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Gregory Adam Scott

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The Buddhist Nationalism of Dai Jitao 戴季陶

GREGORY ADAM SCOTT¹
Columbia University

“To choose Buddhism in the search for religious identity meant that one was choosing to be Chinese. It was an expression of cultural loyalism, a denial that things Chinese were inferior.”

Holmes Welch, *The Revival of Chinese Buddhism*, 261.

In this passage from his seminal 1968 work, Welch identifies something particularly significant about Buddhists in early twentieth-century China: that there were many who conceived of a close relationship between their religious and national identities. This concept manifested itself in a number of ways, from discussions of national crises in Buddhist periodicals to monks enlisting as soldiers in the war with Japan.² One of the most prominent people who was intimately involved with the nexus between Buddhism and Chinese nationalism is Dai Jitao (1890-1949).³ An early political associate of Sun Zhongshan 孫中山 (Sun Yat-sen; 1866-1925), Dai held several positions in the Republican government, including that of head of the Examination Yuan from 1928 to 1949.⁴ He was also well-known

¹Gregory Adam Scott <<http://www.buddhiststudies.net/>> is a Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of Religion at Columbia University. Research for this article was supported by a Daniel and Marianne Spiegel Fund Grant from the Weatherhead East Asian Institute and a Faculty Fellowship from Columbia University. I am grateful to the participants in the panel on “Chinese Lay Buddhists in the Early Twentieth Century and the Question of Secularization: Four Case Studies” at the 2009 meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, as well as the two anonymous reviewers for this publication. I also benefited from reading an unpublished paper by Brooks Jessup on Dai’s Buddhism.

²For one example of the former, see Taixu 太虛, “Chengfo jiushi yu geming jiuguo” 成佛救世與革命救國 in *Renjian Fojiao* 人間佛教, no. 1 (June 6, 1925), pp. 8-9. Available as reprint in MFQB 66 468-469. For details on how reprint periodical articles are cited in this essay, please see the Bibliography section.

³Dai used the name Chuanxian 傳賢 after the death of Sun Zhongshan in 1925. He adopted the style name 號 Tianchou 天仇 around 1911, and used the courtesy name 字 Xuantang 選堂. For a brief outline of Dai’s biography and relationship to Buddhism, see the on-line resource *Database of Modern Chinese Buddhism*, <http://buddhistinformatics.ddbc.edu.tw/dmcb/Dai_Jitao>.

⁴Though formally one of the five main branches of government, in the Republican period the Examination Yuan (*Kaoshi yuan* 考試院) was a largely symbolic and “weak organization without a substantial base of power.” Julia C. Strauss, “Symbol and Reflection of the Reconstituting State,” 117 and *passim*.

both as a Buddhist practitioner and as a political figure who was supportive of Buddhism. Not only did he accept the linkage of religious and national identities described by Welch, but he went even further, adopting an ethos of Buddhist nationalism that sought to mobilize Buddhism's salvific powers to save China from national crisis.

I follow Anthony D. Smith's succinct definition of nationalism as "an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining the autonomy, unity and identity of an existing or potential 'nation.'"⁵ Buddhist nationalism may be understood as when such a movement is expressed using Buddhist idioms of image and language, by a group that identifies itself as part of a Buddhist religious tradition. Buddhist nationalism was initially described in the context of Ceylon (Sri Lanka), where religious reformers such as Anagarika Dharmapāla (1864-1933) developed a 'Protestant Buddhism' established in resistance to religious and political power of British rule. Ceylon's role as the protector of orthodox Buddhism came to serve as a powerful symbol for the nascent anti-colonial nationalist movement.⁶ In Meiji-era Japan, Buddhists transformed their tradition into a 'New Buddhism' (*shin Bukkyō* 新佛教) that was articulated as modern, authentic, and above all, as a core part of the cultural heritage of the Japanese nation. Although this began as a response to state persecution, among some groups it later translated into an explicit support for the nation-state in its military exploits.⁷ In both of these contexts we find that state-led projects of social modernization, new legal and social categories of 'religion', and competition from new types of religious culture including Protestant Christianity put pressure on Buddhists in Asia to either adapt, or else lose their relevance in changing times. The internal reforms they enacted incorporated new expectations for religious practice, including stronger roles for the laity and a new emphasis on textual studies and publication. This new religious identity also incorporated a nationalist ideology that linked religious authority and orthodoxy to the patrimony of a national culture.

Xue Yu's 2005 study has brought to light how reformist and nationalist causes were mutually supportive in the mobilization of Chinese Buddhist monks to participate in the war with Japan between 1937 and 1945.⁸ Yet many other aspects of nationalism among Chinese

⁵ Anthony D. Smith, "The Origins of Nations," 108. In this article, single quotes will be used to enclose key terms that are under consideration, while double quotes represent direct quotations from historical or scholarly sources, as well as titles of articles or other short published works.

⁶ Richard Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo*, 172-197; Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka*. Nur Yalman pointedly observes that the latter work sidesteps any discussion of the religious violence and conflict that followed independence. See his review in *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 91, No. 4 (Dec. 1989), pp. 1082-1083.

⁷ James Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan: Buddhism and Its Persecution*, ix-x and *passim*; Brian Victoria, *Zen at War*.

⁸ Xue Yu, *Buddhism, War and Nationalism: Chinese Monks in the Struggle against Japanese Aggressions, 1931-1945*.

Buddhists during this period remain to be explored, most critically the internal developments and discourses among Buddhists in China that made possible, *inter alia*, the type of patriotism described by Xue. The roots of these developments lie in the historical relationships between Buddhist and state powers in China.⁹ Buddhist monastics arriving in East Asia brought with them texts describing the model of King Aśokā (*Ayuwang* 阿育王; r. ca. 269-232 BCE) and his Buddhist kingdom as narrated in the *Legend of King Aśokā* (*Aśokāvadāna*).¹⁰ This narrative sought to make Buddhist doctrine relevant to the political, social and religious practices of the era when the text was produced, something that was accomplished partly through the model of the *balacakravartin* 轉輪聖王, a “wheel-turning king” who along with the Buddhist Dharma formed “two poles of a single religious structure” with overlapping functions.¹¹ Such a model that described mutually supportive political and religious powers would have been quite familiar to the Chinese gentry, who saw doctrine and ritual as essential parts of governance. Buddhist monasticism and the social form of the sangha would prove to be more problematic, however, and friction between the authority of the sangha and that of imperial powers remained a recurrent issue in East Asian history.¹² As early as the fourth century CE the autonomy of the sangha had already become ammunition for political struggles, and the institution of the sangha had to be continually defended against the anti-clericalism of a tradition where a celibate priesthood was not part of its cultural norms.¹³

It was not long before Chinese Buddhists began to articulate means of supporting the power and authority of imperial rulership, attempting to turn this agonistic relationship into a one of mutual support and authorization. Charles Orzech has identified the “comprehensive rhetoric and practice” of state-protection (*huguo* 護國) in the esoteric tradition as the domain where Buddhists most fully explored issues of engagement with this-worldly powers, and there, perhaps more abstractly, they explicated the identity of this world with nirvana.¹⁴ The emergence of the *Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra for Humane Kings Protecting Their Countries* (*Renwang huguo bore poluomiduo jing* 仁王護國般若波羅蜜多經) in the fifth century CE, a text whose message closely corresponds with the political and religious concerns of the period, points toward the indigenous generation of sacred models to link religious and political

⁹ By ‘state powers’ I mean those kingdoms and dynasties that asserted power over such matters as taxation, military conscription, and the like.

¹⁰ This text exists in two Chinese translations: the first, *Ayuwang zhuan* 阿育王傳 (T 2042) is attributed to the Parthian translator An Faqin 安法欽 (fl. late third century CE), while the second, *Ayuwang jing* 阿育王經 (T 2043) is ascribed to Zhongkai 眾鑿 (fl. fifth century CE.) DDB.

¹¹ John S. Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka*, 32; 50-51; 72; 162-163.

¹² Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, 9.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 106-108; 254-285.

¹⁴ Charles D. Orzech, *Politics and Transcendent Wisdom*, 6; 8-9.

powers in China.¹⁵ Its ideal of the Dharma-king, for example, mirrors that of the sage-king from classical literature, and rituals associated with the scripture worked to confirm the power of the ruling monarch while cementing the position of the sangha as an essential part of the ritual apparatus of the rulership.¹⁶

By the time of Dai Jitao's birth in the late Qing 清 dynasty (1644-1912), however, the conditions of Buddhism and the rulership of China had both radically changed.¹⁷ The violence surrounding the rise and fall of the Taiping Kingdom 太平天国 (1850-1864) had devastated the Buddhist infrastructure in its heartland, the Jiangnan 江南 region of the lower Yangtze river delta. While reconstruction efforts did follow, many people of the day, Buddhist and otherwise, took it for granted that Buddhism was in the midst of a long period of decline, faulting the monastic institutions for being more concerned with their own well-being than spiritual advancement. Yet we should recognize that critiquing contemporary practices as 'corrupt' or 'superstitious' was often a strategic move by would-be reformers intended to establish a discursive space into which new and ostensibly more authentic doctrines and practices could be introduced.¹⁸ One such figure was the lay educator and publisher Yang Wenhui 楊文會 (1837-1911), who through his research and writing presented Buddhists with a platform for a sweeping program of religious reform and renewal.¹⁹ Yang's work helped to attract many elites to Buddhist study, leading Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929) to later remark that among reform-minded late-Qing scholars, including Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927), Tan Sitong 譚嗣同 (1865-1898), Zhang Binglin 張炳麟 (1868-1936) and himself, there were few who had no connection to Buddhism.²⁰

¹⁵ Popularly known under the shortened title *Renwang jing* 仁王經. The first version (T 245) is attributed to Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什, while it is the second (T 246), attributed to Amoghavajra 不空, that has been most influential. DDB.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 74-97; 107-121; 143. The likelihood that the scripture was apocryphal should not discount its importance to the history of Buddhism in China. See Robert Buswell, "Prolegomenon to the Study of Buddhist Apocryphal Scriptures."

¹⁷ Space does not permit me to discuss relevant developments in early-modern Chinese Buddhism, most significant of which were the innovations of figures such as Zhuhong 祿宏 (1535-1615) and Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭 (1599-1655). See Chun-fang Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China*; Beverly Foulks, "Living Karma: The Religious Practices of Ouyi Zhixu (1599-1655)."

¹⁸ See Jan Nattier, *Once Upon a Future Time*, 46-51, 66-89 and *passim*; Jamie Hubbard, *Absolute Delusion, Perfect Buddhahood*, 113-117, 251-255; Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China*, 171-192, 208.

¹⁹ Yang is also known by his courtesy name Renshan 仁山. Yang's program for Buddhist renewal focused on the printing of texts, on scholarship and education, and on lay participation, elements that had always been present among Chinese Buddhists but which were now foregrounded to an unprecedented extent. See Gabrielle Goldfuss, *Vers un bouddhisme du XXe siècle. Yang Wenhui (1837-1911), réformateur laïque et imprimeur.*

²⁰ These were scholars associated with the New Learning (*xinxue* 新學) movement and the attempted political reforms of 1898. See Liang Qichao, *Intellectual Trends in the Ch'ing Period*, 116.

The last decades of the Qing and the beginning of the Republican period (1912-1949) saw continued reforms both in the state apparatus and in intellectual circles regarding the meaning of the nation and the role of religion. The long-standing status that had been negotiated for Buddhism in relation to the rulership was discarded; in the eyes of many influential figures, it now merely stood in the way of national development. The ancient models of Aśokā and the *Scripture for Humane Kings* had assumed a context where political and religious power operated within the same field, but as Buddhists of the late-Qing and early Republican periods quickly discovered, modern nation-states operated on very different terms than the imperial courts of dynastic history. A separate sphere of religion, for which the neologism *zongjiao* 宗教 was adopted, was now conceived as a domain separate from that of the state, which now claimed legitimacy not on the basis of a heavenly mandate but rather on the popular support of national citizens.²¹

Yet the Chinese state continued to assert control over both the definition and regulation of religion, even if in practice it was only able to do in a limited manner. Rebecca Nedostup has adeptly shown how, in spite of a series of constitutions that included protections for the freedom of religious belief, state powers of the Republican era reserved for themselves the authority to regulate religious practice, especially the power to define what was (legal) religion and what was (illegal) superstition (*mixin* 迷信).²² Ashiwa and Wank have highlighted the importance of negotiation between multiple state and religious actors in this process, pointing out that each side has relied upon the other in an ongoing contest for power, control, and authenticity.²³ Studies such as these remind us that the modern relationship between religion and the state is not simply one where secularization leads to the eclipse of the former by the latter. Indeed the continued relevance and public resurgence of religion in many modern societies has prompted many scholars to revise the theory of secularization itself. José Casanova's identification of three separate "moments" of secularization allows us to accept the first, that of the progressive differentiation of religion into one sphere of society among many, without necessarily affirming the other two, which predict the gradual decline and privatization of religion.²⁴ I would argue that this is precisely what we find in China in the closing years of the Qing dynasty: the differentiation of religion from other aspects of society, but by no means the beginning of its decline or marginalization into a domain of private conscience. Nevertheless, as a newly differentiated sphere of society, religion was immediately faced with serious pressures from without.²⁵

²¹ The term *zongjiao* was coined in Japan as *shūkyō* and brought into the Chinese lexicon in 1890. See Federico Masini, *The Formation of Modern Chinese Lexicon*, 100, 101, 222.

²² Rebecca Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes: Religion and the Politics of Chinese Modernity*.

²³ Yoshiko Ashiwa and David Wank, eds., *Making Religion, Making the State*, 8.

²⁴ José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, 19-39.

²⁵ This was the beginning of a long period of intense pressure on religion in China to change, reform, or disappear. See Goossaert, "1898: The Beginning of the End for Chinese Religion?"

The environment of political reform in fin-de-siècle Qing China soon produced tangible threats to the institutional bases of Buddhism itself. The movement to convert temples into public schools (*miaochan xingxue* 廟產興學) initially called for popular and folk religious properties to be seized for use as public state-run schools, but many local officials understood it to include all religious institutions in its scope, and thus targeted Buddhist temples with destruction.²⁶ Further, the new types of scientific, rationalist, and historicist knowledges that were valued by modernity, even when they were not explicitly directed against religion, threatened to undermine an authority that was based on scriptures and heuristics that were not yet in a conversation with modern disciplines of knowledge.

I do not wish to argue against Welch's observation that a Buddhist identity came to represent a form of 'cultural loyalism,' nor against Xue's description of patriotic monks, but rather to follow Ashiwa and Wank's lead in focusing attention on how this connection between religious and national identity was first negotiated and established. Such an approach might find a useful parallel in studies of the history of nations, which, as Ernest Renan observed in 1882, came together "by often circuitous paths" and which gained their status as accepted fact only through a process of forgetting and "historical error."²⁷ Furthermore, I will argue that the story of Buddhist nationalism is not primarily or even substantially a story of religious actors influencing the construction of the nation, even though much of the rhetoric was produced along these lines. Its most significant contributions were directed toward the construction of a religious identity that drew upon and was influenced by nationalism and the nation form.²⁸ Virtually every aspect of Buddhism in China was targeted for 'reform' or 'modernization' by those who wanted it to play a role in the salvation of the Chinese nation.²⁹ My goal here, therefore, is to examine Buddhist nationalism to suggest how it transformed

²⁶ The movement also used the more sinister slogan "Destroy Temples, Establish Schools" (*huimiao banxue* 毀廟辦學.) See Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 95-98; Vincent Goosseart, "1898: The Beginning of the End for Chinese Religion?"; Huang Yunxi 黃運喜, *Zhongguo Fojiao jindai fanan yanjiu* 中國佛教近代法難研究, 75-132.

²⁷ Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?" 44-45; Takashi Fujitani, "Inventing, Forgetting, Remembering."

²⁸ On the 'construction' or 'invention' of religious identity, see Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, particularly the introduction and chapters two and three. Also see Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*.

²⁹ To criticize contemporary religion at the same time as advocating for its reform and a greater role in society was a common theme among late-Qing reformers. For example, in a speech delivered in Tokyo in 1906 Zhang Binglin described a unified spirit as being more important to a nation than any political, social, or economic concern, and although the Buddhism and Christianity of his time were too corrupted, he saw a reformed Buddhism as being able to provide such a unified spirit for China. See Shimada Kenji, Joshua A. Fogel, trans., *Pioneer of the Chinese Revolution: Zhang Binglin and Confucianism*.

Buddhist thought and practice, and how engaging with the nation and a national identity changed what it meant to be a Buddhist in China.

Dai Jitao is a relevant point of entry into this story because he was a highly prominent figure whose Buddhist practice and public persona were closely linked, and who advocated reforming Buddhism so that it might help revitalize the nation. Dai also operated within a social network of prominent and influential Buddhists, one that included Taixu 太虛 (1890-1947), Ouyang Jian 歐陽漸 (1871-1943), Xuyun 虛雲 (1840-1959), and Wang Yiting 王一亭 (1867-1938) among others.³⁰ He drew upon this network to develop his vision for the future of Buddhism in China, a vision that was actualized in print and public ritual. Examining the Buddhist nationalism of Dai Jitao thus introduces us into a milieu of reformers, authors, publishers and activists who developed powerful images and ideas that linked Buddhism to a nascent national identity and a discourse of national salvation. While operating under the rubric of nationalism, however, they often broke away and ‘forgot’ elements of the Chinese Buddhist past in order to move forward into a modern age of nationalism, science and rationality. Recovering the history of Dai’s engagement with Buddhist nationalism is, therefore, one step toward uncovering this history of religious transformation along nationalist lines.

“The Causes and Conditions of Mr. Dai Jitao Studying Buddhism”

While most biographical studies focus on his political thought and devote little space to the religious side of Dai Jitao’s life,³¹ there is a voluminous archive of his writings on Buddhist subjects, and much published material describing his engagement with Buddhism.³²

³⁰ Taixu (formerly romanized as Tai-hsü) is probably the best-known Chinese Buddhist monk of the modern period, a status he attained largely through a series of political, publishing, and educational projects. Donald Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism*. Ouyang was a lay Buddhist and founder of the China Inner Studies Institute (*Zhina neixue yuan* 支那內學院) in Nanjing. Eyal Aviv, "Differentiating the Pearl From the Fish Eye: Ouyang Jingwu (1871-1943) and the Revival of Scholastic Buddhism." Xuyun was a long-lived Chan master who helped to organize the Chinese Buddhist Association in the first few years of the PRC. Wang Yiting was a Shanghai-based industrialist, renowned artist, and lay Buddhist. Paul R. Katz, "The Religious Life of a Renowned Shanghai Businessman and Philanthropist, Wang Yiting."

³¹ See, for example, William Saywell, "The Thought of Tai Chi-T’ao, 1912-1928;" Herman Mast, "An Intellectual Biography of Tai Chi-T’ao from 1891 to 1928;" Lu Yan, *Re-understanding Japan*; Li Jiehua 黎潔華 and Yu Wei 虞葦, *Dai Jitao zhuan* 戴季陶傳.

³² Shi Dongchu 釋東初 assembled Dai Jitao’s Buddhist writings in his 1972 compilation *Dai Jitao xiansheng Foxue lunji* 戴季陶先生佛學論集. Most of the pieces in this volume, however, can be found in the series of Dai Jitao’s collected works edited by Chen Tianxi 陳天錫, and since this series avoids the typographical errors of Dongchu’s work, I use it here in concert with other periodical and monographic resources.

Dai had already had an established Buddhist persona for some time prior to his first efforts at developing a Buddhism to save the nation. Examining published narratives of Dai's Buddhist practice, we can see that this persona came together over a period of several years in a process that was closely connected to Dai's other political, cultural, and social concerns.

Nearly all the published narratives that describe how Dai came to be involved with Buddhist matters focus on a dramatic event that occurred in 1922.³³ In that year Dai was en route via steamship from Shanghai to Sichuan where he was to negotiate with warlords on behalf of Sun Zhongshan. When his ship stopped at Hankou he learned that the warlords were ready to recommence hostilities, and on the next leg of the journey his nervous distress caused him to become despondent. One night, evading his companions, he leapt into the river intending to commit suicide. Yet as he floated in the water far from shore, he became aware of being surrounded by a halo of Buddha-light (*foguang* 佛光) and was prevented from slipping beneath the waves. Before long he is rescued from the river by a local fisherman and reunited with his traveling companions.³⁴

The earliest public account of this incident was to have appeared in the early months of 1926 in an article entitled "Eight Awarenesses" (*bajue* 八覺) but Dai retracted the article before it was published.³⁵ During a period of political and physical convalescence in Huzhou 湖州, Zhejiang province, Dai wrote an account explaining his aims in writing the article, and subsequently this has been used in place of the original as his account of the events.³⁶ There is a fair amount of Buddhist imagery and philosophy invoked in this piece: the text opens and closes on the theme of repentance, Dai expresses faith that the law of cause and effect

³³ This was not the earliest published narrative. In an article in an April 1912 issue of his newspaper *Minquan bao* 民權報, Dai relates how in 1909 he was fond of reading Buddhist books and decided to try meditation. Though he sat assiduously until he had an experience of being surrounded by nothingness, suddenly he was approached by a myriad of evil spirits that appeared as if to grasp him, whereupon he awoke, feverish and covered in sweat. Afterward he was so busy that he did not read Buddhist books. See Dai, *Dai Jitao xiansheng wencun zaixubian* 戴季陶先生文存再續編, 741-743. This experience was also reported in a 1936 issue of the Buddhist periodical *Hongshan huibao* 宏善彙報. See Gukan 古戡, "Dai Jitao xue Fo sanbu qu" 戴季陶學佛三部曲. The original article has been reprinted in Sang Bing 桑兵, Huang Yi 黃毅 and Tang Wenquan 唐文權, eds. *Dai Jitao xinshai wenji* 戴季陶辛亥文集, Vol. 2, 730.

³⁴ There is some disagreement as to whether this event occurred in 1922 or 1923. Chen Tianxi's 陳天錫 chronology and Lin Jing's 林競 account both place it in 1922, yet Dai dates it to 1923. See Chen, *Dai Jitao (Chuanxian) xiansheng biannian zhuanji* 戴季陶(傳賢)先生編年傳記, 54-55; Lin Jing, "Bukong jushi yu Fojiao" 不空居士與佛教, 39; Dai, *Dai Jitao xiansheng wencun zaixubian*, 741.

³⁵ The piece was to have appeared in the periodical *Xinsheng yuekan* 新生月刊 but after a youth working in the press read a draft of the article and disappeared, Dai decided to recall and destroy it. Dai, *Dai Jitao xiansheng wencun zaixubian*, 747. The title may be a reference to the eight wrong perceptions as outlined in the *Huayan Sūtra* 華嚴經. See DDB, [八覺].

³⁶ Dai is said to have been so ill that he could hardly move at all in June and July of that year. Chen, *Dai Jitao (Chuanxian) xiansheng biannian zhuanji*, 78.

(*yin'guolü* 因果律) governs the world, and he quotes briefly from the *Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch* 六祖壇經. The dramatic moment of the narrative comes after Dai has leaped into the water, when he feels himself comfortably held upright in spite of the strong current and frigid temperature. As he is surrounded by the ring of white light, he reflects on his mother's Buddhism and his own lapsed practice, and comes to the realization that this Buddha-light represents his chance at salvation, a symbol that he should not die but continue to live.³⁷

The image of a Buddha-light appears throughout the East Asian Buddhist canon, most notably in the *Amitābha Sūtra* (*Amituo jing* 阿彌陀經).³⁸ Yet overall Dai's interpretation of his experience makes references to values more strongly related to belief in honoring one's ancestors and the value of Classical moral teachings rather than Buddhist streams of thought. Part of the impetus for his journey was to visit his mother on her birthday, and in the narrative he recalls a story from before his birth when his grandfather's trip to repair their ancestral tombs in Huzhou coincided with his own conception back in Sichuan, both expressions of the responsibilities and blessings associated with filial conduct.³⁹ His rescue from death is also framed with little reference to Buddhism. Dai makes much of the fact that it was a modest fisherman who pulled him out of the river, nursed him back to health, and helped to reunite him with his friends. He uses this as an opportunity to point out that the future hope of the nation lies with the farmers and workers, not with the "Western slogan of communism." Finally, Dai argues that to blindly follow Western thought is to underestimate the good qualities of the Chinese people, and dismisses the notion that the West might hold the key to national salvation.⁴⁰

In this piece written in 1926, Dai is not yet suggesting that China should turn to Buddhism for salvation, but one key element of his later Buddhist writings is already present: that of sickness and recovery. Dai describes himself as suffering from psychasthenia (*jingshen shuairuo* 精神衰弱), the cause of which he traces to his licentious and unbridled lifestyle between about 1905 and 1919.⁴¹ Though his spirits never fully recovered after his attempted suicide, afterward he is said to have turned to an earnest repentance of his past evil deeds, and

³⁷ Dai, *Dai Jitao xiansheng wencun zaixubian*, 742. In 1930 Dai would write of his mother's Buddhist practice and its influence on him, an influence he says was not allowed to bear fruit because of the prevailing anti-religious sentiment of the time. Dai, *Dai Jitao xiansheng wencun*, 1171.

³⁸ See, for example, T 366.12.347a26, as cited in DDB, [佛光].

³⁹ Dai, *Dai Jitao xiansheng wencun zaixubian*, 738.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 744.

⁴¹ This was roughly the period of Dai's residence in Japan. This illness was first identified as a psychological condition by Pierre Janet (1859-1947) who called it psychasthenia. George M. Beard (1839-1883) understood it as a physical illness and termed it neurasthenia. It was by a translation of this latter name, *shenjing shuairuo* 神經衰弱, that the Buddhist layman Jiang Qian 江謙 (1876-1942) and the monk Hongyi 弘一 (1880-1942) understood their illnesses. See Beverley Foulks McGuire's article in this issue, 33-54.

expressed the hope that through publishing his experience to the world he could warn and encourage others to avoid his mistakes.⁴² These images of past bad acts causing present crises, and of curing these illnesses through repentance, would figure strongly in his later writings on Buddhist subjects.

Yet in spite of the limited role that Buddhist themes play in this account, it forms the core of nearly all subsequent narratives that describe Dai's turn toward Buddhism. It appears as early as 1930 in the Buddhist periodical *Haichao yin* 海潮音 in an article written by Foyin 佛因.⁴³ The article repeats Dai's 1926 account of having been taught Buddhist practice by his mother, as well as his narrative of being saved from the river by the halo of Buddha-light. Foyin adds his own editorial spin to the story, however, when he proclaims this as evidence of the Buddha's salvific power and proof that Buddhism is more than just mere superstition. He also foregrounds Dai's political position, now much improved from that four years earlier, to lend Buddhism the support of "an elder statesman of the party ... respected at home and abroad."⁴⁴ Later accounts would follow Foyin's lead in folding the complex religious and moral arguments of Dai's essay into a story of crisis, conversion, and salvation that is markedly Buddhist in its presentation.⁴⁵ The result is that it is rather difficult to penetrate these embellishments to see how Dai's personal engagement with Buddhism developed in the years between 1922 and 1930.⁴⁶

For our purposes, however, it is precisely this public image that is most relevant. When people read Dai's writings on Buddhist topics, they would turn to narratives such as these to help them understand Dai's position. By 1930 they also had access to articles reporting on Dai and his developing relationship to institutional Buddhism. In September 1928, for example, the periodical *Dayun yuekan* 大雲月刊 (*Great Cloud Monthly*) published an article describing Dai's meeting with Taixu in Nanjing earlier that year. Dai expressed his view that followers

⁴² Dai, *Dai Jitao xiansheng wencun zaixubian*, 740; 746-747.

⁴³ See Foyin, "Dai Jitao xiansheng zhi xuefo yinyuan." The article was reprinted two years later in *Xianghai Fohua kan* 香海佛化刊, a Buddhist periodical published in Hong Kong. See MFQB 47:53. Foyin is a pseudonym for one Wan Liang 萬梁, a Buddhist layman about which little is yet known. The same name is cited as the author for a range of articles in periodical literature of the period. See, for example, MFQ 83:152, 174:448; MFQB 10:166.

⁴⁴ Foyin, "Dai Jitao xiansheng zhi xuefo yinyuan", 146.

⁴⁵ These include even those published much later, such as a biographical chronology compiled by Chen Tianxi in 1957, and a piece by Lin Jing on Dai Jitao's Buddhist practice written in 1959. See Chen Tianxi, *Dai Jitao (Chuanxian) xiansheng biannian zhuanji*; Lin Jing, "Bukong jushi yu Fojiao."

⁴⁶ One important source of influence was likely his wife. Niu Youheng 鈕有恒 (d. 1942) had briefly lived as a nun before she and Dai married in 1911, and had engaged in Buddhist practice from an early age. The monk and scholar of modern Chinese Buddhist history Shi Dongchu reports that the two regularly practiced sutra recitation together, and that without her help, Dai could not have attained what he did in terms of religious cultivation. Shi Dongchu, *Zhongguo Fojiao jindaishi*, 484. Dongchu does not, unfortunately, provide a source for his description of Dai or Niu's practice.

of Buddhism ought to become more independent, and also suggested that Buddhist literature ought to be popularized, advocating the use of the neologisms of science and philosophy (*Ke Zhe zhi xin mingci* 科哲之新名詞).⁴⁷ In addition to these types of articles we also have access to Dai's own writings on Buddhist subjects, many of which appeared as part of Buddhist publications beginning from about 1930, while others were originally private communications with Buddhist laypeople and monastics.⁴⁸ Overall it is clear that Dai's religion was very much a matter of public record, as was his role in pushing changes within the religious realm. While such public attention and interest in his religious beliefs was due at least in part to his status as a political figure, I would suggest that there is another important reason why Dai developed a public Buddhist persona.

Dai studied law in Japan from 1905 to 1909, and later returned there with Sun Zhongshan from 1912 to 1917. This was during the era when Japanese Buddhist institutions were in the midst of a dramatic transformation that saw Buddhism redefined into something that would be considered a core part of Japan's national culture.⁴⁹ Reforms included new legislation, the laicization of the priesthood, the formation of new Buddhist religious societies, Buddhist periodicals and book series, and the rise of the scholarly discipline of Buddhist Studies. Though Dai had no personal involvement in these reforms, these new types of Japanese religious culture would subsequently exert a significant, if uncredited, influence on his relationship to Buddhism in China. We can see this begin to take shape in his well-known work *Riben lun* 日本論 (*On Japan*), first published in the spring of 1928.⁵⁰

In this book Dai narrates Japan's emergence as a powerful and united nation in order to put China's faults into relief and to suggest how it might learn from Japan's experience of modernization. Religion appears as a central concern, particularly in terms of how Dai sees it mediating the relationship between individuals and their society, influencing both their personal conduct and their relationship to others. Dai describes how the Buddhism of the feudal period inculcated a positive spirit of sacrifice in the Japanese elite and an attitude of human affection among the folk, a far cry from the "staunch and solitary" Buddhism of

⁴⁷ Ning Dayun 甯達蘊, "Dai Jitao xiansheng zhi Fojiao tanhua" 戴季陶先生之佛教談話. The terminologies of modernity to which Dai refers had entered the Chinese lexicon quite recently, often from Japanese translations of European terms. See Masini, pp. 89-108.

⁴⁸ A partial and in-process list of these works can be found on the *Database of Modern Chinese Buddhism* as part of its biography page on Dai. See <http://buddhistinformatics.ddbc.edu.tw/dmcb/Dai_Jitao>. Dai produced a voluminous oeuvre of Buddhist writings in the 1930s and 1940s, including short pieces on keeping the precepts, eulogies, gathas, remarks and commentaries. He also penned prefaces and epilogues for Buddhist monographs and exchanged correspondence with some of the most important Buddhist figures of the time.

⁴⁹ Ketelaar, x-xi; 76; and *passim*.

⁵⁰ Dai, *Dai Jitao xiansheng bianian zhuanji*, 87. On its relationship to Dai's earlier essay "My View on Japan" (*Wode Riben guan* 我的日本觀), see the preface by Hu Hanmin 胡漢民 (1879-1936), in Chen, *Dai Jitao xiansheng zaixubian*, 328.

China.⁵¹ He also puts forward a narrative history that describes Buddhism and Japanese society changing together over time, from an ancient era when Buddhism helped to unify the tribes of Japan, to the present time when Buddhism is clearly separated from other forms of religion, and encourages the reader to study this history well.⁵²

Turning to the modern period, Dai insists that religion continues to be relevant, although he recognizes that many oppose it because they understand ‘religion’ to mean the popular religious beliefs of China, which in his view are nothing but superstition.⁵³ He argues that one can attempt to oppose religion, but neither individuals nor societies can live by rationality alone, and in fact a people (*minzu* 民族) must have some kind of belief (*xinyang* 信仰) in order that they may be able to make sacrifices and help others. Dai proceeds to set up a contrast between China, where people worship deities based on expediency, and Japan where religious belief is unconditional and absolute, an integral part of society rather than something that arises from a “priestly sermon.”⁵⁴ The implications that Dai wishes to establish for religion in China are clear—it must follow the example of Japan and play a positive role in molding individuals to contribute to society, a path that requires unity rather than diversity, and a strong faith in a distinct religious identity rather than shifting allegiances to a multitude of gods.

The strong connections between religion and society that Dai establishes in this text would be further developed in Dai’s later work on Buddhism, perhaps nowhere more so than in his Dharma assemblies (*fahui* 法會) based on the *Scripture for Humane Kings who Wish to Protect their States*. Two such events were held in 1931 and 1933 on Baohua Mountain 寶華山 in Jiangsu province and hosted by the Tibetan Panchen lama 班禪喇嘛 (1883-1937). In these events, the articles and writings that accompanied them, and his later publications, we see the ideas expressed in *Riben lun* actualized into a form of Buddhist nationalism.

Protecting the Nation, Nationalizing Buddhism

Baohua Mountain stands about 35 kilometers to the east of Nanjing, the capital of the Republic of China from 1928 to 1937. The site has had a Buddhist presence since the sixth-century monk Baozhi 寶志 established a small hermitage there. Temples on the mountain have traditionally been associated most strongly with the Vinaya school (*lüzong* 律宗),

⁵¹ Dai, *Riben lun*, 17-19.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 19-20.

⁵³ In his 1926 piece on writing “Eight Awarenesses” Dai called “superstition in spirits and ghosts” the poison of the Chinese people, and warned that without establishing a “respectable belief” in its place it would be impossible to save the nation. Dai, *Dai Jitao xiansheng wencun zaixubian*, 745.

⁵⁴ Dai, *Riben lun*, 141-146.

particularly Longchang Temple 隆昌寺, which served as the host institution for Dai's Dharma assemblies. Yet the text around which these rituals revolved, the *Scripture for Humane Kings who wish to Protect their States*, has no particular connection to the Vinaya school. The text exists in two versions, a fifth-century translation attributed to Kumārajīva (Jiumoluoshi 鳩摩羅什, 344-413) and another produced by Amoghavajra (Bukong 不空, 705-774) in the eighth century, and it was this latter version that attained the most popularity.⁵⁵ Yang Wenhui's Jinling Scriptural Press (*Jinling kejing chu* 金陵刻經處) published a woodblock edition of the text in Nanjing in 1871,⁵⁶ and it continued to be made available throughout the Republican period.⁵⁷ While its full role in the Buddhist reforms of modern China has yet to be explored, it seems to have had an important connection to the development of Buddhist nationalist thought.

Taixu seems to be the earliest Buddhist in the Republican era to promote the use of this scripture in connection with a discourse of national protection. In June 1922 his Hankou Buddhist Association (*Hankou Fojiao hui*) 漢口佛教會 published an article in *Haichao yin* urging all Buddhist associations and institutions to read and discuss the *Scripture for Humane Kings* for the sake of national and world peace. The article links the natural disasters narrated in the scripture to China's domestic unrest since the 1911 revolution, and proclaims that the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have the power of sympathetic response (*ganying* 感應) to change the course of these calamities, if the readers would read, recite and expound on the scripture. Finally it notes that a Buddhist assembly praying for peace at home and abroad had already been assembled in Hankou where it had marched in procession through the streets, and it encourages similar events to be held that very day in every type of Buddhist association in the country.⁵⁸

Three years later, another *Haichao yin* article reports that the Hubei warlord Xiao Yaonan 蕭耀南 (1875-1926) had requested Taixu to perform a nation-protecting assembly in Wuchang, just across the river from Hankou.⁵⁹ The assembly was held at Zhonghua

⁵⁵ It appears in the Taishō canon as *Renwang huguo bore poluomiduo jing* 仁王護國般若波羅蜜多經, T 246. See Orzech, 69-79 and *passim*.

⁵⁶ In 1982 Charles Orzech discovered a copy of this printing that had once been part of a Shanghai monastic library. It led to his study of the *Scripture for Humane Kings* that was published in 1998. See Orzech, 1-2.

⁵⁷ In 1935 Shanghai Buddhist Studies Press (*Shanghai Foxue shuju* 上海佛學書局) published a version of the text accompanied by discourses by Yuanying 圓瑛 (1878-1953). It also appeared as part of the series *Songzang yizhen* 宋藏遺珍 (Treasures from the Song-dynasty Canon) also published in Shanghai in 1935.

⁵⁸ Hankou Fojiao hui, "Puquan gedi Fojiao conglin xueshe jiaohui sian jiangdu *Renwang huguo bore poluomiduo jing* wei guo wei shijie qiqiu ping'an qi" 普勸各地佛教叢林學社教會寺菴講讀仁王護國般若波羅蜜多經為國為世界祇求平安啟.

⁵⁹ Around this time Xiao was engaged in hostilities with fellow warlord Wu Peifu 吳佩孚 (1874-1939).

University 中華大學 in a lecture hall capable of holding seven or eight hundred people.⁶⁰ The article's author notes that surrounding the attendees were portraits of eminent people from China and abroad, organized into rows of Buddhist, Confucian, Christian and Muslim figures. During the ceremony Xiao made three great prayers for global, national, and local peace, the text of which was publicized in the newspaper *Sino-Western Daily* (*Zhong Xi ribao* 中西日報).⁶¹ Although the organizations behind both these events—Taixu's Buddhist association and Xiao Yaonan's Wuchang government—were only regional in scope, the content of the rituals themselves aspires to a scale that is national if not global.

Taixu appears again in the earliest published instance where we find Dai Jitao mentioned in connection with Baohua mountain. In January 1931 Dai invited the monk to the mountain to discuss the establishment of a World Buddhist Studies Center (*Shijie Foxue yuan* 世界佛學院) in Nanjing; while there Taixu delivered a speech on the value of the precepts and the need for greater education in China.⁶² In June of that year *Modern Sangha* (*Xiandai sengqie* 現代僧伽) reported that in April Dai and the Shanghai-based lay Buddhist Wang Yiting had been on Baohua mountain to read scriptures and recite the Buddha's name. At that time Dai had vowed to repair the structures on Baohua and to build a lecture platform and a memorial pavilion, projects that he expected to cost 100,000 yuan.⁶³

The subsequent article in that issue reports that Huiju Temple 慧居寺 on Baohua Mountain had had its name changed back to Longchang Temple at Dai's request. In June, while he was residing on the mountain because of illness, Dai had looked into the temple's history and had decided that this name, which had been bestowed during the Ming dynasty, had a broader meaning and more historical value than that later given in the Qing. The full name of the temple was now given as "Nation-protecting Sanctifying Longchang Temple" (*Huguo shenghua longchang si* 護國聖化隆昌寺).⁶⁴ Not only had Dai restored the temple's name from that bestowed by a Manchu dynasty, he also reconnected it with the esoteric national-protection (*huguo*) tradition and, by association, with the *Scripture for Humane Kings*.

⁶⁰ Zhonghua was a private university established in 1912. The article does not report on the actual number of attendees at the event.

⁶¹ Anonymous, "Xiao duban qing Taixu fashi jianshe renwang huguo fahui jishi yishu" 蕭督辦請太虛法師建設仁王護國法會記事一束.

⁶² Li Zikuan, "Taixu dashi zai Baohuashan zhi jiangyan." Taixu had established a World Buddhist Studies Center in Wuchang in 1929, and a branch operated in Beijing from 1930 to 1932. See Shi, *Zhongguo Fojiao jindai shi*, Vol. 1, pp. 256-264 and Yu Lingbo 于凌波, *Xiandai Fojiao renwu cidian* 現代佛教人物辭典, Vol. 1 p. 811 a-b.

⁶³ Anonymous, "Dai yuanzhang fayuan xiuqi Baohua si" 戴院長發願修葺寶華寺.

⁶⁴ Anonymous, "Baohuashan Huiju si huifu Longchang si yuanming" 寶華山慧居寺恢復隆昌寺原名. Also see a similar article in *Haichao yin*, July 15, 1931, MFQ 178:344.

In May of 1931 the Tibetan Panchen lama 班禪 (1883-1937) arrived in Nanjing, invited by the Nationalist government to attend the National People's Convention (*guomin huiyi* 國民會議). The government's aim was to secure political control over Tibet, whereas the Panchen lama reportedly made skillful use of Chinese rhetoric in seeking to preserve the autonomy of the Tibetan people.⁶⁵ Earlier that year, the lama had presided over a Kâlacakra Dharma Assembly in Beiping 北平, centered on the pure land of Shambala and its king who would bring peace to the world.⁶⁶ The publicization of this event helped to reestablish the state-supporting role that lamas had played during imperial times, and also to create an aura of spiritual power based on their mastery of esoteric teachings.⁶⁷ Dai wasted little time in harnessing this power in service of the nation. At his request, on June 24 the Republican government granted the lama the title "Protector of the Nation, Propagator of Transformation, Great Master of Vast Wisdom" (*Huguo xuanhua guanghui dashi* 護國宣化廣慧大師). Dai had specifically recommended that both the Panchen and Dalai lamas be given titles that incorporated the phrase "Protectors of the Nation" (*huguo*).⁶⁸

In early August of that year, Dai wrote to the monk Rongren 融忍 of Baohua mountain proposing that a Dharma assembly be held there during the ghost festival, which in that year culminated on August 28. Most of the ritual events that Dai outlines in this missive are based on repentance and directed toward the salvation of living beings, and were to be performed on six "Scripture Platforms of Universal Benefit" (*Puli jingtan* 普利經壇) that Dai requested be set up on the mountain.⁶⁹ The fifth of these platforms was to be dedicated specifically for the benefit of all sentient beings, the protection of China's national territory and people, and the complete establishment and fulfillment of the Three Principles of the People and the Five Branches of the Chinese state.⁷⁰ Part of this platform's ritual was to include the *Suvarṇa-aprabhāsa-(uttama)-sūtra* (*Jinguangming jing* 金光明經) as well as the *Scripture for Humane Kings*.⁷¹

⁶⁵ Tuttle, *Tibetan Buddhists in the Making of Modern China*, 162-164. See also Tuttle, "Tibet as the Source of Messianic Teachings to Save Republican China."

⁶⁶ Beiping was the name given to Beijing after Nanjing was established as the capital of the Republic in 1928.

⁶⁷ See Tuttle, "Tibet as the Source of Messianic Teachings to Save Republican China", 314-319. Though no officials from Nanjing were in attendance (the warlord Wu Peifu is the only public figure in attendance noted in contemporary sources), later accounts portray the event as supportive of the Nationalist government, an indication that these rituals had come to represent something significant to national politicians and historians. Tuttle, *Tibetan Buddhists*, 169-171.

⁶⁸ See Tuttle, *Tibetan Buddhists*, 164-165.

⁶⁹ Dai asks that they not be called Platforms of Water and Land (*shuilu daochang* 水陸道場), which were part of the Festival of Water and Land that seeks to help save creatures living on the land and in the water. See DDB, [水陸會].

⁷⁰ Another purpose of this ritual platform was to pray that all the scientific works and knowledges of the world would come to benefit all peoples and nations.

⁷¹ Dai, *Dai Jitao xiansheng wencun*, 1224-1230. The former text is T 663.



生攝影 陳諸先 夫謝鑄 生陳立 祥鈕惕 任馬福 及于右 虛大師 喇嘛太 宴班禪 先生歡 戴季陶

Picture 1: Dai Jitao, the Panchen lama, Taixu, and other Buddhist figures as pictured in *Haichao yin* on September 15, 1931, two months before the first nation-protecting Dharma assembly at Baohua Mountain.

Dai and his correspondents were not the only ones planning events incorporating the *Scripture for Humane Kings* that autumn. A report published in *Buddhism Semimonthly* (*Foxue banyue kan* 佛學半月刊) announced that the Buddhist laymen Di Chuqing 狄楚青 (ca. 1873-1941), Zhu Ziqiao 朱子橋 (1874-1941), Wen Lanting 聞蘭亭 (1870-1948) and others had invited the monk Chisong 持松 (1894-1972) to perform a nation-protecting Dharma assembly in Shanghai that would begin on November 7.⁷² Every evening from 6:00 to 7:30 he was to lecture on the *Scripture for Humane Kings* for the sake of easing the causes of natural disasters and national crises.⁷³ This event and the assemblies held earlier in Hankou, Wuchang, and Beijing illustrate how the idea of national salvation by means of Buddhist ritual could be adopted by local and regional groups. Yet Dai's implementation of the nation-protecting assembly would attempt to transform this idea in two distinct ways that strongly echo his treatment of religion in his *Riben lun*. Not only would he attempt to establish control over the

⁷² Chisong had studied Esoteric Buddhism in Japan and later became the guiding teacher of the Shanghai Bodhi Study Association 上海菩提學會. See Yu, *Xiandai Fojiao renwu cidian*, 1:754c-757b.

⁷³ Anonymous, "Benbu gongdelin qijian renwang huguo fahui."

authority behind national salvation on behalf of the Republican state, he would also move its emphasis away from ritual and toward the transformation and reform of Buddhism itself for the sake of the nation.

The first nation-protecting Dharma assembly at Baohua mountain took place on November 16, 1931, led by the Panchen lama. Among those in attendance were Dai, Dai's wife Niu Youheng (1886-1941), his son Anguo 安國 (1912-1984), Jiang Weiguo 蔣緯國 (1916-1997), head of the Judicial yuan (*Sifa yuan* 司法院) Ju Zheng 居正 (1876-1951) and head of the Control yuan (*Jiancha yuan* 監察院) Yu Youren 于右任 (1879-1964).⁷⁴ As Dai was head of the Examination yuan (*Kaoshi yuan*), three of the five branches of the Republican government were represented at the assembly. We can get an idea of Dai's contribution by examining the vows (*fayuan* 發願) that he read on the opening day, the text of which was published in *Haichao yin* in May of the following year.⁷⁵

The overall message of Dai's vows is that China's national crises stem from the communal karma of its citizens, and that they must repent of past bad deeds in order to cleanse away its effect on the nation. He expresses his wish that citizens have strong faith, conduct themselves morally, work hard and be filial so that the nation may be strengthened. Dai urges the Chinese government to be honest and faithful, and he also exhorts the nations of the world to cooperate, abandon violence, and protect nations weaker than themselves. Finally, Dai addresses the community of Buddhist followers (*Fojiao dazhong* 佛教大眾), warning them against being confused by heterodoxy, worldly matters, demons and spirits, and urging them not to be held back by established custom. They are urged to, among other things, distribute both worldly wealth and the dharma to others, to proclaim the ten kinds of wholesome behavior to the mundane world, to revive the original Buddhist teaching, and to make good use of science.

These published remarks by Dai reveal a great deal about how he saw Buddhism playing a role in China's national salvation. We see a set of moral injunctions, including diligence, filiality, honesty and amity, that echo those of the classical canon. These injunctions are backed up by a sense of responsibility understood through a Buddhist karmic lens of transgression, suffering, and repentance. The path to China's salvation, in this view, lies through the self-examination and self-improvement of the citizens themselves, under the tutelage of political and religious leaders. The role of Buddhism was to guide the people in proper moral behavior and to serve as a means for corporate unity, two themes that had already been introduced in Dai's book *Riben lun*. Echoes of his own past sickness, a suffering

⁷⁴ At the time Jiang Weiguo was considered to be the son of Jiang Jieshi 蔣介石 (Chiang Kai-shek), but it is now generally understood that Dai was his biological father.

⁷⁵ Dai Chuanxian [Jitao]. "Renwang huguo fahui fayuan wen." The article appears in a section of the periodical entitled "Historical Materials on National Salvation" (*jiuguo shicai* 救國史材) and includes the text of Dai's vows and a list of attendees.

he attributed to poor moral behavior, and the subsequent “treatment” of Buddhist practice are also present in the communal salvation he envisions for the Chinese people.

Yet this was not a political campaign for public morality, and the ritual component of this event cannot be overlooked.⁷⁶ As mentioned above, Tibetan lamas had begun to resurrect their former role as ritual specialists to the imperial court, and the Panchen lama in particular was a figure whose power and prestige had been publicly recognized by the state. The ritual space was significant as well. At the time, an ordination certificate from a temple on Baohua mountain was a source of prestige recognized nationwide, as it was well-known as a place of strict training, especially in the Vinaya Study Hall (*xuejie tang* 學戒堂) and Board Halls (*bantang* 板堂).⁷⁷ It was close to the new national capital of Nanjing, but far enough removed to be at arm’s length from city authorities. This may be why Dai had overlooked urban institutions such as Pilu Temple 毗盧寺, situated in the capital a few streets away from the Presidential Palace.⁷⁸ The history and reputation of Baohua was an important part of the context behind the power and significance of the ritual.

This ritualistic component of the assembly was also, however, used as grounds for critique. One such attack was published in *Haichao yin* in March 1932 by Zhu Feihuang 朱芾煌 (1877 - ca. 1955), a veteran of the 1911 revolution who went on to study Buddhism under Han Qingjing 韓清淨 (1884 - 1949).⁷⁹ In his article Zhu objects to the Baohua assembly on the grounds that relying on rituals to cure national crises is pointless, as these problems were caused by the people’s own bad acts and can only be changed if our their circumstances are first changed. He also casts doubt on the esoteric tradition and the efficacy of the Panchen lama, pointing out that the Tibetan master not only eats meat, thereby breaking the prohibition

⁷⁶ For examples of the former, see Murdock, *Disarming the Allies of Imperialism*.

⁷⁷ See Holmes Welch, *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism*, 286-294; Welch, *The Chinese Buddhist Revival*, 103-104. A contrary opinion can be found in an article in *Modern Sangha* published in 1929-1930, which noted the lax discipline of the youths in the Board Hall. Zhongliang, “Baohuashan sengqie de shenghuo.” As *Modern Sangha* was published by a student of Taixu, however, this might have been hyperbole for the purposes of promoting monastic reform. When the monk Chen-hua 真華 visited Baohua in 1945, he found the ordination masters strict to the point of cruelty. See Chen-hua, *In Search of the Dharma*, 47-59. Foreign visitors as well were attracted by Baohua’s fame. Reichelt noted the fame of the ordination platform on Baohua in 1928, and Prip-Møller observed ordination proceedings at Longchang Temple in the spring of 1930 and 1931. See Reichelt, *Truth and Tradition in Chinese Buddhism*, 235-236; Prip-Møller, *Chinese Buddhist Monasteries*.

⁷⁸ In 1934 Pilu Temple would invite Yuanying to lecture on the *Scripture for Humane Kings*. The lectures were published the following year with a short preface by Lin Sen 林森, then President of the Republic. See Anonymous, “Nanjing Pilu si dunqing Yuanyin lao fashi jiangyan renwang huguo bore jing qi”; Yuanying, *Renwang huguo jing jiangyi*.

⁷⁹ Han was a well-known scholar of the Consciousness-Only school (*weishi* 唯識), and he and Zhu were founding members of the Three Times Study Group (*sanshi xuehui* 三時學會), a major lay Buddhist study association in Beijing. Yu Lingbo, *Zhongguo jinxiandai Fojiao renwu zhi* 中國近現代佛教人物志, 456-460.

against killing, but even enters in to the houses of the wealthy and powerful.⁸⁰ At least part of Zhu's objection may stem from his background as part of the lay Buddhist educated elite, who largely valued textual learning and philosophy over ritual and magical means.

Since Dai's vows focus on moral rejuvenation and religious reform, Zhu's critique does seem rather overstated, yet he has pointed out something curious about Dai's orchestration of the assembly on Baohua. The assembly was a 'public' event in the sense that it involved a large group of people and references to it were published in the Buddhist press, and yet its publicity was actually quite limited. It was not well-covered in the print media, and though Baohua was not very distant from the capital it was a far cry from the city streets where the Nationalists had staged their political rallies and mass campaigns in the past.⁸¹ Did Dai intend his assembly to influence the behavior of a citizenry who was not even aware of it, or was Zhu correct in claiming that Dai was relying on the power of the Panchen lama and the ritual performance to purge the national karma of China?

I would suggest rather that it was the lay and monastic Buddhists in attendance on Baohua mountain for whom the performance was primarily intended. In Dai's writings on Buddhism, we consistently find a shadow discourse paired to that of national salvation: the imperative to first reform religion to bring it in line with modern knowledges and values.⁸² Before Buddhism could save the nation, it itself had to be purged of what Dai identified as superstition, and reformed into something that was modern, scientific, relevant to the public and authentic to its traditions. First on Baohua mountain and then in his writings on Buddhism, Dai published these reforms to Chinese Buddhists as part of his project of national salvation. Like many Buddhists in the Republican period, Dai sought not only to save the nation through Buddhism, but also to save Buddhism by reconstructing it along the lines of the modern nation form.

Saving the Nation, or Saving Buddhism?

A few months after the first nation-protecting Dharma assembly on Baohua mountain, *Haichao yin* published an open letter from Dai to the monks of Longchang Temple on Baohua. In it he observes that although some people blame Buddhism for China's weakness, since the Buddhist nation of Japan is known throughout the world as a powerful nation, this cannot be

⁸⁰ Zhu Feihuang 朱芾煌, "Yu Dai Chuanxian yuanzhang lun yingqing Banchan rangchu guonan shu" 與戴傳賢院長論應請班禪禳除國難書; also see Tuttle, "Tibet as the Source of Messianic Teachings to Save China."

⁸¹ Murdock, *Disarming the Allies of Imperialism*.

⁸² Note, for example, the *Dayun yuekan* article of 1928, his criticisms of Chinese religion in *Riben lun*, and his advice to monastic community that was delivered at the assembly on Baohua.

true. Dai argues that Buddhism could be a source of national strength for China as well, if it were to be reformed from its state of degradation. He concludes that the salvation of the nation and the people must proceed from the reformation of Buddhism, and that Longchang Temple, being an important center for the Vinaya School and located near the capital, bears a special responsibility for this task.⁸³

The letter goes on to outline a schedule of national holidays that Dai would have temples begin observing, including the January 1 anniversary of the founding of the Republic, the October 10 anniversary of the Xinhai Revolution 辛亥革命, the birth and death dates of Sun Zhongshan, and the anniversary of the death of 72 revolutionary martyrs in Guangzhou 廣州. Such observances would be visible not only to visitors, pilgrims, and the neighbors of Buddhist temples, but perhaps most importantly to the monastics who would participate in them as part of their ritual calendar. Introducing this type of communal marking of national history would bring the nation into Buddhist institutions in a very public way, transforming daily temple life in the process.⁸⁴ Moreover, as a popular and well-respected center of ordination, Longchang Temple had the potential to influence Buddhist institutions across the country by producing monastic leaders who would carry these new traditions with them.

We can start to see the full scope of Dai's plans to remake religion in a speech entitled "The Reform of China's Religions and the Task of National Salvation," which was broadcast on National Central Radio (*Zhongyang guangbo diantai* 中央廣播電台) on March 22, 1933 and later published in the May 15, 1933 edition of *Haichao yin*. In this short essay, Dai identifies religion as one of China's most pressing national problems. Every nation, he explains, shares a common bloodline (*xuetong* 血統), language, writing system, and customs, and each nationality (*minzu* 民族) has its own particular religion which has influenced its culture, education, and governance. Although this is the case, he continues, religion is such a sensitive topic that it is seldom discussed in the government.⁸⁵ Yet since religion can not be accepted uncritically, nor opposed, nor dismissed out of hand, the only course remaining is to work toward reforming it so that it might unify the Chinese people. Dai proceeds to outline the reforms he sees necessary for Buddhism in China, arguing that the state must move to protect the economic and social activities of religious organizations, regulate religion as a type of educational enterprise, require official permission for people to enter monastic life, and increase the educational level of monastics. Finally, he notes that the state must ensure

⁸³ Dai, "Jinggao Longchangsi zhusengzhong shu" 敬告隆昌寺諸僧眾書. He also argues that Buddhist institutions have always been supportive of the Chinese polity, and that Buddhist communities can act as a model of purity for the rest of society.

⁸⁴ Competition with the Buddhist ritual calendar was an active concern of the Nationalist state. See Nedostup, "Ritual Competition and the Modernizing Nation-State," 96-107.

⁸⁵ Many leaders in the Guomindang and allied warlord camps, however, did have well-known religious affiliations, Jiang Jieshi and Feng Yuxiang 馮玉祥 (1882-1948) among them.

that the religion in the borderland regions of Tibet, Xinjiang and Mongolia is both kept authentic to its traditions but also adapted to the times.⁸⁶

Such a program of reform, if realized, would represent an unprecedented degree of state control over religion in China, and by stressing the importance of religion to the nation, Dai skillfully uses the sense of national crisis in order to justify it. Yet this broadcast is not at all out of line with his previous work on religion. The connection between a national people and its religion recalls his observations of Japanese religion in *Riben lun*, while the theme of Buddhist reform is further developed from his published vows and private correspondence regarding the assembly on Baohua mountain. For Dai, it would seem that in order to survive the crises of the modern age, Buddhism had to be thoroughly reconstructed, and his efforts to change practice on Baohua mountain were initial, experimental steps toward this end. Like many others of his day, Dai believed that if Buddhism could be saved from superstitious and destructive forces, then it could take its place as the ethos of the Chinese nation. Thus while it is quite clear that Dai wished Buddhism to play a central role in the task of national salvation, it is somewhat less clear what this Buddhism would look like after being reformed and regulated to the degree he envisioned. His articulation of Buddhist nationalism thus had, as its most immediate and well-developed consequence, the reform of Buddhist life in the nation rather than the introduction of Buddhist ideas or culture into nationalist discourse.

In spite of the overtly nationalist nature of many of Dai's Buddhist activities, his personal practice as well as his voluminous writings on scriptural and doctrinal subjects, indicate that his engagement with Buddhism was neither simply a political tool nor a cynical use of the people's religious beliefs. Yet the changes he proposed for Buddhist culture in China were quite drastic — transforming the monastic ritual calendar, purging 'superstition' and ignorance, and focusing the power of Buddhism toward the education of the people along nationalist, moralistic lines. It is important to remember, however, that Dai lacked the means to implement these reforms through the legal or regulatory apparatus of the state, and although his programs for reform were heard by fellow Buddhists through personal communication and published articles, and a second similar dharma assembly was held in 1933, his plans for reforming Buddhism into a force for national strength were never enacted beyond the scope of these assemblies and his personal writings.⁸⁷

I would argue that it is here where the greatest impact of Buddhist nationalism can be found: in the effects that nationalist projects had on the religious thought and practice of

⁸⁶ Dai, "Zhongguo zhi zongjiao gaige yu jiuguo shiye." The reference to national unity is particularly poignant considering that the previous two years had seen the establishment of the Jiangxi-Fujian Soviet (*Zhonghua Suweiai gongheguo* 中華蘇維埃共和國) and Manzhouguo 滿洲國, both of which undermined Dai's government's claim to national control.

⁸⁷ It was during this second ceremony that Dai took the Dharma name Bukong 不空, the name of the putative translator of the second version of the *Scripture for Humane Kings*.

Buddhists themselves. If the watchword of Republican Buddhists was ‘reform’, then the contours and values of this reform were very much influenced by concepts of national crisis and salvation. We can see this quite clearly in the samples of Dai’s work reviewed above, where the twin discourses of nationalism and reform appear strongly intertwined. Although other influential lay and monastic Buddhists of this era promoted religious reform along lines similar to those advocated by Dai, the role of nationalism in the development of their thought is a topic that remains largely unexamined. Given that Dai had such a prominent public profile, and such a wide network of relationships with other prominent figures, it is an aspect of Buddhist nationalism that ought to be further studied: how Chinese Buddhists, in attempting to participate in a program of national salvation, had more success in transforming themselves.

Abbreviations

- DDB MULLER, Charles A., ed. Digital Dictionary of Buddhism. <<http://buddhism-dict.net/ddb>>. Consulted between 6/30/2009 and 5/30/2011.
- MFQ HUANG Xianian 黃夏年, ed. *Minguo Fojiao qikan wenxian jicheng* 民國佛教期刊文獻集成 [Complete Collection of Republican-Era Buddhist Periodical Literature], 209 vols. Beijing: Quanguo tushuguan, 2006.
- MFQB HUANG Xianian, ed. *Minguo Fojiao qikan wenxian jicheng bubian* 民國佛教期刊文獻集成補編 [Supplement to the Complete Collection of Republican-Era Buddhist Periodical Literature], 83 vols. Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 2008.
- T *Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo* 大正新修大藏經 (Taisho Tripitika). 100 Vols. Tokyo: Taisho Issaikyo Kankokai, 1924-1934. Accessed from the online archive of the Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association <<http://www.cbeta.org>>.

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⁸⁸ Periodical articles from the MFQ and MFQB collections are cited by the volume and page number of the reprint editions: eg., MFQ 161:303-305 indicates volume 161 of the *Minguo Fojiao qikan wenxian jicheng*, pages 303 to 305. If applicable, the date of the original publication follows in square brackets.

- . “Dai yuanzhang fayuan xiuqi Baohua si” 戴院長發願修葺寶華寺. MFQ 67:97 [June 15, 1931.]
- . “Baohuashan Huiju si huifu Longchang si yuanming” 寶華山慧居寺恢復隆昌寺原名. MFQ 67: 97 [June 15, 1931.]
- . “Benbu gongdelin qijian renwang huguo fahui” 本埠功德林啟建仁王護國法會. MFQ 47:263-264 [Oct. 16, 1931.]
- . “Dai Jitao chaoxie *Jin'gangjing*” 戴季陶抄寫金剛經. MFQB 47:340 [Sept., 1933.]
- . “Nanjing Pilu si dunqing Yuanying lao fashi jiangyan renwang huguo bore jing qi” 南京毘盧寺敦請圓瑛老法師講演仁王護國般若經啟. MFQ 50:8 [Sept. 1, 1934.]
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- DAI Jitao 戴季陶. *Riben lun* 日本論. Shanghai: Minzhi shuju, 1928.
- . “Jinggao Longchangsi zhusengzhong shu” 敬告隆昌寺諸僧眾書. MFQ 181:104- 108 [July 15, 1932.]
- . “Zhongguo zhi zongjiao gaige yu jiuguo shiye” 中國之宗教改革與救國事業. MFQ 184:23-26 [May 15, 1933.]
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- . *Dai Jitao xiansheng wencun zaixubian* 戴季陶先生文存再續編. Taipei: Zhongguo guomindang zhongyang weiyuanhui dangshi shiliao bianzuan weiyuanhui, 1968.
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