did he find his balancing point?

First, Lin affirmed a Marxist view of religion's place in history. He subscribed fully to the view of historical materialism, and accepted that religion was (1) a manifestation of an alienated consciousness, and (2) part of the "superstructure" that came into place when the production of basic goods and services necessary for survival was secure. He affirmed, furthermore, that religion had, throughout most of human history, been a means for the wealthy and privileged feudal lords, capitalists, and imperialists to keep the masses docile and passive. Traditional Pure Land teachings, for instance, in telling people that they had no realistic chance of improving their lot in this world, caused them to displace their hopes and aspirations onto a world to come. Not having any reason to think that life in this world could be improved at all, they lost their spirit and became passive and pliant. Pure Land Buddhism (as well as other forms) thus grew out of the basic structure of the means of production and served to sustain and protect a social order in which the many were exploited for the advantage of the few.

But this scathing critique of Buddhism only accomplished half of Lin's purpose, namely, to criticize Buddhism for neglecting social problems. In order to defend Buddhism as a useful adjunct to Marxist revolution, Lin offered an alternative analysis of Buddhism's potential. In Lin's view, Buddhism was fundamentally not a religion, but a philosophy that had unfortunately become enmeshed in religious trappings. Behind the historical accretions of things such as Pure Land thought, Lin saw a very humanistic call for people to wake up from their slumbers, to investigate actively the nature of reality, and to formulate a plan of action

to deal with the suffering inherent in it. If one took on this task for the sake of others as well as oneself, then one was engaged in *bodhisattva* conduct.

In a short book published privately at the Kaiyuan Temple about women's rights, Lin wrote about the *bodhisattva*:

Bodhisattva conduct means that, on the basis of a correct view of oneself, one works for the welfare of all people in society, acting without a trace of fear. "Benefitting self and others" (*zi li li ta*) is a saying that expresses this type of conduct. (quoted in Li 1991:179)

Thus, Lin had no patience with an interpretation of *bodhisattva* practice that counseled solitary work apart from society until some time in the distant future when one would be equipped with the powers and omniscience of Buddhahood to deal with others' suffering. Instead, he saw Buddhists as taking on the problems of society in the here and now, realizing their compassion in concrete acts to improve life in their local community. In opposition to traditional Pure Land practice, in which the devotee sought to create their own otherworldly Pure Land later, Lin set the task as one of building a "Pure Land on Earth."

If all beings can be without suffering, and enjoy only pleasure, then this earth would become Heaven (*tian tang*). Otherwise, if the strong eat the food of the weak, if distribution is not fair, and this situation endures, then Hell appears right here! How can it be that Heaven is up in the sky and Hell down below the earth? (quoted in Li 1991:179)

In all cases, Lin sought to redefine the place of the *bodhisattva*'s practice as this present world, and the object of the *bodhisattva*'s compassion as the present society.

#### *The realm of Indra's net*

We have already seen that Lin sought to blunt any possible criticism of his religious life on the part of other Marxists by denying that Buddhism is a religion and presenting it as a hard-nosed philosophy instead. In his writings on *bodhisattva* conduct, we have seen how he rationalized this concept and stripped it of its otherworldly content in order to put it to

work as a means of inspiring Buddhists to this-worldly social reform. On a more abstract philosophical plane, however, he saw in Buddhist thought ideas that would complement and even humanize Marxist ideas. The most speculative of these ideas was the unitive vision of Tiantai, Huayan, and other strains of Chinese Buddhist philosophy, which he filtered through his Japanese teacher Nukariya Kaiten's idea of "one buddha" (*yi fo*).

Chinese Buddhism is rich in concepts that relate the many to the one and the many to each other. Tiantai philosophy, starting with the third "patriarch" Zhiyi (538-597), had propounded the unity of all individual phenomena with a single transcendental principle called Absolute Mind, or Middle-Way Buddha-Nature. This mind was the mind of all *Buddhas*, reflecting the truth of the cosmos, a truth that was not static but active, even in the world's most defiled objects and immoral actions. Everything manifested this Mind and this truth, and on this basis the Tiantai school could assert a fundamental unity of the world and a basic equality of all things. (See Ng Yu-kwan 1993, chapter four.) Similarly, Huayan thought used various arguments to go beyond relating all individual phenomena to the single grand unity, and sought to relate them to each other as well. With its famous slogan *shi shi wu ai* ("no obstructions between phenomenon and phenomenon"), Huayan thought asserted that each individual element within the great unity is intimately interconnected, and what each does affects all others and the whole as well (See Cook 1977, especially chapters five and six). Chan (Zen) Buddhism provided practices that would enable people to go beyond philosophical speculation and see this unity of all things directly and experientially.

Though in many if not most instances a Buddhist practitioner would take this concept as a basis for cultivating a particular meditative vision, Lin was quick to see the social implications of this kind of unitive thinking. He laid out his argument in an article for the SSBA newsletter called "Class Struggle and Buddhism" ("*Jieji douzheng yu fojiao*"), already quoted above. In this article, he uses his teacher's term "one buddha" rather than other, more common vocabulary, but the idea of the

interpenetration of unifying principle and differentiated phenomena is essentially the same. He explained the concept in this way:

Now what is the most basic teaching of Buddhism? It is “one buddha.” The “one” in “one buddha” is not “one” as in “one, two, three...”, but is the oneness of a grand unity. Therefore, Buddhism teaches that one buddha is all buddhas. The buddha is the spiritual light at work throughout the limitlessly vast universe. Therefore, between the sky and the wide earth, each and every thing in the jungle of phenomena represents a slice of this spiritual light. Thus, because the scriptures say “all sentient beings possess buddha-nature,” and also “grass, trees, and the earth all become buddhas,” and “the sentient and the non-sentient all attain the Way,” all human beings can naturally be called “buddhas.” Since all human beings are buddhas, then there are definitely many buddhas. The many buddhas are the “all buddhas” of which we spoke. Since one buddha is all buddhas, all buddhas [that is, all human beings] therefore resolve back to one buddha. (Lin 1929, 55; reproduced in Yang 1991:49-50)

Professor Yang Huinan, in analyzing this passage, breaks it down into the following components: First, Lin understands the number “one” in “one buddha” to mean the totality, the whole, the entirety. (In fact, this is a common use of the word “*yi*” in everyday speech. For instance, *yi tian* can mean either “one day” or “all day.”) Thus, “one buddha” means “the Buddha in his entirety.” Derivatively, it means “all Buddhas” as well, since they are all expressions of a single, common Buddhahood. Second, this “one buddha” is “the defining spiritual light of the boundless universe.” Third, the multitude of living beings and other differentiated phenomena of the universe are but “slices” of this spiritual light, seen as both “the whole Buddha” and “all Buddhas.” Fourth, as a result, all beings are neither the same nor different than the Buddha, since the same fundamental nature pervades both the Buddha and all beings (Yang 1991:50). Thus, taking his cue from traditional Chinese Buddhist philosophy, Lin posited a basic unity among all human beings based on their common Buddhahood; indeed, this grand unity extended even to animals and inanimate objects. All were grounded in this “one buddha,” and that meant that they formed a single reality with all Buddhas, all

other beings, and all minds.

In another article, Lin drew explicit connections between this idea of cosmic unity and the ideal of social unity. He wrote:

Individual bodies, seen from the perspective of the body of the whole, are not separate from each other. When individuals gather together, society emerges. One's power goes to support and aid others, and in turn the power of others external to oneself comes back to support and aid one. The universe is even greater than society. The universe is a vast, orderly body. It is like society in being composed of individual bodies that form the whole by mutual support and aid. The myriad phenomena in the universe—humans! animals! mountains, rivers, and trees!—all are in order and so have their being. This great universe is one great buddha-body. The one [or entire] great buddha-body's one [or entire] great life is the buddha that we believe in. Thus, whether one is talking about things within society or the universe, the one and the totality, the part and the whole, oneself and the buddha, are all knit together into an indivisible, unified existence. (Lin 1934:12; reproduced in Yang 1991:51)

These ideas appear so often in Lin's writings in the magazine *The South Seas Buddhist* that Yang Huinan, analyzing them from the standpoint of Buddhist philosophy, concludes that Lin really did believe that all existents—every blade of grass, every flower, and every person—whatever their individual existence in time and space, formed one continuous reality in which nothing was cut off or separate from anything else, but were inextricably intertwined and involved with each other. The reality was the single body of the Buddha, the “one buddha,” and all phenomena were but “slices” or aspects of it (Yang 1991:52).

Why had social classes, and with them the class struggle, first arisen? In brief, classes arose because of greed and grasping, which in turn could only come about on the basis of a false view of the self. He wrote:

How do human beings give rise to thoughts of greed? Because they are unable to understand the true principle of the non-duality of mind, buddha, and sentient beings, thinking instead that the four elements [that is, earth, water, fire, and air] are their body, or that the five aggregates [body, sensations, perceptions, mental constructions, and consciousness] are their self. Because they have

this view of “self,” they develop hatred and desire, grasp at or reject all kinds of things, and make distinctions [among people] between relatives and strangers. Finally, the time comes when the means of production become increasingly complex, which gradually brings forth the rise of practical scientific methods, clandestine conspiracies, and capitalists who exploit the laboring classes. Because of this, those on opposite sides of the loss and benefit [equation] take the pretext of [the other’s] misconduct to form parties and advance their own selfishness, or they come up with some other way to distinguish themselves from the other, discriminate against each other, and gradually, the class struggle arrives. ( Lin 1929:55; reproduced in Yang 1991:56)

Thus, according to Lin, one can draw a straight line from the initial delusion of a separate, isolated self as defined by Buddhism to the class struggle as defined by Marxism.

That Lin would advance such an analysis makes a great difference in our perception of his relationship to both Buddhism and Marxism. It demonstrates clearly that he went well beyond a simple rhetorical appropriation of Buddhist terminology in order to command the attention of the island’s Buddhists and induce their cooperation with a basically Marxist program. Instead, it shows that he genuinely accepted a Buddhist construction of reality that included idealistic elements and metaphysical concepts that Marx himself would never have accepted, and used them as a corrective or complement to Marxist thought. The idea of “one buddha” gave him the means to propound the fundamental unity of humanity (as one aspect of the final unity of all phenomena), which he could then oppose to the divisiveness of class structure, which in his terms rested on a foundation of philosophical mistakes. A Buddhist-style awakening to the true nature of things, therefore, would expose the profound error from which the existence of social classes derived, and such exposure would naturally cause social classes to wither away, bringing class struggle to an end without the need to resort to violence (Yang 1991:60). The Pure Land would then make its appearance as a Marxist paradise (Yang 1991:52).

*Final observations about Lin's synthesis*

This brief survey reveals enough about Lin Qiuwu's balancing of Marxism and Buddhism for a preliminary assessment. It appears that though Lin made alterations in both Buddhism and Marxism in order to reach the level of accommodation revealed in these extracts, Marxism was affected more. Without essentializing either Buddhism or Marxism, we may observe that Buddhism, or more specifically Chinese Buddhism, is the older of the two traditions. In Lin's time, Marxism was still very new, while Buddhism had already passed through two thousand years of development and brachiation in China. This meant that the lines of doctrinaire Marxism could still be drawn fairly narrowly. Even though Lenin, Trotsky, and Gramsci had already been working on variations on Marx's ideas, some of which (notably Gramsci's) made more room for religion to play a positive role in social change, it is not clear that these developments had reached China and Southeast Asia by Lin's time; Lin himself certainly never alludes to them. On the other hand, the range of ideas that could be accepted as authentic Chinese Buddhism was comparatively much wider due to its longer period of development and its higher degree of scholastic ramification.

This meant that Lin's ideas were much easier to position within the Buddhist framework than within the Marxist, with the practical result that he was much more likely to be labeled a heretic by the Marxists than the Buddhists, based on two factors. First, as we have seen, he wished to exclude violence and revolution from his program, even though Marxism saw these elements as necessary in pursuit of the classless society. We may understand this as stemming from the Taiwan experience of the early twentieth century, a time in which armed resistance against Japanese occupation had already been tried and found useless. Be that as it may, many other Marxists would not have accepted his abnegation of this essential element of revolution. Second, his use of Buddhist metaphysical idealism violated Marx's own radical humanism and materialism. The philosopher Yang Huinan comments that this idealistic tendency in Lin's

thought shows that he was not an entirely doctrinaire Marxist after all, because Marx would have disallowed any idealism whatsoever in favor of a thorough-going materialism. Lin's language of "one buddha," which Yang shows that Lin used synonymously with other terms such as *zhenwo* (the "true self"), *zhenru* (suchness, *tathatā*), *zhenxin* (the "true mind"), and *yuanjue* (perfect enlightenment), equated the all-pervasive principle that formed the ground of all being with the Buddha, making it a conscious and purposive principle (Yang 1991:55). Thus, it remains an open question whether Lin ever succeeded in convincing any of his more secular comrades of the validity of his project, while his acceptance as an authentic Buddhist (see below) shows that no such problem arose on the Buddhist side. However, we must accept the likelihood that his early death cut off the development of his thought in midstream; perhaps with more time he could have reached a more comprehensive synthesis.

#### CONCLUSIONS: LIN QIUWU IN CONTEXT

The fact that Lin Qiuwu has become an object of fascination in Taiwan seems strange. As Jiang Canteng points out, he never held high office in any temple or Buddhist organization, and his life was tragically cut short by illness at the age of thirty-two. Interest in him may solely be due to the fact that he has enjoyed good publicity because his nephew, Li Xiaofeng, has published two books and several articles on him. But for that quirk of fate, he may well have faded into obscurity. Is there any reason why his thought should be of interest to modern scholars outside of Taiwan?

I think there is, and this can be explained in two ways. First, we can look at Lin Qiuwu in the context of his own times, and see that he provides another window into a historical period when Marxism was still new and exciting in East Asia. At this time, it inspired much intellectual ferment, within the Buddhist world as well as outside of it, and the events of the late 1940s (that is, the fall of the mainland to the Chinese Communist Party and the retreat of the Nationalists to Taiwan) that made Marxism a taboo topic in Taiwan had not yet arisen. Second, we can look to the

example and inspiration that Lin continues to provide for modern currents of Taiwan Buddhist thought, even though many of his successors do not necessarily identify themselves as Marxist, but as “engaged Buddhists.”

In terms of his own times, we can see Lin as part of a larger movement in the Buddhist world. The early twentieth century in China was a period that Holmes Welch has written about in terms of a great revival of Buddhism. This revival took many forms, among which we find a great interest on the part of some Buddhists in the new doctrines of Marxism (Yang 1991:55). The case studies that Holmes Welch provides of other monks and reformers such as Taixu (1889-1947), Qiyun (n.d.), and Zongyang (1865-1921), show that Lin Qiuwu was not alone in his ideological predilections (Welch 1968:15-22; Welch 1967:159-160; also see article “Zongyang” in *Fo Guang Da Cidian* 3146c-3147a). Even in Taiwan, there seems to have been some awareness of Marxism among monastics who did not necessarily share Lin’s enthusiasm for social reform. For example, in 1925, the eminent monk Shanhui (1881-1945) went as a representative of Taiwan Buddhism to the East Asian Buddhist Conference in Tokyo, an event organized by Taixu. While there, he gave a speech that applauded the egalitarian social order propounded by Marxism, and recommended Buddhism as a nonviolent means of bringing such a society into being. (The speech is reproduced in Shanhui 1981:2.) That Buddhism could counteract Marxist tendencies to violent revolution was, as we have seen, a position that Lin shared as well. However, the comparison also reveals the comparative authenticity of Lin’s Marxism. Shanhui, in this speech, appears to do no more than acknowledge the currency of Marxism, and his remarks may only have been aimed at drawing people away from it by proposing that Buddhism can provide a way to accomplish at least one of its goals without the need for violence. Lin’s use of Marxist terms and concepts is far more pervasive and consistent in a way that shows a much deeper appropriation and integration of them into the basic fabric of his social thought.

Again, we can look at Lin as a precursor of trends in Taiwan Buddhism that have become quite prominent in the modern period. If we bracket

the Marxist framework and vocabulary for a moment, we can see in Lin's proposed reform of Buddhism a serious call for modernization. By this I refer to the tendency to rationalize and instrumentalize aspects of religion so as to adapt it to modernity's climate of thought. In terms of rationalization, this means the desire to exclude from Buddhist thought and practice elements that do not make sense within a scientific view of the world. Such things as rituals to feed hungry ghosts or practices that aim at post-mortem goals are to go. Instrumentalization means that one seeks to abandon practices that have no immediate value in terms of benefiting society, raising people's standard of living, or enhancing a "realistic" philosophical stance. In Lin's case, we see these trends in his desire to re-orient the goals of religious practice away from rebirth in Amitābha's Pure Land and toward the building of a Pure Land on earth, and in other areas not explored in this paper, such as his crusade against the Yu Lan Pen (or Ghost Festival), which he saw as irrational and wasteful, and his denunciations of footbinding, which he saw as simple, useless cruelty.

Lin was certainly not alone in wanting to reform Buddhism in these ways. Even non-Marxists such as Yinshun (1902-) found much to criticize in the "peasant practices" that afflicted the Buddhism that they grew up with (Yinshun 1985:5). Among the younger generation, one sees further evidence of the dominance of these trends in the adoption by many temples, such as the Nongchan Temple in the northern Taipei suburb of Peitou, or at the Faguang Temple in downtown Taipei, of the slogan "Building a Pure Land in the Human Realm" (*jian renjian jingtu*). One also sees a greater Buddhist involvement in political, social, and environmental activism, and a decreasing tendency to perform rituals such as the "Release of Living Beings" (*fangsheng*), or the "Yogic Release of the Flaming Mouths" (*yuqie yankou*).

Jiang Canteng attaches great importance to the study of Lin Qiuwu (as well as his allies in the Buddhism of his day, such as his abbot Deyuan and teacher Nukariya Kaiten) when considering questions of modernization. He perceives a tendency in the study of Taiwan Buddhism

to ascribe the advances of modernization in religious practice and outlook to the mainland monks who arrived after 1949 and came to dominate the Taiwan Buddhist scene until the 1990s. Such a view gives little credit to movements in this direction that were already taking place before the mainlanders' arrival. Among these, he points to Lin Qiuwu's reorientation of Pure Land practice away from a postmortem, otherworldly goal to the building of the good society here on earth as something that was already in the air prior to the arrival of Ven. Yinshun from the mainland in the early 1950s and the popularization of his idea of "Buddhism for the human realm" (*renjian fojiao*) (Jiang 1996:189).

It is no wonder, then, that one finds a series of articles on Lin Qiuwu in the magazine *Fojiao wenhua* (*Buddhist Culture*), a journal run by Taiwanese Buddhists with a preference for social activism and street demonstrations. Lin provides for them a suitable precursor and example of the way in which one can successfully integrate a reformed Buddhism with a thoroughly modern, even socialist, outlook. Thus, putting Lin into the context of his own times provides another avenue for studying the intersection of Buddhism and Marxism in the Chinese cultural sphere in the early twentieth century, and looking at him from the perspective of a later generation helps us to understand the genealogy of ideas and aspirations that have become quite mainstream in Taiwan today.

#### NOTE

1. This was the principal island-wide organization of Buddhists in Taiwan during the Japanese period. Founded by a Japanese official, it replaced all earlier organizations in 1922 and served as the primary liaison between Buddhist circles and the government until 1945. See Jones 1999, chapter three for details.

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*SUPPLEMENT: CHINESE CHARACTER GLOSSARY FOR*

Buddhism and Marxism in Taiwan: Lin Qiuwu's Religious Socialism and its Legacy in Modern Times

Charles B. Jones

Chi dao bao 赤道報  
Deyuan 德圓  
fangsheng 放生  
*Foguang da cidian* 佛光大辭典  
Fojiao Wenhua 佛教文化  
jian renjian jingtu 建人間淨土  
Jiang Canteng 江燦騰  
Jieji douzheng yu fojiao 階級鬥爭與佛教  
Jimei xuexiao 集美學校  
Kaiyuan Temple 開元寺  
Kan Zhengzong 闕正宗  
Komazawa University 駒澤大學  
Li Xiaofeng 李筱峰  
Lin Qiuwu 林秋梧  
Minnan Taiwan xuesheng lianhehui 閩南台灣學生聯合會  
Nan'e Bukkyō 南瀛佛教  
Nan'e Bukkyō Kai 南瀛佛教會  
Nukariya Kaiten 忽滑谷快天  
Qiyun 棲雲  
renjian fojiao 人間佛教  
renjian jingtu 人間淨土  
Shanhui 善慧  
shi shi wu ai 事事無礙

si hong shiyuan 四弘誓願  
Taihoku shihan gakkō 台北師範學校  
Tainan 台南  
Taiwan Gongyou zong lianmeng 台灣工友總聯盟  
Taiwan Minzhong Dang 台灣民衆黨  
Taiwan Qingnian 台灣青年  
Taiwan Wenhua Xiehui 台灣文化協會  
Taixu 太虛  
tian tang 天堂  
Wuliangshou Fo Jing 無量壽佛經  
*Xifang Helun* 西方合論  
Yang Huinan 楊惠南  
yi fo 一佛  
Yinshun 印順  
Yu lan pen 盂蘭盆  
Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道  
yuanjue 圓覺  
yujia yankou 瑜伽焰口  
Zhengfeng fashi 證峰法師  
zhenru 眞如  
zhenwo 眞我  
zhenxin 眞心  
Zhiyi 智顓  
zi li li ta 自利利他  
Zongyang 宗仰