9 Some Remarks on the Usage of Renjian Fojiao and The Contribution of Venerable Yinshun to Chinese Buddhist Modernism

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In the study of history "influence" is a delicate concept. Related to the problem of historical causality, influence is easily asserted and demonstrated, but difficult to ascertain, quantify or falsify. To a certain degree it might be true that if many influential people in a given place or time consider something influential, it *is* influential there and then. From the outside of history, anthropology or cultural studies, however, the challenge is to weigh and consider the "causes and conditions" in order to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of a situation. Therefore outsiders might perceive the relative importance of forces and their trajectory differently than those who actually lived through a period and were themselves part of it.

For the last 25 years Venerable Yinshun has deservedly been praised as the most learned scholar monk in contemporary Chinese Buddhism. On Taiwan where he spent the second fifty years of his life, he is held in especially high esteem due to his propagation of *renjian fojiao* 人間佛教, a "Buddhism for the Human Realm". Moreover, he has produced a largely historiographical oeuvre that makes academic truth-claims about Indian and Chinese Buddhism.

It might be too early to judge the overall contribution of Yinshun to Chinese Buddhism, but a few preliminary attempts to position him in the field might be useful. In the following, after some remarks on the usage of the term itself, we will try to contextualize *renjian fojiao* in the work of Yinshun and the history of Buddhism in the 20th century.

The Semantics of Renjian fojiao

Renjian fojiao in itself is a somewhat ambiguous term. Since we are all among human beings, all kinds of Buddhist ideas or activities could be

called *renjian fojiao*. In the following I propose a simplified semantic field of *renjian fojiao,* which is constituted by a *descriptive* vs. a *normative* meaning.

Descriptively, *renjian fojiao* emphasizes that the three treasures of Buddhism exist or at least originated in the human realm.[1] The remaining four[2] realms may profit from the beneficial influence of Buddhism, but the human realm is the true field of its history, doctrine and practice. This view results in an emphasis on the image of Buddha as a human being, the Sangha as the guardian of a changing Dharma and the study of Buddhism as the study of the history of Buddhism as played out in the human world. Only where Buddhism, the Buddha, the Dharma, the *Saṃgha*, is not conceived of as *species aeternitatis*, but subjected to the up and downs of history, can the study of this history be of any importance. During the first part of the 20th century, in almost every Buddhist culture, there were individuals within the Sangha, who were attracted towards this kind of description.

The perception of something decides its use. In a description of Buddhism as a human affair there is relatively little space for deities, demons, hungry ghosts or the souls of one's ancestors. Therefore when a growing consensus among Chinese Buddhists considered the true field of action to be the human realm, some forms of practice receded into the background while others were revived or newly created. The description merely orientates *renjian fojiao* to the human realm; it does not say what exactly is to be done. This is why there is such a great variety in the normative use of the term.

It is no coincidence that the term "Engaged Buddhism" that has been widely used to discuss contemporary Buddhism, originated as Thich Nath Than's translation of *renjian fojiao*.[3] In "Engaged Buddhism" Buddhism is conceived as a force within society. It emphasizes social and political involvement as well as a more involved and empowered laity. It also justifies missionary activities and the evolution of larger entities within the Sangha

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[1] This according to Yinshun (2002), 101-106.

[2] Five, counting the *asura*.

[3] Queen & King (1996), 36. The Vietnamese term *nhap gian phat giao* renders the Chinese *renjian fojiao*. (Thanks to Douglas Gildow for pointing this out.) Thich Nhat Hanh already had read Yinshun's works by the 60s. When a few years ago he was presented with the CD version of Yinshun's complete works he said, according to an eye-witness: "This is the Buddhist teacher who I revere most." At least two of Yinshun's works were translated into Vietnamese in the 80s.

that resemble corporate entities more than traditional "ordination families." In Chinese Buddhism on Taiwan *renjian fojiao* is often used as a motto to justify the expansion of the group and the branching out of its activities, not merely as a statement about Buddhism. It is used normatively: *renjian fojiao* is something that should be done. It is generally seen positively and often seems to imply novelty, a progressive force vis-avis an older "traditional" Buddhism. It is used as motto for large projects such as the construction of hospitals, disaster relief, and the establishment of schools and universities. Perhaps it is a direct result of the description of Buddhism as *renjian* that the Buddhist world more and more models its institutions on those of secular society. There are universities, printing houses, and hospitals funded and run by international Buddhist organizations. Moreover, Engaged Buddhists (on Taiwan and elsewhere) are likely to take a political stance. As a consequence the group they represent can be described as progressive or conservative on a political spectrum just as any other political group.

To distinguish between descriptive and normative usage has the advantage that we are able to explain why some interpreters of *renjian fojiao* did not, in fact, promote their own ideas. For them it was simply a matter of making a true statement about Buddhism. The difference also appears as a minor problem in translation. In European languages it is (aptly) expressed by the preposition: "Buddhism *of* (or *in*) the Human Realm" points to the descriptive side; "Buddhism *for* the Human Realm" is more normative, slogan rather than sign.

Yinshun and Renjian Fojiao

In the following I am going to argue that *renjian fojiao* in its normative sense does not play a major role in Yinshun's work. His main contribution should be seen in his extensive historiographical oeuvre that results in a new focus on history, especially that of Indian Buddhism, and a revalorization of the earlier Āgama sutras and Indian Madhyamaka over and against Chinese Māhayāna literature. Yinshun's contribution to Buddhist modernism in Taiwan is well known, but it is important to view his contribution in a nuanced perspective that includes the beginnings of Chinese Buddhist modernism under Taixu. Moreover, Chinese Buddhist modernism itself has to be seen in a broader historical context as part of a pan-Buddhist

phenomenon.

If one surveys of the some 40 monographs and essay-collections that bear Yinshun's name, it is obviously apparent that his main interest is not how to apply Buddhism in modern society. Most of the volumes deal with the history of Buddhist ideas and texts, usually in Indian Buddhism, with a few essays and one monograph on Chinese developments. Also the annals of Taixu, the numerous obituaries, and his two autobiographical accounts point to a concern with the past. Another prominent group of his writings are expository works that teach the Dharma via scriptural exegesis. The first seven volumes of the *Miaoyunji* 妙雲集 collection, for instance, belong to this traditional format of sutra lectures (*jiangjing* 講經). Yinshun also makes use of other traditional genres like in *Chengfo zhi dao* 成佛之道, where he composed short *gāthā*s followed by an auto-commentary, but most often he rearranges his subject matter in a new, less traditional way. I have argued elsewhere that one of his greatest contributions should be seen in the introduction of the academic monograph.[4] By presenting his ideas in this relatively new genre Yinshun introduced new rules for the production and proof of statements about Buddhism.

Clearly Yinshun's studies of doctrinal history constitutes the larger part of his oeuvre. A recent collection of the comparatively few writings concerning *renjian fojiao* contains eight essays of together 225 pages.[5] A small amount even when only compared to the c. 5000 pages of his eight later, semi-academic monographs.

Nevertheless, historiography and essays on *renjian fojiao* are closely linked. In both, Yinshun basically attempts the same thing: Just as he tries to accommodate traditional scholarship into new standards of rationality in his historiography, he also promotes a view of Buddhism that dispenses with supernatural agency. The newly accepted standards of historiography translate into new possibilities for practice, but in Yinshun's life and work this is clearly a sideshow. For himself he preferred the conservative, relatively uneventful life of a Chinese scholar-monk to that of a social activist. It was left to others like the Venerables Zhengyan, Shengyan and Xingyun to actively promote *renjian fojiao* in Taiwanese society on a large scale.

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[4] Bingenheimer (2004), 189-196.

[5] Yinshun (2002).

From Renjian to Rensheng Fojiao and back again

A lot has been made of the alleged difference between Taixu's *rensheng fojiao* and Yinshun's *renjian fojiao*.[6] A simplified narrative has evolved that credits Yinshun with further developing Taixu's concept. However, apart from the fact that Yinshun did not coin the term *renjian fojiao*, it is doubtful that the difference between the two terms is large enough to credit Yinshun with an important innovation. Yinshun himself explained that Taixu used *rensheng fojiao* "Buddhism of Human Life" to counter the prevalent role of Buddhism at that time as provider of funeral ceremonies and rituals for the ghosts of the dead. Yinshun's concern was more what he considered the heterodox introduction of gods and heavenly beings into Buddhism, especially in its devotional and esoteric forms. He writes:

> I continued the idea of Master Taixu of a Buddhism of Human Life that is free of ghosts and demons (非鬼化的人生佛教), went one step further and laid the foundations for a Buddhism without deifications (非天化的).[7]

In recent years discussions often seem to imply that Yinshun actually invented the term *renjian fojiao*. However *renjian fojiao* was not only used by Taixu, but almost certainly predates him, though the first usage of the term has not been ascertained yet.[8] In 1934 a special issue dedicated to *renjian fojiao* appeared in *Haichaoyin* 海潮音, the influential Buddhist periodical that Taixu founded in 1920. For this special issue several prominent members of Taixu's circle contributed extensive articles to the already well-established journal: among them the editor Daxing 大醒 (1899-1952), the talented

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[6] Mainly because of the essays in Yang Huinan (1991) and Jiang Canteng (1990). Their account of a Taixu *rensheng fojiao* on the one hand and a Yinshun *renjian fojiao* on the other has proved very influential. A recent extensive account of the transition from Taixu to Yinshun continues to reify and attribute the terms rather than putting them in perspective (Hou Kunhong 侯坤宏 (2004), R11 – R19). Only Chen Bing and Deng Zimei (2003) seem to share the view that the difference is basically neglegible and place Taixu and Yinshun together in one chapter on *renjian fojiao*. Chen and Deng also show how Taixu's ideas lived on in China through his student Zhao Puchu 趙樸初 (1907-2000) and try to account for the impact of the slogan on Chinese Buddhism on the mainland in the eighties.

[7] "Qili qiji zhi renjian fojiao 契理契機之人間佛教" in Yinshun (1993), vol.4, 69.

[8] The canonical meaning of *renjian* as translation of *manuṣya-loka*, *manuṣya* etc., especially in the Vinaya, is of no consequence here.

Fafang 法舫 (1904-1951), and Moru 默如 (1905-1991), who later (in 1954) debated with Yinshun over the right terminology concerning Buddhist traditions. Not among the contributers, however, is Yinshun, who had arrived at the Minnan Institute in 1931. Perhaps he was not senior enough to contribute, though this is unlikely, since he was only one year younger than Moru, and had already fought a debate in *Haichaoyin.*[9]

The term *renjian fojiao* appears on every page of an issue with a politically acute, surprisingly international and sophisticated outlook. To give only a few examples: In "Renjian fojiao shi guan" 人間佛教史觀 Fafang tries to show that Buddhism has always been *renjian* Buddhism and, citing Āgama sutras, gives an extensive account of "past and future *renjian fojiao*". In "Renjian fojiao yu shehui zhuyi 人間史觀與社會主義" Shuyi 蜀一 explains the differences between Buddhism and Socialism. In "Cong qiu tafang jingtu shuodao renjian fojiao 從求他方淨土說到人間佛教" Weifang 唯方 argues that it is mistaken to search for a Pure Land somewhere else, the aim of Buddhism is rather to establish a Pure Land in the Human Realm.

Obviously Taixu himself used the term *renjian fojiao* extensively in the early thirties. It appears in the titles of at least two texts: "Jianshe renjian jingtu lun 建設人間淨土論"[10] and "Zenyang lai jianshe renjian fojiao 怎樣來建設人間佛教".[11] The former is a critique of traditional Pure Land practice. The motto "To Establish a Pure Land in the Human Realm (建設人間淨土)" became the "orthodox" modernist reinterpretation of traditional Pure Land beliefs.[12] In "Zenyang lai jianshe renjian fojiao" Taixu discusses *renjian fojiao* on three levels: First, concerning the individual believer and his daily life attitudes and problems; second, on the level of nation and society; and finally with intriguing ideas about the international relevance of Buddhist modernism. Far ahead of his time, Taixu analyses popular

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[9] On Yinshun's debate with Shoupei about questions concerning the Weishi tradition see Bingenheimer (2004), Ch.2.2.

[10] *Haichaoyin* vol.12 no.1 (1931), (and Taixu (1953) 14:47.6.349-430).

[11] *Haichaoyin* vol.15 no.1 (1934), (and Taixu (1953) 14:47.5.431-456).

[12] For Yinshun's later use of the argument of establishing a Pure Land in the Human Realm see Bingenheimer (2004), Ch.3.1.2. "Establish a Pure Land in the Human Realm" is still a motto of Shengyan's Dharma Drum Mountain, one of the largest Buddhist organizations in Taiwan..

perceptions of Buddhism as seen in movies and plays, sketches a Buddhist theory of economics and defense, and then summarizes the history of European thought in a few pages. He gives a remarkably perceptive and far-sighted account of the deadlock between capitalist and communist ideologies after the first world-war, praises Roosevelt's New Deal, and, in between all this, promotes Buddhism as the foundation of a new ethic for mankind. However, Taixu was eventually not quite satisfied with the term *renjian* and in his later writings on the subject he preferred *rensheng fojiao* 人生佛教.[13]

He seemed to feel that *renjian* was too narrow, too anthropocentric and did not do justice to the vastness of the Buddhist project. Taixu's understanding of *rensheng* in *rensheng fojiao* is rather broad, it encompasses all the lifetimes and modes of existence a practitioner has to strive through until final liberation:

> This is the special approach of Buddhism, where it differs from Confucianism: Of the seven levels [of rensheng fojiao that I (Taixu) have proposed here] Confucianism does not care about the first three or the last. As it is said "Whatever exists outside this world, is not to be discussed [by the wise]."[14] They only care for human matters; things that exist outside the human realm (人間) are not to be discussed. Therefore, because this central level is the most narrow, it is clear that the Confucian teachings are concerned only with the human realm (人間) and are not as broad as Buddhism. [They] do not have the height and depth [...] of Buddhism. Because they abide in the human realm (人間) and relate all things and beings to human need, they cannot attain depth or clarity. They have never heard about the heavenly beings of the three worlds, the sages of the three vehicles, the stages of the Bodhisattva-path and the final plane of the Buddha. [...] Therefore, in the future, every time the Confucians say that Buddhist teachings despise the world and neglect human life, we

[13] Cf. also the remarks in Yinshun's essay "Renjian fojiao xuyan 人間佛教緒言" (Yinshun (2002), 102). The shift in Taixu's terminology occurred between 1934, when the Haichaoyin special issue appeared, and 1940, when he uses *rensheng fojiao* in his panjiao (s. note 16 below).

[14] 六合之外，[聖人]存 而不論. This is a quote from *Zhuangzi* (Ch. 2 "Qiwu").

> can now raise this "Buddhism of Human Life". It emphasizes the human life in its karmatic relationships and the ultimate goal of betterment, realizing one's nature and attaining Buddhahood.[15]

Apart from the desire to set Buddhism apart from Confucian "narrowness", another reason for Taixu to prefer *rensheng* over *renjian* was perhaps the homophony with an important concept in his panjiao: i.e. the idea of the "Human Vehicle" (*rensheng* 人乘).[16] Taixu held that in the current age it is the "Human Vehicle" should be practised At one point, in his critical remarks on Yinshun's *Yindu zhi fojiao*印度之佛教(1942), Taixu cautioned Yinshun directly against the tendency to limit Buddhism to the "human realm". He might have accused him of anthropocentrism (人本主義), if the term had had entered Chinese parlance already.[17] Taixu is much more inclusivistic regarding Buddhist deities, heavens, hells and devotional practices. Yinshun tends to qualify them at best as *upāya*, at worst as defiling true Buddhism by assimilating theistic practices and concepts. Yinshun and other students of Taixu, like Daxing 大醒 (1899-1952), Fafang 法舫 (1904-1951), Dongchu 東初 (1908-1977), Xingyun 星雲 (b.1927) and the influential Cihang 慈航 (1895-1954) did not think the term *renjian* as too narrow for Buddhism and used both *renjian* or *rensheng*.

In the late 40s and early 50s, about a hundred monks from the mainland arrived on Taiwan in the wake of the civil war and started to reform local Buddhism. The more "progressive" among them, most of whom had studied in Taixu's seminaries, used *rensheng fojiao* as a slogan. The prolific Shi Dongchu, the teacher of Ven. Shengyan, founded the monthly *Rensheng* 人生 right after his arrival in 1949. Here, under the motto "To Purify the Modern Human Mind and Establish a Buddhism of Human Life (淨化現代人心建設人生佛教)" monks like Yuanming 圓明, Cihang and Dongchu, share their

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[15] From "Rensheng fojiao yu cengchuang jinhua lun 人生佛教與層創進化論" (1944) (in Taixu [1953]).

[16] "Human Vehicle" here in contrast to the "Śrāvaka Vehicle" and the "Vehicle of Heavenly Beings." See: Taixu: "Wo zenyang panshe yiqie fofa 我怎樣判攝一切佛法" (1940) (in Taixu [1953]).

[17] He does come close: 孤取人間為本之趨向，則落人本之狹隘 (Taixu [1943] cited in Yinshun [ed.] [1987], 4). In the same essay Taixu repeats his argument that "limiting" Buddhism to *renjian fojiao* would put it on a level with Confucianism and Taoism. ("Zai yi 'Yindu zhi fojiao'" 再議印度之佛教 (in Yinshun [Ed.] [1987], 3-17).)

thoughts on the meaning of life in general, and the uses of Buddhism for it in particular. After more than a decade of war and displacement, they had escaped to Taiwan with the losers of the civil war. They regarded it as their duty to establish orthodox Chinese Buddhism on Taiwan, but materially they had to start from scratch. Considering the economic difficulties, the fear of an attack from the mainland, the political tensions under the regime of Chiang Kai-shek, it is not surprising that those who lived through these early years on Taiwan would gravitate to the more existential term, *rensheng*. Perhaps they were also following the preference of their late teacher Taixu, who had died in 1947. In the front page "manifesto" of the first issue of *Rensheng*, Yuanming[18] writes:

> In order to repay the Buddha's kindness and to enlighten human society, we now, on the birthday of the Buddha, launch this "Human Life (人生)". Without doubt "Human Life" will be able to answer the Buddha's call to help mankind and the world.[...] It is called "Human Life" because the object of Buddha's talks during his 49 years of teaching, in more than 300 gatherings, is "Human Life". People who do not understand Buddhism think that it is other-worldly (出世), negative, apart from our human world (我們人世間) and so on. All this derives from a great misunderstanding, from not being able to see the aim of the real meaning of Buddhism. True Buddhism is to guide us as a method of becoming a human being.[19]

Nobody here proposes a difference between the terms rensheng and renjian. A year later, in April 1950 in the frontpage article of Rensheng, Mufu 木桴 uses the term *rensheng* in a way that is clearly synonymous with *renjian*:

> Rensheng fojiao is a term that appeared in the Buddhist world in the early years of the Republic. [...] It is said of old: "The

[18] Yuanming (1918-?) was one of the more radical monks of the early fifties, he went to study in Japan, where he wrote articles attacking traditional Pure Land practices that led to a fracas between Cihang and Yinshun. Later, however, he returned to lay-life and vanished from the scene.

[19] *Rensheng* 人生vol.1 no.1. (May 1949).

> Buddhadharma is in the world (世間), there is no enlightenment outside this world. Looking for awakening outside this world is like searching for horns on a hare." This verse is already filled with the spirit of a "humanisation" of Buddhism (佛教人間化的精神). [...] The sciences of the 20th century look for real proof in all things, they do not accept empty and abstruse [arguments]. Therefore, Master Taixu has put forward and propagated the term *rensheng fojiao*. The Buddhism of the Tang, Song, Ming and Qing [Dynasties] always had its special characteristics; likewise the present *rensheng fojiao* has its own theory and aims. Buddhists differentiate ten worlds (法界), humanity is one of them. All Buddhas became Buddha and taught the Dharma here among humankind and not in any of the other nine worlds. This shows how closely Buddhism is related to the human life.[20]

It would be hairsplitting to propose that in these early discussions the use of *rensheng* differed from that of *renjian*. Mufu's arguments for a *rensheng/renjian fojiao* are the same as what Yinshun said after and Taixu before him: *Rensheng/renjian* means adapting Buddhism to the times, solving concrete problems in society and promoting Buddhist education.

Further, Mufu also cites scriptural evidence for the "Humanism" of Buddhism. Scriptural evidence is also part of the narrative that connects Yinshun with *renjian fojiao*. An often (mis-)cited dictum is that Yinshun realized the humanity of the Buddhas when he read an Āgama passage that he gives as: "All Buddhas appear in the human realm, never has one become a Buddha in a heaven. (諸佛世尊,皆出人間, 終不在天上成佛也.)"[21]

Clearly, this understanding of Buddhahood directly contradicts many devotional forms of Chinese Buddhist practice, where the devotees hope for

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[20] *Rensheng* 人生 vol.2, no.3 (April 1950).

[21] As cited in Yinshun (1985), p.1. Yinshun cites the passage in various ways. The first part appears like this in the Song, Yuan and Ming editions, the second is a free paraphrase. The passage is taken from the Ekottarāgama (T. vol.2.694a). The Taishō edition, by the way, relying mainly on the Tripitaka Koreana, has 所以然者.佛世尊,皆出人間, 非由天而得也. (...This is the reason why the Buddhas, the Worldhonored Ones, appear in the human realm, and do not reach attainment in/from the heavens.) The Taishō reading is doubtless the correct one. It is interesting, however, how the "wrong" reading used by Yinshun in his early works is cited again and again on his authority.

a rebirth in a heavenly realm, from where they would continue their path to enlightenment. But here is not the place to discuss Yinshun's differences with the Pure Land Movement. Probably the passage was one of the reasons for Yinshun's preference of *renjian* over *rensheng*, but it seems difficult to argue that this shift in nuance constitutes a significant development. Most of the promoters of *rensheng/renjian fojiao* mentioned above died in the 50s – too early to have an impact on Taiwanese Buddhism. Xingyun studied with Taixu only for a few months when still very young. Of all of Taixu's elder students, only Moru, Dongchu and Yinshun lived to see Buddhism prosper on Taiwan.[22] Dongchu seems to have preferred the word *rensheng*, Yinshun *renjian*. Naturally, by surviving all his friends and opponents, Yinshun has come to solely represent *renjian fojiao* and this although, apart from a short spell of administrative duty in the fifties, he was rarely actively involved in contemporary matters let alone social activism.

To summarize, both terms – *renjian fojiao* and *rensheng fojiao* – were used by Chinese Buddhists in the first half of the 20th century. *Renjian* was popular in the early thirties, *rensheng* in the forties and fifties. That *renjian fojiao* in the last decades finally gained the upper hand can be attributed to a number of reasons, Yinshun's propagation being probably the most important. However, for the development of the Chinese form of Buddhist modernism both terms are equally important. The difference between both is negligible and mostly artificially constructed. *Renjian* and *rensheng* should be treated as emic terms, rather than as useful categories for understanding Chinese Buddhism in the 20th century.

Rensheng/renjian fojiao and Yinshun's contribution in the context of other Buddhist modernisms

In general, for academia, even when considering *renjian fojiao* alone it should rather be discussed as a concept among contemporary Taiwanese and Chinese Buddhist groups themselves, not as an etic entity. The term *renjian fojiao* does help neither to conceptualize nor to explain a number of important phenomena in contemporary Buddhism, such as the

[22] While Dongchu and Yinshun via their students Shengyan and Zhengyan had a great impact on the development of Taiwanese Buddhist modernism, Moru spent his last decades in virtual reclusion and silent study.

persistence of traditional modes of Chinese Buddhism (both within and without the groups that profess to follow the principles of *renjian fojiao*) or the growing influence of Tibetan Buddhism among Chinese Buddhists. In the following we will try to understand *renjian fojiao* in its pan-Buddhist context. *Rensheng/renjian fojiao* should be seen as but one form of Buddhist modernism, which is an international, intercultural phenomenon that precedes both Taixu and Yinshun.

I suggest to use Heinz Bechert's "Buddhist modernism(s)" instead of "Engaged Buddhism" or *renjian fojiao* as a general term for those Buddhist movements that actively engage the rational standards of modernity and try to adapt or reform Buddhism. It is more neutral and descriptive than "Engaged Buddhism" and more interculturally compatible than *renjian fojiao*.

In a definition of Buddhist modernism that Bechert forwarded as early as 1966, he outlined a number of typical traits for Buddhist modernist movements.[23] Although his description relied mainly on data from Theravāda countries, it is equally applicable to Māhayāna. According to Bechert,

(1)Buddhist modernism emphasizes the rationalistic elements of Buddhism.

(2)Its leaders were influenced by their knowledge of European history and scientific standards of rationality.

(3)It expands the role of the laity, especially regarding the formation of lay-Buddhist organizations.[24]

(4)Buddhist modernism competed with and learned from Christian missionaries.

(5)"For many exponents of Buddhist modernism, *the Buddhist teachings do not first of all teach us to turn away from worldly affairs, but challenge us to improve on them.*"[25]

Later research has corroborated these points.[26] Moreover, it has become

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[23] Bechert (1966), vol.1, 37-42.

[24] This was a novelty for Theravāda, not, however, for Chinese Buddhism.

[25] Bechert (1966), vol.1, 40. (My italics; this almost seems to quote Taixu, Dongchu or Yinshun.)

[26] It is by now impossible to give a comprehensive account of the research on modern Buddhism here. It might be said, however, that compared to Sri Lanka, Thailand, Japan and other Buddhisms, modern Chinese Buddhism, on the Mainland as well as in Taiwan, has

clear that all modernist movements in Buddhism are characterized by a dialectic between transformation and re-formation.

On the one hand there is the assimilation of Western ideas, the influence of academic scholarship that leads Buddhist communities to explore new directions of belief and practice. On the other hand there is the tendency to take recourse to history and accommodate new ways into a re-formed tradition that pretends to be older and "more traditional" than the current state of "the tradition" which is often perceived as corrupted or in decline. Ideas that (perhaps) lay dormant but are (certainly) new to most believers are framed as a mere return to an older, essential Buddhism that had been lost or forgotten. It matters little if the "essential Buddhism" is found in a form of practice, as it is the case with the introduction of Burmese Vipassana techniques in Sri Lanka[27] or in a certain doctrine as it is with Yinshun, who has, throughout his remarkably long and prolific career, upheld the philosophical tenets of the Madhyamaka school as the "true meaning (*zhengyi* 正義)" of Buddhism. For Yinshun the philosophy of emptiness as found in Nāgārjuna is the orthodox interpretation of the Buddha's teachings as found in the Āgama sutras. According to him, that the "Dependent Arising" of the Āgamas equals the "Emptiness" of Nāgārjuna is the essential Buddhist doctrine, the key for a correct understanding of the whole tradition. It has been shown elsewhere how his understanding on that point differs from that of his teacher Taixu.[28] But how are Yinshun's views on *renjian fojiao* and his new orthodoxy to be understood in the context of other forms of Buddhist modernism?

The dialectic-critical discourse of Madhyamaka is one of those schools of Buddhism that lend themselves rather easily to a comparison with European philosophy. For modern (and postmodern) western thought Madhyamaka is a far better interlocuter, than e.g. the Buddhism encountered in the sutras concerning the Medicine Buddha. By emphasizing Madhyamaka

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received relatively little attention in Western and Japanese literature. This is due to a number of reasons: the political difficulties of research on religion in mainland China, the fact that a comparative small number of Chinese scholars have made Buddhism their speciality, and the complicated religious landscape of China itself where religious phenomena and terminology are linked with different traditions and difficult to isolate.

[27] As amply documented in Carrithers (1983) and Bond (1988).

[28] Bingenheimer (2004), Ch. 2.3.

in his construction of Buddhist history, Yinshun steers the discourse away from the magical-mythological elements of Buddhist and guides it towards its more rational, interculturally communicable aspects. In stressing those parts of Buddhism that are (to a degree) compatible with modern intellectual discourse, Yinshun is clearly in communion with a development that can be found in other Buddhisms as well. To illustrate this we will in the following look at examples from Sri Lanka, Thailand and Japan.

A) Sri Lanka

In his discussion of Buddhist modernism on Sri Lanka George Bond asserts two levels of the "rationalization of the religious symbol system" – the personal and the social.[29] Rationalization on the personal level is, according to Bond, exemplified in the growing use of meditation among the laity. On the social level the result of rationalisation is social development work in a Buddhist key. His main example is the Sarvodaya Shramadāna Movement, a grassroots movement that tries to improve the living conditions in rural communities through voluntary work. The success of Sarvodaya resembles that of Ciji in Taiwan. Though their approach and scope of engagement are different, both successfully realize large public welfare projects. Both espouse the role of the Sangha as the "active leader for social progress,"[30] though both are pre-dominantly funded and run by lay Buddhists.

Another parallel between Sinhalese and Taiwanese Buddhism is the debate about longstanding inequalities within the Sangha. While in Taiwan attempts have been made to abolish the Eight Rules of Respect (*ba jingfa* 八敬法)[31], "progressive monks" in Sri Lanka fight against the impact of the caste system on the Sangha, which has been an important factor in the ordination of Sinhalese monks at least since the 18th century.[32] Since the edicts of King Kīrthi Śri Rājasimha (1747-1782) it was basically impossible for people from the lowest castes to be ordained. Against this practice, Inamaluwe Sumangala, the abbot of the ancient and influential Dambulla temple, in 1985 started to ordain monks from all castes in one ceremony. He writes:

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[29] Bond (1988), 38-39. For A.T. Ariyaratne's Sarvodaya Shramadāna Movement see Ch.7.

[30] Cited in Bond (1988), 282.

[31] Bingeheimer (2004), Ch.3.3.3.

[32] Bechert (1966), vol.1, 219. Abeysekara (1999).

> The number of years that a tradition has been practiced is not important; what is important is that we should examine whether that tradition is correct or not. [...] We should have the right to get rid of any tradition that is not proper; everybody has the power to get rid of tradition if it is wrong, improper, dangerous to society, and particularly if it is a hindrance to the development of any organization. We should not just continue doing things because "tradition" says so.[33]

In Taiwan the protest against the Eight Rules of Respect that subordinate all nuns, however senior, under the guidance of monks, is led by Shi Zhaohui 釋昭慧, who in turn is inspired by Yinshun. If we understand the fight against the Eight Rules only as a chapter in the battle for gender equality or Ven. Sumangala's movement in Sri Lanka only as a part in the struggle against the caste system we easily overlook the connection. In both cases acquaintance with modern arguments concerning legitimisation change the perception of the power-structures within the Sangha. Current practice and hierarchy is questioned, however, not by taking recourse to modern social theory, but usually by appealing to the higher authority of the Buddha himself. This truly "Protestant" move amounts to a reinterpretation of the oldest texts or, in the case of Chinese Buddhism, to their reevaluation. Not only is Buddhist modernism itself a pan-Buddhist phenomenon, but also the strategy to use scriptural reinterpretation to assert a "modern tradition." This is why Yinshun's innovative emphasis on the Āgama sutras is so important. In the case of Theravāda, no special reevaluation was needed. It was therefore sufficient for Sumangala to point out:

> By not confining the performance of the upasampāda [ordination] ceremony to a particular place, the Buddha allowed monks the freedom to conduct an important ceremony independent of the authority of any particular center or group of individuals belonging to a center. There is no mention in the Buddha's doctrine that it should be done in association with a central establishment.[34]

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[33] Cited in Abeysekera (1999), 263.

[34] Cited in Abeysekera (1999), 262.

The restraints in the Sinhalese ordination system are relatively recent and the current tradition is easily dismissed as non-traditional. In comparison, the struggle against the Eight Rules of Respect, which are found in practically all Vinaya scriptures, is a more difficult battle to win on scriptural grounds.

B) Thailand

In Thailand, Buddhist modernism in the late 19th and early 20th century was initiated very differently. It started not as a grassroots movement but was organized by royal rulers like Kings Mongkut (r.1851-1868) and Chulalongkorn (r.1868- 1902), and the Princes Wajirayān (1860-1921) and Damrong (1862-1944).[35]

Rationalization, i.e. the acceptance of modern standards of rationality over the truthclaims of tradition, is a complicated notion at best. This is also true in the case of King Mongkut, who combined his remarkable understanding of Western science with the practice of astrology and belief in devas.[36] Mongkut's reform of Buddhism nevertheless "involved a change in focus that brought rational man clearly to the center of the stage of history, mentally in control of his own world through the exercise of his critical functions."[37] The same words could be used for reformist Chinese Buddhism under Taixu and his students. There is a clear parallel to a more anthropocentric practice in Chinese Buddhism under the slogan *rensheng/ renjian fojiao* with which Taixu and the others turned against burial rites or certain forms of Pure Land belief. Consequently many developments in Thai Buddhism in the latter half of the 20th century are very similar to that of modern Chinese Buddhism on Taiwan. In fact the pair Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu (1906-1993) and his disciple Sulak Sivaraksa, bear not a little resemblance to Ven. Yinshun and Ven. Zhengyan.[38] Not only was Buddhadāsa born in the same year as Yinshun, but like him, he spent most of his quiet life immersed in study and practice. Peter Jackson calls Buddhadāsa a "conservative radical", a term that also suits Yinshun. Like Yinshun, Buddhadāsa was critical of the "traditional" Buddhism as he saw it and he used the very same

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[35] Swearer (1999), 200-203.

[36] Johnson (2002).

[37] David Wyatt cited in Hallisey (1995), 48.

[38] On Buddhadāsa see Jackson (2003). For Sulak Sivaraksa see Swearer (1991).

doctrines of early Buddhism such as non-self, dependent origination and emptiness in his reformatory interpretation of Buddhism. Both Buddhadāsa and Yinshun transformed abstract, descriptive principles into normative guidelines for how to both understand Buddhism and lead a Buddhist life within society. Their main source of inspiration was not a modern, occidental "other", but both constructed their innovations mainly from within Buddhism itself. The necessary mirror, the source of reflection, was provided by "other" traditions within Buddhism, but removed in time and space, from the present, declined state of affairs. Yinshun turned to the history of Indian Buddhist thought, Buddhadāsa looked to a reinterpretation of early Theravāda doctrines and, surprisingly, to Chan/Zen Buddhism to explain his ideas.[39]

Both Yinshun and Buddhadāsa found disciples in Sulak Sivaraksa and Shi Zhengyan, who were able to receive the impulse and transform the suggestions of their masters into social practice. The various organizations founded by Sivaraksa[40] and Zhengyan's Ciji Gongdehui 慈濟功德會have become major players within their respective Buddhisms and are highly visible examples for Buddhist modernism. Both groups have greatly internationalized their activities during the 90s. Sivaraksa has been fighting a number of highly political causes, criticized the military regime and at one point had to go into exile. He has generally taken a more aggressive stance than Ven. Zhengyan who stays clear of politics, and has dedicated her effort to relatively uncontroversial issues, like improving medical facilities in rural areas, international development work and disaster relief. In spite of the differences, however, both are highly respected public figures that have attracted considerable international attention.

C) Japan

Once it is agreed that the truly original contribution of Yinshun is not *renjian fojiao* but his rationalization of Buddhist doctrine and historiography, parallels are not confined to Theravāda societies. In Japan, the debate about the so-called "Critical Buddhism (*hihan bukkyō*批判佛教)" is considered the most important development in Japanese Buddhist discourse since the

[39] Jackson (2003), 177-201.

[40] There are five independent organisations under the umbrella of the Sathirakoses-Nagapradeepa Foundation that Sivaraksa founded in 1968.

formation of the Kyoto school. The debate was started by the research and opinions of two scholars, Hakamaya Noriaki 袴谷憲昭 and Matsumoto Shirō 松本史朗.[41] Hakamaya and Matsumoto independently argue that large parts of the Māhayāna tradition, namely, all that relies on the concepts of Tathāgatagarbha, Buddha-nature and Original Enlightenment, is *not* Buddhism. For them the idea of a substantial, eternal Buddha-nature is incompatible with older doctrines like (again) dependent origination.

They also regard the anti-intellectualist trend, with its suspicion of language and rational argument that in East Asian Buddhism has gained the upper hand since the Song-Dynasty, as "un-buddhistic." Although their argument is more oriented towards the history of Buddhist thought and doctrine, their critique also has a social dimension. For Hakamaya and Matsumoto, teachings like Buddha-nature and innate enlightenment are responsible for the legitimation and perpetuation of social ills, such as discrimination and cultural chauvinism. Their critique is mainly aimed against later Chinese and Japanese Buddhism, the teachings of which they consider highly deviant from early Buddhism. This recalls Yinshun's decision to study Buddhist history in order to resolve the contradictions he found between the Buddhism in the texts and that which he saw practiced. Like Yinshun and Buddhadāsa, Hakamaya and Matsumoto define Buddhism mainly on the basis of its early doctrines such as dependent origination, non-self and emptiness.[42] It seems indeed that these early concepts are enjoying a renaissance among Buddhist intellectuals.

The convergence is no coincidence. Buddhist modernisms are increasingly influenced by the growing contact among the Buddhist traditions themselves. Before the 20th century the three large traditions (Pali, Tibetan and Chinese) co-existed in relative isolation; today we see signs of increasing intra-Buddhist syncretism in Buddhist cultures. Therefore Bhante Buddhadāsa can translate Chan scriptures, Shi Yinshun research the Āgamas with the help of the Nikāyas, and Matsumoto Sensei uphold *pratīyasamutpāda* and *anātman* as the basis of Buddhism.[43] Today Buddhists

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[41] Some of their most important essays are translated in Hubbard & Swanson (Eds.) (1997)

[42] For the differences between "Critical Buddhism" and Yinshun see Scott Hurley (quoted in Bingenheimer (2004), Ch.4.2.3.2).

[43] Jackson (2003), 177. Yinshun (1983). Hubbard & Swanson (1997), 165.

in Thailand, Taiwan and Japan – all the more those who live in the so-called West – can (therefore must) choose from a number of different Buddhisms that appear to be very different in belief and practice. It is possible that the current tendency to use early doctrine to define Buddhism might evolve into a new consensus, a process that later generations will perhaps perceive as a re-convergence of the traditions.

Conclusion

We have shown that *rensheng* and *renjian fojiao* are both names for the same phenomena and outlined the similarities with other forms of Buddhist modernism. It has been argued that Yinshun in his propagation of *renjian fojiao* generally followed his teacher and fellow-students without introducing great changes into the trajectory of theory or practice of *rensheng/renjian fojiao*. Contrary to his teacher, however, Yinshun champions the vocabulary and content of the Āgamas and early the Māhayāna doctrines over later formulations. We have seen that Buddhist modernists of all traditions do strongly prefer early doctrines like dependent origination, emptiness and non-self in their definition of orthodox Buddhism, while devotional practices, and concepts like Buddha-nature or sudden enlightenment are much less valued.

The comparison with other Buddhist modernisms also highlighted Yinshun's truly original contribution: a great step towards the introduction of modern standards of rationality into the Chinese perception of Buddhist history. This rationalisation has a strong formal component: Yinshun's presentation of his research became more and more academic during his lifetime and his introduction of the academic monograph into the discourse of the Buddhist Sangha has changed Chinese Buddhist historiography forever.

It is here that Yinshun excels in his generation and goes beyond his teacher: no one in Chinese Buddhism has done more to lay the foundation for a Buddhism that is able to sustain a dialog with the scientific study of its own history. No one in Taiwan has done more to accomodate modern standards of historiography in the study of Buddhism, thereby changing the way Chinese Buddhists perceive their own tradition.

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