

An Old Savior in a New Paradise: Buddha Amitābha in Tang Dayuan’s ‘New Pure Land’

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Abstract

One of the most significant developments within Sinophone Buddhist tradition in the 20th century was the tendency to redefine the concept of Pure Land as a “this-worldly” ideal that motivates ethical action within society. The best known example of this approach is the idea of *renjian jingtu* 人間淨土 (variously translated ‘Pure Land on Earth,’ ‘Pure Land in the Human realm,’ or ‘Humanistic Pure Land’), advanced in Republican China and further developed in contemporary Taiwanese Buddhism. It has been suggested that the ideal of a “this-worldly” Pure Land, constructed by human effort, emerged as an alternative to the strictly literalist reading of the Pure Land myth, which portrays humankind as reliant on the salvific power of Buddha Amitābha, the creator of the paradisiacal land of Ultimate Bliss. For this reason, “socially-oriented” readings of the Pure Land are sometimes perceived as modern reformulations of the alternative understanding traditionally preferred, for example, by some Chan-leaning exegetes—namely, the understanding according to which a Pure Land is established by “purifying” individual mind or discovered within mind that is originally pure.

In my paper I would like to reconsider this assumption by discussing an alternative model of a socially-oriented Pure Land practice that was advanced in Republican China—the project of constructing a “New Pure Land” proposed by Tang Dayuan 唐大圓 (1890[?]-1941). As the paper tries to show, Tang went beyond both major traditional patterns of interpreting Pure Land scriptures—on the one hand, the “devotional” stance which portrayed Buddha Amitābha as an agent of individual salvation in the afterlife; and on the other hand, the view which equated this Buddha with one’s own enlightened self.

Instead, he attempted to construe Amitābha as a leader of human community involved in the process of turning present society into a Pure Land. According to Tang's interpretation, personal agency of Buddha Amitābha is not downplayed, but actually serves to buttress the modernist postulate of refocusing Pure Land practice towards the benefit of society. The paper argues that this was possible because Tang redefined the relation between human self and Amitābha in terms of cooperation between multiple agents rather than in terms of individual salvation, as was the case with pre-modern interpretations. This new approach was at least to some extent inspired by the contemporaneous secular movements, notably the 'socialist' ideal of establishing "New Villages". Yet, the theory behind this approach was articulated in the language of Buddhist doctrines, combining traditional Pure Land apologetics with references to Consciousness-only (Yogācāra) philosophy that was highly regarded by Republican modernists. For this reason, Tang's vision of a "New Pure Land" throws a new light on the understudied impact of the modern revival of Consciousness-only studies on Chinese approaches to Pure Land tradition.

Keywords:

Pure Land Buddhism, Tang Dayuan, Consciousness-only studies, Buddhism in Republican China, New Village movement

「新淨土」中的舊拯救者

——論唐大圓對阿彌陀佛的詮釋

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摘要

在 20 世紀的漢傳佛教中，很重要的一個發展趨勢，是將「淨土」的概念解釋成「現世」的理想，以促進社會中的道德實踐。此種趨勢最著名的例子，是民國時期所提倡，後來在當代臺灣佛教又進一步發展的「人間淨土」思想。已有學者指出，由人類的努力所建構的「現世淨土」，相對於傳統上依嚴格的字義所詮釋的淨土信仰，也就是人類必須仰賴阿彌陀佛的願力才能抵達的極樂世界，是一種不同的解讀方式。因此，這種「社會導向」的淨土有時被視為是傳統禪宗傾向的「唯心淨土」的現代闡釋，「唯心淨土」意指淨土是透過淨化人心或發現自性本淨而成。

本論文主要探討民國時期的另一種「社會導向」的淨土法門，也就是由唐大圓（1890[?]-1941）於 1920 年代所提出的「新淨土」方案。文中試圖指出，對於淨土經典的解讀，唐大圓超出了兩種主流的傳統詮釋，一種是「虔誠」的立場，將阿彌陀佛塑造為來世解脫的拯救者，另一種是「自性彌陀」的觀點，認為阿彌陀佛就是自性。唐大圓則是將阿彌陀佛理解為人類群體的領袖，參與將當今社會變成淨土的過程。依據唐大圓的解釋，阿彌陀佛的「人格性」不僅沒有被淡化，反而有助於重新定位淨土法門以造福社會。本文認為這是可能的，因為唐大圓將人類與阿彌陀佛的關係重新定義為群體的合作關係，不同於傳統詮釋中侷限在個人解脫方面。這種新的解釋至少在某種程度上受到了當時世俗思潮的啟發，尤其是所謂的「新村」運動。然而，其背後理論仍是用佛教教義的概念來表達的，結合了傳統淨土護教學與民國時期現代派所注重的唯識學。因此，唐大圓的「新淨土」願景讓我們看到當代唯識學復興對漢傳淨土信仰的影響。

關鍵詞：

淨土、唐大圓、唯識學、民國時期佛教、新村運動

1. Introduction

One of the most significant developments within Chinese Buddhist tradition in the twentieth century was the tendency to redefine the concept of Pure Land as a “this-worldly” ideal that motivates ethical action within society. The best known example of this approach is the idea of *renjian jingtu* 人間淨土—variously translated “Pure Land on Earth,” “Pure Land in the Human realm,” or “Humanistic Pure Land”—which has gained considerable traction in contemporary Sinophone Buddhism. This current idea of an “earthly” Pure Land is usually traced to the two eponymously titled talks and essays by Taixu 太虛 (1890–1947), the self-styled leader of modernist sangha in the Republican period (1911–1949).¹ Taixu’s call to establish a Pure Land in this world has often been interpreted as a challenge to the strictly literalist interpretation of Pure Land scriptures that was upheld by traditional preachers.² The canonical sūtras of East Asian Pure Land tradition state that the Pure Land has already been established in the far west of the universe as a result of vows undertaken by Buddha Amitābha (first a bodhisattva called Dharmākara). It is described as the paradisiacal Land of Ultimate Bliss in which Amitābha awaits devotees unable to achieve liberation solely by their own means. Taixu’s ideal of a “humanistic” Pure Land, constructed in this world by human effort, appears to deemphasize this popular image of Amitābha as a suprahuman savior. For this reason, it has sometimes been perceived as a modern reformulation, or a modern development, of the long-standing alternative interpretation of Pure Land as a realm perceived by a purified mind.³ This opinion is understandable inasmuch as both the old “Mind-only Pure Land” (*weixin jingtu* 唯心淨土) and the new “Pure Land on Earth” can be construed as a result of self-cultivation of human agent(s). Moreover, Taixu’s approach to Pure Land tradition reflects his

¹ “Jianshe renjian jingtu lun” 建設人間淨土論 (On Establishing a Pure Land on Earth), in *Haichaoyin* 海潮音 7, no. 7 (27 Aug 1926): 1–39 (MFQ 165: 417–456; HW 11: 1–67; TDQS 14: 349–424) and “Chuangzao renjian jingtu” 創造人間淨土 (Construction of a Pure Land on Earth), in *Haichaoyin* 12, no. 1 (15 Feb 1931): 4–8 (MFQ 177: 62–66; TDQS 14: 425–430).

² Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism*, 222 ff.; Birnbaum, “Buddhist China at the Century’s Turn,” 435–6.

³ See, for example, Yang Zengwen, “Renjian jingtu sixiang yu bu’er famen,” in *Renjian jingtu yu xiandai shehui*, 201; Fang Litian, “Rensheng lixiang jingjie de zhuiqiu,” in *ibid.*, 303; Jones, “Transitions in the Practice and Defense of Chinese Pure Land Buddhism,” 129–130; Xu Ying, *Jinxiandai chanjing heliu yanjiu*, 281–285.

fascination with Consciousness-only (*weishi* 唯識) thought—more precisely, its modernist interpretation that highlighted activist and positivist connotations of Buddhist idealism.⁴ Granted, as pointed out by Justin Ritzinger, Taixu’s project was not intended to replace a literalist devotion to Amitābha altogether. Moreover, it was itself heavily imbued with mythical overtones related to the rival cult of Maitreya—the Buddha of the Future and the patron of Consciousness-only scholars.⁵ Nonetheless, this shift of emphasis towards Maitreya may be taken to mean that Taixu perceived the cult of Amitābha as too “other-worldly” to motivate ethical action within society and for this reason turned to its purportedly more modernist alternative. In this sense, Ritzinger’s findings do not change the general impression that the socially-oriented understanding of the Pure Land that emerged in Republican China was, at least implicitly, polemical with regard to straightforward reliance on the external agency of Amitābha.

The above conclusion, however, is still based on very partial evidence. It goes without saying that Taixu’s idea of *renjian jingtu*, carried forward in the new interpretations by the likes of Yinshun 印順 (1906–2005) or Shengyan 聖嚴 (1930–2009), has so far been more influential than any other Republican interpretation of Pure Land *mythos*. However, this single idea may not be taken to represent the complex dynamics between Amitābha devotionism, Consciousness-only scholasticism and the “socially” oriented readings of the Pure Land in that period. In the present paper, I would like to discuss an alternative model of a “this-worldly” Pure Land practice that was advanced in Republican China—the project of constructing a “New Pure Land” proposed in 1924 by Taixu’s lay associate Tang Dayuan 唐大圓 (1890 [or 1885]–1941).⁶ As in the case of Taixu, in Tang’s vision, the Pure Land is also reimagined as the utopian community constructed and inhabited by practicing Buddhists. The spirit of collective action is also integrated into doctrinal tradition with the help of Consciousness-only thought that was highly regarded by Republican modernists. Yet, in Tang’s vision, personal agency of Buddha Amitābha is not downplayed, but rather explicitly endorsed and affirmed—although in a new interpretation which is going to be discussed below. This new pattern of interpreting the figure of Amitābha was effectively abandoned in Tang’s later works and became completely overshadowed by the much more influential ideas

⁴ Jones, *ibid.*; Xu Ying, *Jinxiandai chanjing heliu yanjiu*, 283–284.

⁵ Ritzinger, *Anarchy in the Pure Land*, 123 and 192–198.

⁶ On the dates of Tang’s birth and death, see Yin Xiaobin, “Tang Dayuan shengzuan nian bianzheng,” 52–56.

of Taixu and his continuators. Nonetheless, as will be argued below, it deserves more attention than it has hitherto received. This is because it raises several important questions with regard to the development of modernist interpretations of Pure Land scriptures, both within and beyond Republican China.

2. Tang Dayuan as a Pure Land Modernist

The life and thought of Tang Dayuan has not yet become a subject of extensive study. Nonetheless, his name appears in almost every significant survey of the intellectual history of Chinese Buddhism in the Republican decades. Tang enters historical records at the end of the 1910s, as one of the outstanding laymen attracted to Buddhism by the charisma of the famous Pure Land preacher Yinguang 印光 (1861–1940).⁷ His encounter with Taixu in the early 1920s marks the beginning of his career as an editor and contributor of various Buddhist journals, notably the *Haichaoyin* 海潮音 (Sound of the Tide), *Shijie fojiao jushilin linkan* 世界佛教居士林林刊 (The Magazine of the World Association of Lay Buddhists), and *Dongfang Wenhua* 東方文化 (Eastern Culture). In this capacity, Tang becomes the spokesman of a lay-oriented and activist form of Buddhism⁸ and a prolific scholar and propagator of Consciousness-only thought.⁹ His voice is already heard in the famous debate about the orthodoxy of the *Awakening of Faith* (*Dacheng qixin lun* 大乘起信論), where he supports Taixu in defending the treatise against the doctrinal critique levelled by fellow Consciousness-only scholar Ouyang Jingwu 歐陽竟無 (1871–1943).¹⁰ In the following years, Tang advocates the “scientific method” of Consciousness-only and joins another ongoing debate of his times, representing the “nativist” side in a controversy over the relative merits of Eastern and Western civilizations.¹¹

As can be seen from the above brief overview, whereas Tang can broadly be categorized as a Buddhist modernist, his modernism had (at least initially) a more apologetic than reformist bent. He endeavored to explain Buddhist doctrine in a way that could win the hearts of the new generation of lay

⁷ Dongchu, *Zhongguo fojiao jindai shi*, 682–87; Yu Lingbo, *Xiandai fojiao renwu cidian*, 809–811.

⁸ Müller, *Buddhismus und Moderne*, 185–186.

⁹ Chen Bing and Deng Zimei, *Er shi shiji zhongguo fojiao*, 240–241.

¹⁰ *Dasheng qixin lun yu Lengyan jing kaobian* 大乘起信論與楞嚴經考辨, 133–150, 159–164.

¹¹ Hammerstrom, “Yogācāra and Science in the 1920s,” 175–178.

followers—people living in an age shaped by Western intellectual and political trends and Westernized models of education. Tang believed that without the support of forward-looking lay believers, Chinese Buddhism could not survive long in an age of tumultuous exchange between “East” and “West.” Interestingly, his strategy of adapting tradition to these new circumstances was to find a new relevance for what he termed as “Pure Land tradition” (*jingtu zong* 淨土宗),¹² notably the popular practice of “recollecting” Buddha Amitābha (*nianfo* 念佛). In his relatively best known essays from the mid- and late 1920s, Tang advocated a model of self-cultivation in which Pure Land practice (*xing* 行) is grounded in the “understanding” (*jie* 解) based on Consciousness-only treatises.¹³ His calls to combine Pure Land practice with doctrinal studies eventually earned him several public rebukes from the traditionalists who highlighted the popular and egalitarian aspects of the Pure Land creed.¹⁴ Tang’s concept of a “New Pure Land,” discussed below, precedes these controversies by a few years and, as such, represents an earlier phase of his Pure Land thought. While it appears somewhat more accommodating with regard to the naïve Pure Land faith, it may also be regarded as one of his first attempts at reforming this faith in the light of doctrinal principles derived from Consciousness-only treatises. As will be argued below, the major point of this reformation was to redefine Pure Land practice as a form of practice that is supposed to benefit other sentient beings (*li ta* 利他) rather than merely facilitate one’s own liberation from suffering and ignorance. In order to appreciate the novelty of this postulate one needs to consider the legacy of traditional doctrines against which it was formulated.

¹² Tang’s usage of this term is most likely modeled on the nomenclature popularized by Yang Wenhui 楊文會 (1837–1911), which already reflects the influence of Japanese Buddhist doxography.

¹³ See, e.g., “Jinri xuefo zhi da fangzhen” 今日學佛之大方針 (The general guiding principles of the contemporary study of Buddhism) in *Haichaoyin* 6, no. 3 (13 Apr 1925): 21–3 (MFQ 161: 413–415) or Tang’s letter to the layman Luo Jihe 駱季和在 *Haichaoyin* 7, no. 1 (4 Mar 1926): 4–5 (MFQ 164: 268–69).

¹⁴ See, for example, Tang’s correspondence with Chen Zican 陳自慚 in *Haichaoyin* 10, no. 11 (20 Dec 1929): 6–8 (MFQ 174: 108–110) or Feng Da’an’s 馮達庵 response to Tang’s “Jingtu zong zhi xin jianli” 淨土宗之新建立 (Establishing the Pure Land tradition anew), in *Hongfa shekan* 弘法社刊, no.12 (Oct. 1929): 1–3 (MFQB 36: 455–457); original essay by Tang in *Haichaoyin* 10, no. 2 (31 Mar 1929): 26–30 (MFQ 172: 144–148, HW 11: 73–80).

The postulate of “benefitting others,” the spirit of universal compassion and altruism, is one of the founding themes of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The notion of bodhisattva’s universal compassion certainly underlies the canonical “salvation narrative” of Pure Land tradition—namely, the story of establishing the paradisiacal Western Pure Land by the power of Buddha Amitābha’s vows. Nonetheless, the extent to which this ideal informed traditional Chinese interpretations of the Pure Land scriptures is debatable. It may appear that pre-modern Chinese exegetes were, on the whole, more concerned with the relation between the individual self and Buddha Amitābha than with the one between the self and others. Some explicitly argued that the practice of single-mindedly “recollecting” Amitābha by reciting his name, or the attitude of relying on his salvific power, takes precedence over the call to “benefit others.” This is because one can successfully emulate altruistic bodhisattvas only after transgressing the present limitations of the human condition through rebirth in the Western Pure Land.¹⁵ On the other hand, in some of the most influential Chinese commentaries on Pure Land sūtras, Amitābha’s status as a personal savior was often qualified by erudite references to the “One Mind” common to buddhas and sentient beings alike, or the innate Buddhahood which the devotee shares with Amitābha (albeit in a yet to be manifested form). Such interpretations, to a large extent inspired by the more elitist tradition of Chan Buddhism, tended to mitigate the exclusive focus on Amitābha imagined as a resident of the Western paradise. However, the alternative they presented was not so much directing one’s practice to another sentient being, as reconnecting with the “Amitābha of one’s own Nature” (*zixing Mituo* 自性彌陀).¹⁶ The emphasis which pre-modern Chinese exegetes put on the relation between practitioner and Amitābha should not be taken to mean that traditional Pure Land practice lacked ethical and social dimension (after all, altruistic and moral behavior constituted a form of “merit” expected of a Pure Land aspirant). Yet, the question of whether, and how, such practice can benefit fellow human beings rarely became the primary concern of traditional exegetes—at least, this

¹⁵ The *locus classicus* of this kind of argument is the first answer recorded in the *Jingtu shiyi lun* 淨土十疑論 (Treatise on Ten Doubts about the Pure Land), a Pure Land apologetic treatise attributed to Zhiyi 智顛 (538–97). See T 1961, 47: 77b24–c29.

¹⁶ Alternatively, “the Amitābha [as] one’s original Nature” (*benxing Mituo* 本性彌陀) or (mostly in Japanese sources) “Amitābha [as] one’s own Mind” (*koshin [no] Mida* 己心彌陀). See Shibata Tōru, “Chūgoku jōdokyō ni okeru yuishin jōdo shisō no kenkyū (II),” 41, 62.

appears to be the assumption behind Tang Dayuan's reformist proposals discussed below.

As did many lay Pure Land practitioners in Republican China, Tang recognized the authority of Yinguang, the charismatic preacher currently regarded as the thirteenth “patriarch” of the Chinese Pure Land lineage. Yinguang advocated Buddha-recollection in its most popular and accessible form—as a single-minded recitation of Amitābha's name intended to “stimulate” (*ganying* 感應) this buddha's salvific power. Yet, Yinguang's literalism was also qualified by informed references to the hermeneutical and metaphysical tropes of Sinitic Mahāyāna: he agreed that in the ultimate sense, there is no Pure Land apart from the mind, while the pure Nature of one's own mind is essentially the same as Amitābha's. In sharp contrast to Chan-leaning interpretations of the Pure Land scriptures, Yinguang believed that the shortest way to the recovery of “Self-Nature Amitābha” leads through focus on “Amitābha who is in the West,” regarded (at least provisionally) as an external agent.¹⁷ Some of Tang's earliest contributions to Republican Buddhist journals reveal a similar, rather traditional concern with reconciling these two seemingly conflicting readings of the Pure Land. For example, he convinced skeptical laymen to embrace a literalist understanding of their practice by expatiating on the dialectics of “emptiness” and “being,” or abstract “principle” (*li* 理) and tangible “phenomena” (*shi* 事)—a traditional doctrinal vocabulary shared with Yinguang and the early modern exegetes who inspired his mentor.¹⁸ At the

¹⁷ In Yinguang's own words: “Because there is an Amitābha of Self-Nature, you have to recollect the Amitābha who is in the West and strive for rebirth [in the Western Pure Land]. You will then gradually progress until you can directly realize the Amitābha of Self-Nature. If you become fixated on Amitābha of Self-Nature instead of recollecting Amitābha in the West, you may reach true enlightenment, but you will not manage to cut through the cycle of births-and-deaths in this life. Those who advocate such practice to others are all fools and liars. One, and yet two—this is how it is before one becomes a Buddha. Two, and yet one—this is how it is after one has become a Buddha” 「由自性彌陀故，必須念西方彌陀，以求往生，漸進而可以親證自性彌陀。儻單執自性彌陀而不念西方彌陀，縱令真悟，尚未能即了生死，況說此話者，皆是一班擔板漢、脫空漢乎。一而二，係未成佛前之事。二而一，乃已成佛後之事。」 (YFW 12: 922). See also relevant fragments of Yinguang's writings collected under the heading of “Shi putong yihuo” 釋普通疑惑 (Explanations of common doubts) in *Yinguang dashi wenchao jinghua lu*, 190–95.

¹⁸ See, e.g., Tang's responses to the “Two doubts concerning Buddha-recollection” (“Da nianfo de er wen” 答念佛的二問), in *Haichaoyin*, “Amituofo danri

same time, already in the early 1920s, Tang's understanding of the rationale behind Buddha-recollection begins to veer from the traditional framework. Apparently, the first impulses in this direction came from Tang's new acquaintance, Wu Bihua 吳璧華 (1877–1926), the secretary of The Association of Lotus Pond Sea (*Lianchi hai hui* 蓮池海會), a group of Pure Land practitioners based in Wenzhou.¹⁹ In one of his earliest manifestos as a “modernist,” “Xin fohua zhi biao zhun” 新佛化之標準 (Criteria for New Buddhification) from 1924, Tang credits Wu with his most revolutionary discovery as a Pure Land exegete: namely, that the true purpose of recollecting Buddha is to rescue others (*du ta* 度他) rather than to practice for one's own benefit.²⁰ What this means in practical terms is that recollecting Amitābha needs to be paired with good deeds, or at least the intention to benefit others, and with ethical self-reflection on the part of the practitioner. Remarkably, in the “Criteria...” Tang attempts to reconcile his new approach with the traditional emphasis on the “single-minded” recitation of Amitābha's name, or rebirth in his paradise after death. He argues that striving for the benefit of others is, in itself, a practice that purifies the mind and gradually transforms this world into a Pure Land. In this context, Tang adduces the teaching of the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*—“if mind is pure, the land is also pure,” which was often quoted in exegetical polemics against literalist or devotional interpretations of Pure Land scriptures.²¹ In the “Criteria...,” however, this “mentalist” interpretation supports a model of Buddha-recollection which entails engaging with public affairs, cultivating friendly relations with one's neighbors, or providing help for the needy.²²

Such statements mark an obvious break with the simple devotional approach advocated by Tang's early mentor Yinguang. Yet, nothing in Tang's manifesto suggests that his adjustments to Pure Land practice require a shift of focus from the personal figure of Buddha Amitābha towards one's own “original” Mind or Nature. What he takes issue with is not a literal understanding of Pure Land symbolism, but rather the inward-looking or passive attitude associated with traditional Pure Land practice. Other essays penned by Tang in the same period

jiniankan” 阿彌陀佛誕日紀念刊 (special edition commemorating Amitābha's birthday) (Jan 1921): 12–13 (MFQ 149: 137–139).

¹⁹ For an overview of Wu's life and work, see Yu Lingbo, *Xiandai fojiao renwu cidian*, 398–400.

²⁰ *Haichao yin* 5, no. 6 (21 Jul 1924): 12–17 (MFQ 159: 256–261).

²¹ For the original quote, see T 475, 14: 538c4–5.

²² MFQ 159: 258–260.

clarify that he perceived this passive attitude as a general vice of Chinese Buddhists, including those who sought to uncover the original nature of their mind in the spirit of Chan tradition. In fact, just as were some other renowned Chinese laymen active in the late imperial and the early Republican period, Tang was rather skeptical about the potential of Chan to represent Chinese Buddhism in the face of modern challenges. He accused contemporaneous Chan practitioners of unnecessary elitism and escapism and chastised their passive approach to social issues as contradictory to the very spirit of Mahāyāna teachings.²³ What is worthy of notice is that in this regard Tang drew on the arguments of external critics of Buddhism—be they Confucian, or secular modernist. For example, in an essay “Xinshi de fohua” 新式的佛化 (New style of Buddhification),²⁴ also from 1924, he argues that Buddhists need to reckon with the charge that had long been levelled at them by the exponents of Song and Ming Neo-Confucianism (*lixue* 理學)—namely, that they overindulge in metaphysical “substance” (*ti* 體) at the expense of practical “activity” (*yong* 用) and neglect the domain of ethics and human relationships. He avers that such aspersions need to be somehow addressed from within the Chinese Buddhist community, preferably by reaffirming the tradition’s commitment to the original spirit of Mahāyāna:

(...) methods of [Buddhist] preaching should also be completely cleared from the old habits and totally renewed. What kind of renovation should it be? It should serve to spur the inconceivable activity, so as to universally respond to the needs of society and to completely fulfill the vow to teach and save all sentient beings.²⁵

23 In addition to the two essays discussed below, see Tang’s “Da erdi daxiu shu” 答二弟大休書 (Reply to second brother Daxiu), in *Haichaoyin* 5, no. 4 (23 May 1924): 6–8 (MFQ 159: 52–54). Tang advises the letter’s recipient that although his capacities (*genji* 根機) appear to be sufficient for undertaking Chan practice, there are few masters of this tradition worthy of genuine respect or of following. Tang’s “brotherly” advice is to exchange Chan sitting meditation for a three-pronged regime of self-cultivation, consisting of “benefiting others” (*li ta* 利他), recollecting Buddha every morning and evening, and studying Consciousness-only texts (MFQ 159: 53).

24 *Zhongdao* 中道 2, no. 7 (1 Jul 1924): 3–5 (MFQ 123: 87–89) and *Haichaoyin* 5, no. 3 (23 Apr 1924): 9–13 (MFQ 158: 391–395).

25 「其闡化之式，亦當滌盡從前之舊習，煥然維新。其維新者何？即是激其不可思議之用，以徧應社會之需求，而圓滿成就其教度一切眾生之願也。」 (MFQ 123: 87).

In the twentieth century, Buddhism should therefore no longer be associated with passivity, stillness, other-worldliness, idealism, idleness, stratification and hierarchy, self-benefit, and focus on one's own enlightenment. On the contrary, it must present itself to the world as a religion of activity, movement, this-worldliness, realism, labor, equality, altruism, and collectivism.²⁶ The tenet of "this-worldliness" (*rushi* 入世) extends to the interpretation of the Pure Land: Tang explains that since the land in which one resides and the body residing therein are both transformations of consciousness, once the consciousness is purified, there is nothing to escape from. What remains to be done is to rescue others who are trapped in the suffering caused by the transformations of their own impure consciousness.²⁷ In another essay from 1924 called "Zhenzheng foxuejia dang wei shijie da laodongjia" 真正佛學家當為世界大勞動家 (True Students of Buddhism as the great workers of this world),²⁸ Tang reiterates his commitment to ethical engagement as the true pillar of Pure Land practice. In response to the aforementioned charge that "benefitting others" ought to be pursued after securing Pure Land rebirth, he claims that even in an unlikely case that a Pure Land aspirant falls into hell, her pure aspiration can still turn hell into a Pure Land.²⁹

As can be seen, Tang's objectives laid out in his early essays published around 1924 are not unlike those which contemporary scholarship attributes to his mentor Taixu. On the one hand, there is the unmistakably modern postulate of providing a new reading of the tradition that would justify a more robust engagement in the affairs on this world. On the other hand, the goal of this "renovation" is to imbue Chinese Buddhist tradition with the original spirit of Mahāyāna, especially its lofty ethical ideal of the altruistic bodhisattva. Both these objectives inform a new understanding of the practice of Buddha-recollection, which becomes redefined as practice focused on the benefit of human beings. This new emphasis on the ethics appears to challenge traditional trends of interpreting Pure Land scriptures, whose central concern was either the Amitābha of "self-Nature" or the Amitābha of the "Western Pure Land." Nonetheless, Tang took attempts to resolve the tension between the old and new approaches by including Buddha Amitābha in his proposals to reform Chinese Pure Land practice. This attempt is best documented in a terse, yet passionate,

²⁶ MFQ 123:87–89 and 158: 391–393.

²⁷ MFQ 123: 87 and 158: 392.

²⁸ *Zhongdao* 2, no. 11 (1 Nov 1924): 5–6 (MFQ 123: 105–06) and *Haichaoyin* 5, no. 7 (20 Aug 1924): 6–8 (MFQ 159: 366–368).

²⁹ MFQ 159: 367.

essay about “New Pure Land,” which will be discussed in detail in the following section.

3. From the “New Lotus Society” to “A New Pure Land”

Tang’s emphasis on the activist and communal character of Pure Land practice was not limited to theory or rhetoric. Following the current trend of forming lay associations, he endeavored to organize a collective of Pure Land aspirants known as Dharma-realm New Lotus Society (*Fajie xin lianshe* 法界新蓮社).³⁰ According to the society’s first charter, the “Fajie xin lianshe qi” 法界新蓮社啟, drafted in 1923, members of the group are required to recollect the Buddha by calling his name and to repent for their past and present misdeeds, all the time maintaining the attitude of “true faith” (*zhengxin* 正信).³¹ Members Tang’s definition of “true faith” consists of two aspects: on the one hand, it entails a straightforward belief in a real Pure Land, where Amitābha now delivers his sermons; on the other hand, it is a firm trust that one’s own mind (*zixin* 自心) “is” the Buddha and “creates” the Buddha—a reference to the words of the *Contemplation Sūtra* which, in Tang’s reading at least, imply that everyone can attain rebirth in the Pure Land.³² This seemingly paradoxical formulation resembles earlier definitions of Pure Land faith that can be found in some of the classic commentaries on Pure Land sūtras from the early modern period. Their authors instructed serious devotees that proper faith involves believing in Amitābha not merely as an external agent, but rather as a yet to be realized Buddha within.³³ In the society’s charter, however, Tang appears to be making a somewhat different point. The very name chosen for the society

³⁰ The name of the society explicitly refers to the White Lotus Society associated with Lushan Huiyuan 廬山慧遠 (334–416), who is often regarded as the first “patriarch” of Chinese Pure Land lineage. For a discussion of Tang Dayuan’s society, see Li Yu-chen, “Fojiao lianshe yu nüxing de shehui canyu,” 263–4.

³¹ *Fo Guang* 佛光 3 (3 Aug 1923): 97–100 (MFQ 12: 357–360)

³² 「自心是佛，自心亦可作佛。」(MFQ 12: 358). The original quote from the *Contemplation Sutra* states that “This mind creates the Buddha, this mind is the Buddha” 「是心作佛，是心是佛。」(*Guan Wuliangshoufo jing* 觀無量壽佛經, T 365, 12: 343a21).

³³ See, for example, the definitions provided by Yunqi Zhuhong 雲棲株宏 (1535–1615), *Amituo jing shuchao* 阿彌陀經疏鈔, X 424, 616a6–8; Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭 (1599–1655), “Mizang zhinan” 秘藏指南, in *Jingtu shen zhu* 淨土神珠, X 1198, 618c8–13; or Xingce Jieliu 行策截流 (1626–1680), *Jingtu jingyu* 淨土警語, X 1174, 130b6 ff.

signals his expectation that the individual merit of recollecting Amitabha will benefit the whole “Dharma-realm” (*fajie* 法界) —i.e., the entire universe accessible to human thought and action. This somewhat grandiose claim is explained in the charter in rather practical terms: members of the society are expected to cooperate with one another, pay attention to one another’s progress and to recollect the Buddha on behalf of the members who are in need of spiritual assistance. The metaphysical underpinning of this ideal of solidarity is the vision of the universe in which all sentient beings are interconnected through the mechanism of “stimulus and response” (*ganying* 感應).³⁴ In this scheme, the concept of *ganying* refers to the horizontal relation between human agents, rather than the “vertical” relation between Amitābha and human beings, emphasized by the traditional Pure Land preachers. Nonetheless, the charter not only duly acknowledges Buddha Amitābha’s status as the resident of the Western Paradise, but also designates this other-worldly figure as the “leader” (*shezhang* 社長) of the whole community, to whom all members are expected to report their progress.³⁵ This curious remark suggests that Tang expected the society’s members to perceive Buddha Amitābha as a personal agent who supports them in their task of salvaging the “Dharma-realm.” While the precise mechanism of this support is not elucidated in the charter, this topic effectively becomes the main theme of a text that may be regarded as its follow-up—a much more ambitious manifesto called “Jianshe xin jingtu” 建設新淨土 (Construction of a New Pure Land).

“Construction of a New Pure Land” appeared in the still relatively young *Haichaoyin* journal in June 1924 as one of several “theoretical” essays.³⁶ The five-page text is signed only with Tang’s Buddhist name, Dayuan, and followed by a terse endorsement by the journal’s founder, Taixu, who praises Tang’s idea as “a great contribution to the sentient beings in this world.”³⁷ In the “Construction...” Tang reconsiders his original project of the Lotus Society on the basis of what he calls “concealed meaning” (*miyi* 密意).³⁸ What this “concealed meaning” entails is that the presently experienced world can be relatively easily turned into a Pure Land with a method based on the Consciousness-only theory of “perfuming seeds” (*zhongzi xunxi* 種子熏習).

³⁴ MFQ 12: 360.

³⁵ MFQ 12: 358, 360.

³⁶ *Haichaoyin* 5, no. 5 (21 Jun 1924): 7–12 (MFQ 159: 131–136; HW 11: 67–73).

³⁷ MFQ 159: 136. The table of contents of the *Haichaoyin wenku* provides the author’s full name and surname.

³⁸ MFQ 159: 135.

This new doctrinal insight justifies a radical revision of the received wisdom concerning methods of recollecting Buddha Amitābha. At the outset of his essay, Tang questions the traditional interpretations of the practice of *nianfo*, organized around the dialectics of “principle” and “phenomena.” According to the traditional view, “phenomenal” recollection amounts to simple recitation of the Buddha’s name in the hope of rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss (*chi ming qiu sheng jile* 持名求生極樂). In the case of recollection grounded in “principle,” it is imperative to overcome the duality between one’s own self and Amitābha by realizing that his Buddhahood is inherent in one’s own mind (*tongda jixin zixing* 通達即心自性).³⁹ In contrast with this bifurcated model, Tang’s essay introduces a unified kind of Buddha-recollection, touted as the “real phenomenal recollection” (*zhenzheng shinian* 真正事念) or “recollection [aimed at] establishing a New Pure Land.” Tang’s description of this method deserves to be quoted *in extenso*:

How to establish (a New Pure Land)? One needs to begin with one’s own body (*shen* 身). This body is a fiction made up by the aggregation of five *skandhas*. It is the abode of sentient beings. It is also the tainted land marked with five kinds of defilement.⁴⁰ Originally, it is empty and non-existent. What really exists is only One Mind. It is enough to make the mind recollect the Buddha, rather than self (*wo* 我), the *dharmas* attached to the self, fame and prestige, the five kinds of desires

³⁹ MFQ 159: 131. An obvious reference to the views of early modern commentators, especially Yunqi Zhuhong (c.f. *Amituo jing shuchao*, X 424, 659c14–20, 661b18 ff.). Zhuhong explains that while single-minded concentration on Buddha’s name at “phenomenal” level cleanses the mind by subduing delusional thoughts, at the level of “principle” the devotee realizes that her or his practice is grounded in the reality of One Mind which transcends all dualistic categories. In this sense, Buddha-recollection is revealed by Zhuhong as a swift, expedient way of realizing the ultimate goal of Chan meditators—namely, “the realization of one’s self nature or original mind”; see Yü Chün-fang, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China*, 62. For Ouyi Zhixu, the basic criterion to distinguish between the two modes of Buddha-recollection is whether someone’s practice has been informed by the understanding that “this mind creates the Buddha, this mind is the Buddha” (*Amituo jing yaojie* 阿彌陀經要解, T 1762, 37: 371b12–17).

⁴⁰ The five kinds of defilement are related to current historical epoch, prevailing false views, widespread afflictions, the misery of being human, and diminishing lifetime. See FGDC, 1201.

pertaining to form, sound, smell, taste and touch and the like. In this way, a Pure Land can be established with this very body. (...) ⁴¹

The idea that incessant focus on Amitābha's name can "expel" wayward delusional thoughts is reminiscent, for example, of the model of "phenomenal" practice advocated at least since the Ming dynasty by the likes of Yunqi Zhuhong.⁴² What sets Tang's "real" phenomenal Buddha-recollection apart from this model is that he does not present such practice merely as a form of self-cultivation of one's mind. Rather, he perceives the purification of individual consciousness as the first step required to extend one's own involvement in Buddha-recollection to other people. In Tang's words, "one cannot only repose in one's own Pure Land without caring for others."⁴³ An honest practitioner should talk to one's parents, telling them how blissful the Pure Land will be and how merciful Buddha Amitābha is. A good example should then be extended to more distant family members and everyone associated with the household. Tang also emphasizes that Buddha-recollection must not be practiced apart from daily activities, but rather integrated with the daily life of individual and community alike. Peasants, artisans and merchants should continue with their duties and let all thoughts in their minds and all words in their mouths be a form of Buddha-recollection. The same is to be expected from the "book-reading scholars" (*du shu shizi* 讀書士子). Tang explains that scholars' participation in Buddha-recollection will set a good example for the commoners, who look up to them as models. In this way, collective spiritual practice will eventually transform the whole society, cleansing from human relations all vanity, greed and dishonesty. Consequently, the samsaric world of today will begin to resemble the Pure Land with its fresh scented air and glorious adornments.⁴⁴

Just as in the old "Mind-only" paradigm, the project of constructing a "New Pure Land" assumes personal realization of the mind-dependent character of reality. However, the gist of this realization appears to be different from the traditional teaching about the non-duality between one's own Nature and

41 「云何建設耶？謂先從一身建設起。此身是五蘊和合的假者，是眾生的住廬，亦是五濁的穢土。本是空虛無有的，實有的只是一心。但將此心念佛，不念一切我、我所法、名利、恭敬，及色、香、味、觸等五欲。此身已建設成了淨土……」(MFQ 159: 131).

42 See n. 39.

43 「猶不可徒安住自己的淨土，不顧他人。」(MFQ 159: 131).

44 MFQ 159: 132.

Amitābha. For Tang, an insight into the universal “One Mind” is just a first step towards the creation of a this-worldly community that acts according to common ethical standards rather than particular interests. In this sense, Tang’s vision bears a certain resemblance to contemporary political and social movements that aimed at constructing a better society of tomorrow. In fact, he describes his New Pure Land as a practical and empirical (*shishi qiushi* 實事求是) counterpart of the ideals espoused by the “socialist” movement striving to establish the so-called “New Villages” (*xincun* 新村)—model egalitarian communities based on physical labor.⁴⁵ The term itself was coined by the Japanese writer Mushakōji Saneatsu 武者小路實篤 (1875–1976), who in 1918 established a commune under that name *atarashiki mura* 新き村 in a remote area on the island of Kyūshū. The lofty ideals and bucolic atmosphere of this self-sufficient rustic community made a great impression on the Chinese writer Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885–1967), who described Mushakōji’s experiment in enthusiastic terms in his articles published in 1919. The catchphrase of “building New Villages” was then borrowed by China’s budding socialist movement (which at that time was animated by the ideas of Pyotr Kropotkin [1842–1921] rather than Karl Marx). In China the ideal of New Villages became more closely associated with postulates of social reform, “mutual help” (*huzhu* 互助) and “sanctity of labor” (*laogong shensheng* 勞工神聖) based on the ideas of Kropotkin and Tolstoy. However, internal disagreements between activists, as well as lack of sustained economic support, led to the quick disintegration of such projects.⁴⁶

It appears that by the time Tang wrote his essay on the New Pure Land, the New Village movement had already been widely perceived as a failure. In the discussed essay, Tang draws on this widespread perception to make a case for the unrecognized potential of the Pure Land tradition.⁴⁷ He compares the movement’s demise to the fate of the ancient Mohist school, which failed to captivate the hearts of the masses because of its rigid idealism and overly ascetic approach. In his view, organizations preaching lofty slogans such as “sanctity of labor” would never bring about actual change in the world, unless their efforts accorded with the human craving for serenity and happiness. This

⁴⁵ MFQ 159: 132.

⁴⁶ For details, see Yu Yaoming, *Shū Sakujin to nihon kindai bungaku*, 185–205, and Müller, “Atarashiki mura versus xincun,” <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/volltextserver/15393>.

⁴⁷ Interestingly, references to the New Village Movement can also be found in Taixu’s Pure Land thought. See Ritzinger, *Anarchy in the Pure Land*, 197.

missing element could be found in the Buddhist practice which brings joy and peace (*an le* 安樂) to one's mind:

This is my advice to the fashionable and young who advocate establishing New Villages or the sanctity of labor: take advantage of the rapid skillful means by turning to the Buddha-dharma. From among the Teachings choose the wondrous activity of the method of Buddha-recollection. Join your labor in the New Villages and such with Buddha-recollection and rebuild it all anew. When your mind and body both transform and manifest as a New Pure Land, then your ideal will soon appear as reality, and Amitābha's compassionate vow to save the world will also move forward. Would this not be a great joy?⁴⁸

It needs to be stressed that Tang's reference to Amitābha's "compassionate vow" (i.e., the bodhisattva Dharmākara's vows to establish the Western Pure Land) does not appear to be a mere rhetorical embellishment or lip service paid to popular tradition. He explicitly argues that men's efforts alone are insufficient to establish a model community even in their neighborhood, not to mention throughout China and the whole world. For this reason, they need to be combined with the support of a truly supramundane power:

Since we are already embraced by the great Vow-power of Buddha Amitābha, if you add to it the power of your own original vows resonating with Amitābha's Vow-power, [these two powers] will tally with each other. When the powers of self and Other act together, no matter what kind of devilish obstacle there may be, it will be subdued and it will be eradicated.⁴⁹

In the fragments quoted above, Tang speaks of a literally understood, personal figure of Amitābha, in the manner resembling a popular Pure Land preacher. He draws on the common themes of traditional Pure Land apologists who counselled reliance on Amitābha's grace—the notion of "stimulus and response," or the mutual correspondence between the vows of Amitābha and the individual

48 「我勸現今時髦及青年，主張闢新村的，或主張勞工神聖的，趁速方便歸向佛法，從佛法中採取念佛法門的大妙用來，將新村勞工等加入念佛，從新改造。身心並變共化為新淨土，則諸君之理想立現事實，而阿彌陀佛慈悲救世之願亦逐，豈不大大快耶？」(MFQ 159: 133).

49 「既有阿彌陀佛的大願力攝受，又加自己的本願力與之相感，感應道交，自他同舉，無論何等魔障，都要降伏他、消滅他。」(MFQ 159: 133–34).

vows taken by the practitioner.⁵⁰ In Tang’s interpretation, however, these old motifs appear in a new context defined by the two postulates defined above: first, that a Pure Land can be established in this world “with this very body”; second, that it will be established collectively, by the means of interaction between multiple agents. The doctrinal linchpin between the old notion of “stimulus and response” and the concerns specific to Tang’s project is provided by the aforementioned theory of “seeds” described in one of the magisterial treatises of Consciousness-only Buddhism, the *Yujia shidilun* 瑜珈師地論.⁵¹ In light of this theory, Tang explains the distinction between the Pure Land and the world of suffering as a reflection of the difference between the quality of “seeds” stored in a Storehouse-consciousness. Those who make their untainted seeds come to fruition and eradicate their tainted seeds will see the Pure Land before their very eyes. Those who stimulate their tainted seeds, or at least cannot prevent their maturation, will continue to live in the mundane world of suffering.⁵² Tang further notes that according to the *Yujia shidilun* some sentient beings, labeled as “Nature-less” (*wuxing* 無性), lack all kinds of untainted seeds, and for this reason appear unable to reach Buddhahood. In his view, however, the problem of such people is not some intrinsic lack, but rather a severe accumulation of “obstructing defilements.” Such people may have difficulty mustering enough strength to develop their own untainted seeds, but they are in no way devoid of them.⁵³ Fortunately, since no consciousness is an isolated monad, the impulse to develop these seeds may well come from the

⁵⁰ The idea of mutual correspondence between vows may be traced back at least to the times of Zhongfeng Mingben 中峰明本 (1263–1323), *Sanshi xinian foshi* 三時繫念佛事, X 1464, 59a02, if not earlier.

⁵¹ Xuanzang’s 玄奘 (662–664) translation of the monumental South Asian compendium *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* (Treatise on the Stages of Yogic Practice), this is undoubtedly one of the most important “rediscovered” texts of Republican Consciousness-only studies.

⁵² Tang explored the application of the seeds theory to Pure Land practice independently of his project of New Pure Land, most notably in an essay called “Jingtu zhi zhengjian” 淨土之正見 (The correct view of the Pure Land) published in 1924 in the *Haichaoyin* 5, no 1: 25–27 (MFQ 158: 159–161, HW 11: 219–223, WWQB 66: 197–204). The essay in question argues that being incessantly mindful of Buddha Amitābha accumulates “untainted seeds” which penetrate Storehouse-consciousness. This process eventually transforms the “perverted view” (*daojian* 倒見) of the world as impure into the “true view” (*zhengjian* 正見) of the world as pure. The salvific role of buddhas and bodhisattvas is mentioned, but not elaborated upon.

⁵³ MFQ 159: 134.

outside. At this point, Tang returns to the charter of the New Lotus Society, where Buddha Amitābha is presented as the “leader” of the Buddha-recollecting community which stimulates beneficial change in the whole universe. Now, Tang explains Amitābha’s role in terms of the “inconceivable power” of “perfumed seeds” which dissolves karmic obstacles and allows hidden untainted seeds to finally manifest:

My method of recollecting the Buddha to establish a New Pure Land is therefore to combine the “perfumation” of the two powers: Amitābha’s inconceivable perfuming power of Original Vows and one’s own inconceivable perfuming power of Buddha-recollection. Together, these powers can melt the obstructing defilements and enable the untainted seeds to manifest themselves and completely transform into a Pure Land here and now. Yet, one must know that the seeds which every sentient being possesses are seeds that permeate the whole Dharma-realm. Since those seeds permeate the whole Dharma-realm, should the seeds of one sentient being give rise to a manifest action, the perfuming power of such an action will permeate the whole Dharma-realm as well. Consequently, if one sentient being awakens the resolve to recollect the Buddha, it is enough if he or she takes vows that encompass sentient beings in the whole Dharma-realm to perform this recollection together. Thereupon, the untainted seeds of sentient beings in the whole Dharma-realm will all become perfumed and will simultaneously manifest themselves when these sentient beings recollect the Buddha together. This is why my New Pure Land is not like these New Villages, where one has to run to and for seeking help from outsiders.⁵⁴

As can be seen, Tang clearly emphasizes the active role of individual *nianfo* practitioners, whose altruistic resolve can change this world, perceived by others as a domain of suffering, into an earthly Pure Land. At the same time, he does not make any concessions to the secular mindset which rejects as “superstitious” the very idea of seeking help from a savior-figure such as

54 「我今闢新淨土的念佛法門，即是以阿彌陀佛的本願不思議熏習力及自己念佛的不思議熏習力，兩力同熏，消融障染，使無漏種子顯現，當前盡變成淨土。但須知，各個眾生的種子都是徧法界的。種子既徧法界，若有一眾生種子起現行，則其熏習力亦徧法界。由是，有一眾生發心念佛，祇要發願攝徧法界的眾生同念，則徧法界眾生的無漏種子盡被熏習，同時盡要起現行，同起念佛了。是故，我之新淨土並不似新村家定要向外面處處去求人。」 (MFQ 159: 134–135).

Amitābha. Neither does he subscribe to the old “Mind-only” approaches to Pure Land practice which emphasize the self-cultivation of the mind over the external agency of this Buddha. Forestalling the doubts of conservative Amitābha devotees, Tang vehemently denies that his “New Pure Land” assumes a “mentalist” demystification of the Pure Land myth:⁵⁵

When those who exclusively practice the Pure Land hear that I want to build a New Pure Land, they criticize me, saying: “Your idea of building a New Pure Land resembles the teaching from the *Sūtra of Vimalakīrti* that the Pure Land means a pure mind. If only these sentient beings recollect the Buddha to purify their minds, you call it a Pure Land. Those who say so do not understand it right. They will surely raise the doubt as to whether there is a real Pure Land and a real Amitābha. How is this not a slandering of the Teachings?” (...) When I say that a New Pure Land has to be established in this world, it is certainly necessary to appeal to Amitābha’s inconceivable perfuming power. This clearly tells you that there is a true and real Amitābha. If you doubt it, then you yourself also do not exist. Since it is certain that Amitābha exists, then there has to be an immaculate land in which he resides. This clearly tells you that there is a true and real Land of Ultimate Bliss. If you doubt it, then the place where you reside now must also be non-existent. (...) [The text of Dharmākara’s vows] says: “If there is one sentient being who does not attain rebirth, eventually I will not attain nirvana here.” This is something I put my confidence in. I hope all of you will also believe in it truly without harboring any doubt.⁵⁶

In the above fragment, Tang alludes to the standard argument repeated and rephrased by numerous Pure Land apologists of pre-modern and early modern China: yes, the Western Pure Land is ultimately nothing but mind, but so is

⁵⁵ See MFQ 159: 135.

⁵⁶ 「專習淨土家，聞吾要開闢新淨土，即詰難曰：『汝闢新淨土，意似主張《維摩》心淨土淨之義。只要這些眾生念佛以淨其心，就名淨土。彼等不明道理的，必定疑無真正的西方淨土及阿彌陀佛了。豈不有謗法之罪耶？』……我說在此方闢新淨土，定要請阿彌陀佛的不思議熏習力。是明告你有真正實在的阿彌陀佛了。你若疑無阿彌陀佛，則你自己亦是沒有了。又既認定有阿彌陀佛，則必有所住的清淨國土。是明告你有真正實在的極樂世界了。若你疑無極樂世界，則你現在所居住的地方亦是空虛了……所謂『有一眾生不成佛，終不於此取泥洹』，這是我自信十足的，亦望各位自信十足，不要多心。』(MFQ 159: 135–136).

everything else; the teachings about One Mind or Mind-only do not imply that things are non-existent, but only that they exist as mind-generated and mind-dependent entities. Therefore, those who adduce such principles to claim that there is no reality at all corresponding to the Western Pure Land and Amitābha, do not comprehend the meaning of the lofty teachings they claim to uphold.⁵⁷ According to this interpretation, the idea of “Mind-only Pure Land” does not imply that the Pure Land is a fictitious entity created by the human imagination. Rather, it serves to reconfirm the Pure Land within the universe grounded in One Mind. In the discussed essay this reconfirmation has one more, relatively modern, purpose. Namely, it serves to reclaim the symbolism of Pure Land sūtras in the context of communally engaged Buddhist practice. In the universe in which nothing is more or less real than consciousness itself, the purification of individual consciousness can bring out about real change in what is perceived as an objective world by others. From this point of view, Tang sees no reason to rebuke those who read Pure Land myth in a literal fashion, as a story about someone other than themselves. However, he appears to present Amitābha’s agency somewhat differently than popular devotion. While the Amitābha of the “New Pure Land” is still endowed with the superior power of his vows and intervenes on behalf of those who cannot hope to overcome their own limitations, he is no longer a sole liberator of powerless humanity. Rather, he is a leader and supporter of human community which actively strives for the better world of tomorrow. In this sense, the reference to Amitābha’s salvific vows serves to buttress the “modernist” postulate of refocusing Pure Land practice towards the benefit of others.

4. Summary and Questions for Further Research

In spite of its brevity, and its lack of direct historical impact, Tang’s proposal to construct a New Pure Land certainly deserves to be included in future discussions of Pure Land modernism. It argues for the contemporary relevance of Pure Land tradition against a fairly ingenious and sophisticated doctrinal

⁵⁷ For the classic and influential formulation of this argument attributed to Yunqi Zhuhong during the Ming dynasty, see *Yunqi jingtu huiyu* 雲棲淨土彙語, X 1170, 16c20–17a11. For similar statements by Tang Dayuan, see his “Weishi yu nianfo” 唯識與念佛 (Consciousness-only and Buddha-recollection) in *Shijie fojiao jushilin linkan* 世界佛教居士林林刊 21 (Nov 1928): 12–13 (MFQB 10: 144–145) or *Shi hai yi zhou* 識海一舟 (A boat in the sea of consciousness), 113–114 (WWQB 66: 189–190).

background, which represents a bold combination of Pure Land mythology, socialist ideals, ancient Indian Consciousness-only thought, and Confucian ethics. Perhaps not accidentally, roughly the same ingredients are routinely identified as inspirations behind Taixu's much better known project of "Pure Land on Earth." What appears fresh about Tang's proposal is his emphasis of the figure of Amitābha, here portrayed as a suprahuman supporter of human community in its task of transforming the profane world into an enlightened realm. In the essay discussed above, Tang effectively provides a new reading of the figure of Amitābha, which goes beyond both traditional patterns of interpreting this buddha's role. He certainly does not endorse the straightforwardly devotional stance which portrayed Amitābha as an agent of salvation granted in the afterlife. However, unlike many traditional exegetes, he does not attempt to qualify this buddha's otherness by references to the all-encompassing One Mind or Buddha-Nature. Instead, Tang redefined the relationship between practitioners and Amitābha in terms of cooperation between multiple agents who inspire and support one another's spiritual progress. This new approach reflects numerous inspirations from within and without Buddhist tradition, notably the secular ideal of social activism represented in the agenda of the contemporaneous New Village movement. Yet, Tang articulated the theory behind this approach in the language of Buddhist doctrines, combining traditional Pure Land apologetics with references to Consciousness-only treatises. He describes the mechanism of cooperation between Amitābha and Pure Land practitioners in terms of "stimulus-and-response" between two agents, but also in terms of the mutual "perfumation of seeds" latent in particular individual consciousnesses. In this way, even though Tang's project to some extent resembles traditional "mentalist" interpretations of the Pure Land, it still allows a literalist interpretation of the personal relationship between practitioner and Amitābha. Apparently, at the time when the essay in question was published, Tang assumed that Consciousness-only thought could be employed to vindicate Amitābha's traditional role as a savior-Buddha, without sacrificing the modernist objectives spelled out in his early manifestos.

For reasons that require more investigation, the aforementioned assumption was effectively abandoned in Tang's later writings. From around 1927, he embraced a much more secularist understanding of the idea of a New Pure Land and the objectives of his New Lotus Society.⁵⁸ Moreover, he began to praise

⁵⁸ See, e.g. "Zao xin jingtu yi jiejie rensheng wenti" 造新淨土以解決人生問題 (To create a New Pure Land in order to solve the problems of human life), in

Taixu's project of *renjian jingtu* as a *de facto* "New Pure Land" established in the "true" spirit of Consciousness-only teachings.⁵⁹ In the early 1930s, he openly criticized traditional devotionalism as too "other-worldly" for the needs of the new generation, opting instead for building an "Eastern" Pure Land on the basis of Buddhist and Confucian ethics.⁶⁰ Nonetheless, those later visions of an earthly Pure Land continue to be justified by a socially-oriented reading of Consciousness-only thought, which emphasizes collective practice inspired by the personal ideal of a bodhisattva (if not the bodhisattva's salvific agency), rather than an individual return to the originally pure nature of one's mind. Seen in this light, Tang's endorsement of a personal Amitābha may be perceived as an early attempt to liberate Chinese interpretations of the Pure Land from their supposedly "inward-looking" perspective and their "passivist" focus on individual liberation. Just as with Taixu's references to Maitreya discussed in earlier studies, Tang's early project demonstrates that such attempts did not necessarily entail abandoning literalist faith in a supra-human personal savior. The issue at stake was rather how to integrate traditional accounts about such figures within the new ethical ideals such as collective action, mutual cooperation and universal progress. Tang's example proves that this ethical turn in Chinese Pure Land exegesis rendered traditional emphasis on the non-dualistic "One Mind" or "self-Nature Amitābha" no less problematic than naïve literalism.

Tang's employment of Consciousness-only thought as a theoretical basis for these innovations may indicate a somewhat overlooked broader trend worthy of further exploration.⁶¹ It deserves attention also in the context of

Haichaoyin 8, no. 1 (21 Feb 1927): 16 (MFQ 167: 66); "Fajie xin lianshe nianfaqi ji" 法界新蓮社念法七記 (A Record of the seven days of recollecting the Dharma by the Dharma-Realm New Lotus Society), in *Haichaoyin* 10, no. 11 (20 Dec 1929): 42–45 (MFQ 174: 80–83); or Tang's letter to the Society members and the layman Yuan Zhichun 遠智純, in *Haichaoyin* 10, no. 2 (31 Mar 1929): 3 (MFQ 172: 221).

⁵⁹ *Haichaoyin* 7, no. 12 (23 Jan 1927): 1 (MFQ 166: 517).

⁶⁰ For example, "Qingnian xuefo xingyao" 青年學佛行要 (The essentials of studying Buddhism for the youth), in *Haichaoyin* 12, no. 2 (15 Sept 1931): 31–37 (MFQ 177: 173–179); or "Huayan jing yu yin jingtu" 華嚴經與因淨土 (The Huayan sūtra and the 'causal' Pure Land), in *Haichaoyin* 13, no. 6 (15 Jun 1932): 9–10 (MFQ 181: 15–16).

⁶¹ Commenting on his meeting with three Chinese Buddhist intellectuals well-versed in Consciousness-only thought, including "Mr. Ouyang" (Ouyang Jingwu?), the American philosopher James Bissett Pratt (1875–1944) noted that they rejected the monistic notion of impersonal "Thusness" (*zhenru* 真如) in favor of a wholly "pluralist" and "personalist" universe, in which the Western Pure Land is only "a

developments that occurred in other Pure Land traditions. In modern East Asia, probably the best known Consciousness-only inspired interpretations of Pure Land doctrine were proposed by Japanese Pure Land modernists, such as Soga Ryōjin 曾我量深 (1875–1971) or Yasuda Rijin 安田理深 (1900–1982), both hailing from the Ōtani branch of the *jōdo-shinshū* school. Interestingly, Soga’s or Yasuda’s readings of Pure Land scriptures in the light of Consciousness-only philosophy have been routinely construed as “subjectivizing” the myth of Amitābha by retelling it as a story of spiritual awakening undergone by an *individual* consciousness. Whether this points to some substantial differences between the Chinese and Japanese modernist interpretations of Consciousness-only thought, or perhaps some ambiguities inherent in Consciousness-only doctrines of “selfhood” and “otherness,” is yet another question that may be raised as a follow-up to the present study.

state of mind which we create,” but the buddhas and bodhisattvas are real and many. See Pratt, *The Pilgrimage of Buddhism and a Buddhist Pilgrimage*, 410–12. Remarkably, Taixu’s statements on the Pure Land written from a perspective of a Consciousness-only scholar also endorse the idea that Amitābha and other buddhas or bodhisattvas support devout practitioners with their external power. See, e.g. “Nianfo wangsheng de yuanli” 念佛往生的原理 (The principle behind Pure Land rebirth through Buddha-recollection), TDQS 7: 2857–2863, or “Weishi zhi jingtu” 唯識之淨土 (A Pure Land of Consciousness-only), TDQS 6: 1357–1360.

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Abbreviations

- FGDC *Foguang da cidian* 佛光大辭典, vol. 1–3. Gaoxiong: Foguang chubanshe, 1989.
- HW *Haichaoyin wenku* 海潮音文庫, vol. 1–26. Taibei: Xinwenfeng, 1985.
- MFQ *Minguo fojiao qikan wenxian jicheng* 民國佛教期刊文獻集成. Edited by Huang Xianian 黃夏年 et al., vol. 1–204. Beijing: Quanguo tushuguan wenxian suowei fuzhi zhongxin, 2006.
- MFQB *Minguo fojiao qikan wenxian jicheng bubian* 民國佛教期刊文獻集成補編. Edited by Huang Xianian 黃夏年 et al., vol. 1–83. Beijing: Quanguo tushuguan wenxian suowei fuzhi zhongxin, 2008.
- T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. Edited by Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭, et al., 1924–1934. CBETA version, Taibei: Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association, 2016.
- TDQS *Taixu dashi quanshu* 太虛大師全書. Edited by Taixu dashi quanshu bianzuan weiyuanhui 太虛大師全書編纂委員會, vol. 1–33. Taibei: Taixu dashi quanshu yingyin weiyuanhui, 1970.
- WWQB *Weishi wenxian quanbian* 唯識文獻全編. Edited by Wang Lianzhang 王聯章 et al, vol. 1–66. Beijing: Guojia tushuguan, 2013.
- X *Shinsan Dainihon zokuzōkyō* 新纂大日本續藏經. Edited by Kawamura Kōshō 河村孝照, et al., 1975–1989. CBETA version, Taibei: Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association, 2016.
- YFW *Xinbian quanben Yinguang fashi wenchao* 新編全本印光法師文鈔. Edited by Beijing dafang guang huayan shuju 北京大方廣華嚴書局, vol. 1–24. Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji, 2009.

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