Meta-ethical Pluralism in Longlian's Socially Engaged Buddhism[*†]

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Abstract: Among Buddhist reformers, Longlian 隆蓮 (1909–2006) is renowned for revitalizing monastic discipline and Buddhist education in modern China, especially for Buddhist women. Complementing findings in social history and cultural anthropology, I reread Longlian's work on morality to investigate the philosophical thought that supports her monastic reform. I argue for interpreting her moral theory as a Buddhist expression of meta-ethical pluralism. It is a theory that appreciates a plurality of moralities for sentient beings who are preoccupied with this-worldly life, aspiring to other-worldly liberation, or re-engaging with this-worldly reality to guide others to the Bodhisattvas' path. Instead of postulating a unitary standard of morality, Longlian encourages each person to explore moral values suitable to their own world as a preparatory step towards universal awakening. In doing so, Longlian makes a case for her monastic reform in a secular world and manages to respond to the (neo-)Confucian critique of Buddhism as a socially disengaged teaching.

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In the study of Buddhist modernism, Venerable Longlian 隆蓮 (1909–2006) is renowned for revitalizing 'monastic discipline' (Skt. *śīla-vinaya*, Ch. *jielü* 戒律). Indeed, Buddhist scholars, championed by Ester Bianchi, have detailed this eminent nun's consistent effort to resurrect the dual ordination of Bhikṣuṇī and promote education for Buddhist nuns in mainland China.[1] Elise DeVido further underscores how Longlian and her long-term friend, Venerable Tongyuan 通願 (1913–1991), epitomize generations of Bhikṣuṇīs who strive to connect local nuns with transregional and transnational networks for rejuvenating their religion.[2]

Building upon and complementing their ground-breaking work, I delve deeper into Longlian's philosophical insight on morality, which she developed from her lifelong practice of Buddhism. Longlian speaks of morality as the ground for monastic discipline. In her words, 'the Buddhist viewpoint on morality is mostly instantiated in the training of monastic discipline' (佛教的道德觀, 最具體的是戒學).[3] Longlian's emphasis on morality alludes to her prospects for modernizing Buddhism. Like many of her contemporaries, she worries about the decline of 'authentic dharma' (*zhengfa* 正法). Rephrasing Vasubandhu's (fl. fourth–fifth c.) forewarning in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* that 'the authentic dharma has degenerated to have only one last breath' (正法淪亡已至喉), Longlian laments that Buddhism has entered the phase of 'final dharma' (*mofa* 末法), when Buddhists have deviated from their excellent tradition of 'pursuing truth' (*qiushi* 求實) and turned their practice into a

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1 See Bianchi, *The Iron Statue*, 23–40; *idem*, 'Transmitting', 152–70; *idem*, 'Reading Equality', 919. For Longlian's monastic reform, see Chiu and Heirman, 'The *Gurudharmas*'; Fink, 'The Feminist Buddha'.

2 DeVido, 'Networks', 79–86.

3 Longlian, 'Fojiao daodeguan', 3.

'superstition' (*mixin* 迷信).[4] Her diagnosis of *mofa* evinces common distress for Buddhists in the wake of China's modernization. These practitioners witnessed mounting antagonism towards their religion, insofar as intellectuals depreciated Buddhism as a superstitious teaching inimical to this-worldly well-being.[5] Confronted with such antagonism, Longlian is adamant about remedying the tradition of pursuing truth and reviving Buddhism. Therefore, she takes it as an imperative to restore the authentic dharma through 'education' (*jiangxue* 講學), especially the 'three unpolluted trainings' (*san wulouxue* 三無漏學) of monastic discipline, 'meditation' (Skt. *samādhi*, Ch. *ding* 定), and 'wisdom' (*prajñā*, *hui* 慧).[6] Among them, monastic discipline underpins all learning, not only because it is formulated by the omniscient Buddha, but also because it enables practitioners to commit themselves to 'non-harming' (*busunnao* 不損惱).[7] Longlian is confident that, in their conformity to monastic discipline and morality, practitioners will foster the peaceful coexistence of all sentient beings to support national and global well-being in the modern world.[8]

Throughout her life, Longlian dedicated herself to the education of women.[9] As analysed by Jing Iris Hu, while the Confucian tradition affirms women's intellectual capacity and acknowledges the importance of women's learning, 'learning is viewed by learned women as a curse rather than a blessing in premodern China.'[10] At the dawn of China's modernization, intellectuals advocated for providing women with more access to modern education, whose argument became, in DeVido's words, 'a key part of national

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4 Longlian, 'Fojiao de youliang', 17.

5 For more studies on Buddhist modernism in China, see Welch, *The Buddhist Revival*; *idem*, *The Practice*.

6 Longlian, 'Fojiao de youliang', 17.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 For more studies on Buddhist education, see Lai, 'Praying'; Travagnin, 'Monk Changyuan'; *idem*, 'Fostering Education'.

10 Hu, 'Learned', 2.

salvation discourse in China and other countries of the time.'[11] In this socio-political climate, Longlian received both traditional and modern education. Born with the name You Yongkang 游永康, she grew up in a family of literati and lay Buddhists, in the city of Leshan of Sichuan province.[12] Mentored by her family members, she quickly became well-versed in classics, poetry, and literature. At a very young age, she expressed interest in Buddhism, under the influence of her maternal grandmother. After her enrolment in the Leshan Women's School 樂山女子學校 in 1921, she continued to gain a degree in English language and literature through correspondence education supplied by Shanghai Commercial Press, further becoming proficient in history, geography, and mathematics through self-study. Already a prominent learned woman in her hometown, she was offered a teaching position at a women's middle school in Chengdu once her family moved to this capital city of Sichuan in 1931. Subsequently, the young Yongkang participated in the civil servant exams. She won first place, earning a job as an editorial translator and becoming the first woman to work in the provincial government of Sichuan in 1937. At that time, because of the Second Sino-Japanese War, many notable Buddhist scholars and scholar monks relocated to Sichuan to continue their work. Longlian frequently attended their lectures in Chengdu's Shaocheng Park 少城公園 to ameliorate her Buddhist knowledge. She was mostly impressed by Nenghai 能海 (1886–1967) and Fazun 法尊 (1902–1980), two outstanding Tibetan Madhyamaka masters.[13] When she resigned from the provincial government to become an ordained Buddhist nun in 1941, her story made headlines in the local newspapers. Since then, Longlian followed in the footsteps of Nenghai and Fazun to revitalize the authentic dharma. She collaborated with Tongyuan to restore the dual ordination for Bhikṣuṇīs in mainland China, further harnessing resources to

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[11] DeVido, 'Networks', 75.

[12] For a more comprehensive biography in English, see Bianchi 'Subtle Erudition'; in Chinese, see Aidaotang, dir., *Dangdai diyi biqiuni*; Qiu, *Dangdai diyi biqiuni*; Chen, 'Longlian fashi nianpu chubian'.

[13] For Nenghai and Fazun's reform, see Wu, *Esoteric Buddhism*.

co-found the Sichuan Academy of Buddhist Nuns 四川尼眾佛學院 in 1982. Skilfully, Longlian carved out a lived space for women where they could gain and perfect knowledge, constitute communities for spiritual freedom, and contribute to societal well-being. As an exemplary Bhikṣuṇī, Longlian embodies the possibility of living beyond the dichotomy of public workplace and private family home, one that has been deeply institutionalized in secular modernity.[14]

To unveil the philosophical framework of her monastic work, I find it helpful to draw from Longlian's writings, which mainly encompass five genres. First, she published lecture notes that she took when sitting in Buddhist talks. In 1938, she revised her notes on Wang Enyang's 王恩洋 (1897–1964) *Mahāyānasaṃgraha* seminar into her first monograph, *Shedasheng lun shu lüeshu* 攝大乘論疏略述 [A Brief Summary of the Commentary on *Mahāyānasaṃgraha*]. She also released her notes on Fazun's *Madhyamakāvatāra* lectures as a series of articles entitled 'Ruzhonglun jiangji' 入中論講記 [Lectures on the *Madhyamakāvatāra*] in the 1980s. The second genre includes her translations of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist texts, exemplified by her Chinese translations of Śāntideva's (fl. eighth c.) *Bodhicaryā-*

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[14] Legal feminists reveal that such a dichotomy is the hallmark of modern gender order because it marks the public with masculinity and the private with femininity. See Pateman, *The Sexual; MacKinnon, Toward*. According to Xiaofei Kang, the national policies of early republican China integrated this gender order with traditional Confucian ethics, which created the category of new woman: 'The "new woman" would be a rational and independent thinker... At the same time she was also required to fulfil the roles of "good wife and wise mother," thus making her a suitable companion for the modern man.' See Kang, 'Women', 6. Both Taixu and Ouyang espouse this category of new woman in their project of the Buddhicized family. See Chang, 'Taixu dashi de nüxingguan yanjiu'; Zu, 'Ouyang Jingwu's'. Longlian's skilful erosion of this dichotomy bespeaks a non-teleological feminism. Since her feminism is beyond my current scope, I will not delve into it here. For more discussion on why it is important for women in East Asian religions to carve a lived space beyond the public-private and inner-outer distinctions through community building, see the special issue, 'Re-staging the Periphery as the Centre' edited by Ying Ruo Show and Jingjing Li.

vatāra and Gyeltsapjé's (1364–1432) commentary of this treatise. The third genre contains her academic essays, like her 1991 article 'Fojiao daodeguan' 佛教道德觀 [The Buddhist View on Morality] and her 1994 article 'Fojiao de youliang chuantong ji qi fazhan' 佛教的優良傳統及其發展 [The Excellent Tradition of Buddhism and its Development]. The fourth genre encompasses the teaching scripts she used for introducing novice nuns to Buddhist doctrines, including '*Xinjing* qianshi' 心經淺釋 [A Short Commentary on the *Heart Sūtra*] and '*Baifa mingmen lun* shi' 百法明門論釋 [A Commentary on *Śatadharmaprakāśamukhaśāstra*]. The fifth genre consists of her poems and lyrics. For the current discussion, I focus on her academic essays, together with her first monograph and her teaching scripts.

Since Longlian interprets Buddhist teaching in terms of the perception-practice-fruition tripartition,[15] her moral theory indicates how the reciprocity between knowing and doing conditions the life trajectory of a sentient being. Far from being homogenous and identical, sentient beings are shaped by their individual and shared karma to embrace a plurality of worlds and moralities. Some are entrapped in attachments and preoccupied with this-worldly concerns, in contrast to those who aspire to other-worldly liberation. Moreover, the Bodhisattvas decide to return to this-worldly reality and guide others towards the shared path of awakening. In her appreciation of such plurality, Longlian does not presuppose a unitary or universally applicable morality. Instead, she encourages each sentient being to explore moral values suitable to their own world as a preparatory step in their ethical progress. More specifically, in living through a plurality of moral universes and values, sentient beings inevitably encounter moral ambivalence where values clash. Such an encounter opens the door to moral cultivation, insofar as sentient beings will learn to sort out ambivalence through recontextualizing karmic efficacy. That is why I proffer to comprehend Longlian's moral theory as a Buddhist expression of meta-ethical pluralism, which revalorizes karmic efficacy for preserving a plurality of moralities.[16]

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[15] Longlian, *Shedasheng*, 14.

[16] My definition of meta-ethical pluralism aligns with David Wong's notion

In contemporary studies of Buddhist ethics, scholars debate whether it is more plausible to categorize the Buddhist approach as virtue theory or consequentialism.[17] Given that moral actions are rooted in the lived experience of a sentient being, Jay Garfield proposes to read Buddhist ethics as moral phenomenology.[18] From various directions, these framings tend to focus more on what practitioners will go through at the personal level of their practice. Enriching this ongoing discussion, I follow Longlian to expand the scope from personal cultivation to interpersonal transformation. Longlian redefines agency, in line with the Madhyamaka view of dependent-arising qua emptiness, as a person's performative capacity of acting in relation to others. As such, she is able to revalorize karmic efficacy, pluralize social ontology, and diversify morality. In this sense, morality is personal as much as it is interpersonal and social.

Aside from its import for Buddhist ethics, Longlian's meta-ethical pluralism broadens the discourse of Buddhist modernism, because she establishes the architectonics of social ethics in Buddhist terms. Since the second half of the 1800s, Buddhist and Confucian reformers have struggled to reimagine social ethics beyond the Western paradigm. Much indebted to Buddhist thought, modern Confucians, notably Liang Shuming 梁漱溟 (1893–1988) and Xiong Shili 熊十力 (1885–1968), discerned the weakness of social ethics

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of meta-ethical moral relativism, which states that 'more than one morality is true or most justified but that not all moralities are true or most justified'. See Wong, *Moral Relativism*, 3. I opt for pluralism, not relativism, to highlight Longlian's appreciation of the plurality of worlds and moralities. A further question is whether it is possible to separate morality from ethics. See Cheng, 'Dimensions', 166–69. I am grateful to one of the reviewers for asking me to clarify the meaning of pluralism.

[17] For this debate, see Clayton, *Moral Theory*, 112–18; Goodman, *Consequences*, 131–44. As detailed by Stephen Harris, Buddhist ethics as a virtue theory does not reject its very consequentialist and phenomenological characteristics but re-conceptualizes virtue as one of the critical criteria for the Bodhisattvas' practice. See Harris, *Buddhist Ethics*, 21–48. Longlian also shares this view on virtue.

[18] Garfield, *Buddhist Ethics*, 29–42.

in Buddhist thought and deemed Buddhism to be an other-worldly teaching inefficacious in saving China from its modern crisis. Their critique reinvigorated the (neo-)Confucian sentiment about the Buddhist failure in cultivating meaningful moral relationships in this-worldly life. Buddhist reformers, be they monastics or lay practitioners, took this critique seriously. Pioneers of socially engaged Buddhism, Taixu 太虛 (1890–1947) and Ouyang Jingwu 歐陽竟無 (1871–1943), for instance, experimented with the project of the 'Buddhicized family' (*fohua jiating* 佛化家庭) to harmonize Confucian ethics with the Bodhisattvas' practice. Longlian refrains from such Buddhist-Confucian syncretism. Positioning Confucian ethics as a moral practice for this-worldly dwellers, Longlian reconceptualizes Indo-Tibetan literature on the Bodhisattvas' path to reframe Buddhist ethics. Through this effort, this exemplary nun manages to correct mischaracterizations of Buddhism and recuperate the authentic dharma in modern times.

As such, my article takes on a twofold task to expand the horizon of Buddhist ethics and Buddhist modernism, concurrently. In understanding Longlian's philosophical accomplishment, I find it helpful to set up the context of the modern Buddhist-Confucian exchange on the new imagination of social ethics (section 1). Against this backdrop, Longlian lays down the Madhyamaka framework in terms of dependent-arising qua emptiness (section 2) and maps out her pluralist moral theory (section 3). She finalizes her moral theory with deliberations on resolving moral ambivalence for cultivation and transformation on the Bodhisattvas' path (section 4).

1. Setting Up Context: The Buddhist-Confucian Exchange

Longlian attributes the crisis of Buddhism to disinterest in pursuing truth. Praising the pursuit of truth as an excellent tradition of Buddhism, she delineates truth as the 'true, real, and non-illusory' (真實不虛), subsequently equating 'truth' (*di* 諦) with 'reality' (*shi* 實).[19] This

[19] Longlian, 'Fojiao de youliang', 12.

excellent tradition, as she sees it, encapsulates the authentic dharma of the Buddha, because it is both a 'corrective to the mistaken attachments of all sentient beings' (破眾生之迷執) and a 'restorative of the true reality of the world' (示世間之真相).[20] The Buddhist conception of truth, thus, intends to capture how things really are. Longlian is confident that the pursuit of truth makes Buddhism compatible with modernity. For instance, she argues that the 'five fields' (Skt. *pañca-vidyā*, Ch. *wuming* 五明) of Buddhist study, namely, crafts, linguistics, logic, medicine, and psychology, are on par with natural and social sciences.[21] Although Longlian explicitly ascribes the arrival of the final dharma to an internal corruption of Buddhist communities, she implicitly addresses the adversarial attitude that disparages Buddhism as the antithesis of modernity.

Apart from these internal and external factors, Longlian identifies another resistance against Buddhism that persists throughout Chinese history:

> The Buddhist move to leave family, which [requires monastics to] dissociate themselves with relatives and reject service to kings and lords, [makes monastics] renounce parents and rulers in a more radical way than that in Yangism and Mohism. Consequently, when Buddhism was introduced to Chinese society, it triggered resistance from traditional ethical thoughts. Even intellectuals like Han Tuizhi and his followers, born after dharma master Xuanzang, still perceived Buddhism as a flood and monster and wished for its extirpation. 佛教的出家行動, 辭親割愛, 不事王侯, 無父無君, 比楊墨尤有過之. 所以初與中國社會接觸, 就與傳統的倫理思想大為牴牾. 甚至如韓退之之流的知識分子, 生於玄奘法師之後, 仍對佛教視如洪水猛獸, 必欲鏟盡滅絕.[22]

In this short account, Longlian provides another angle for readers to contemplate the challenge for Buddhism, an angle that is formulated

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[20] Longlian, 'Fojiao de youliang'.

[21] Ibid., 13–15.

[22] Ibid., 7.

through the Buddhist-Confucian exchange. Confucians, represented by Han Tuizhi 韓退之 (i.e., Han Yu 韓愈, 768–824), construe the monastic practice of leaving family as a violation of filial piety.[23] For Longlian, their depreciation of Buddhism as a socially disengaged teaching originates from a selective reading of Buddhist thought and practice, which obscures the correct view of the Buddhist teaching of the middle way.[24]

In their exchange with Confucians, Buddhist clergy in the Sui-Tang period (581–907) criticized Confucianism because Confucians uncoupled their theory of filial piety with karmic causality.[25] This Buddhist interjection inspired the upcoming generations of Confucians, or more precisely, neo-Confucians, to reconfigure their metaphysics under Buddhist influence. Championed by Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) and Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1427–1529), they continue to probe into what they regard as a solipsist soteriology and weak social ethics in Buddhism.[26]

Zhu Xi primarily scrutinizes Chan 禪 and Huayan 華嚴 doctrines

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[23] Scholars interpret the Buddhist incorporation of filial piety as a Sinicization of Buddhism. See Ch'en, *Chinese Transformation*, 14–64; Strong, 'Filial Piety', 171–86; Schopen, 'Filial Piety and the Monks', 110–26; Teiser, *The Ghost Festival*, 196–213; Guang, 'The Teaching', 212–26. Coming from another perspective, I am more interested in the larger debate on the feasibility of Buddhist social ethics.

[24] Longlian, 'Fojiao daodeguan', 7.

[25] For this exchange, see Berger, *Encounters*, 115–27.

[26] For Buddhist input in Neo-Confucian philosophy, see Tiwald, 'Zhu Xi's'; Chan, 'How Buddhistic is Wang Yang-ming?'; Meynard, *The Religious Philosophy*; Makeham, 'Xiong Shili's'. My discussion furthers this scholarship in two ways. First, instead of investigating one thinker, I outline the larger Confucian narrative on Buddhism as a socially disengaged teaching. Second, complementing the (neo-)Confucian side of the dialogue, I rediscover previously marginalized Buddhist voices. This is particularly the case in Chinese modernity. Scholars have researched how modern Confucians developed their philosophical insights from Buddhism, especially Yogācāra. See Clower, 'Chinese Ressentiment'. It remains under-explored how Buddhist reformers, especially women, tackle such Confucian ressentiment.

in his chapter, 'Shishi' 釋氏 [Buddhists],[27] where he targets the Buddhist notion of 'mind' (*xin* 心).[28] For this neo-Confucian, Buddhist metaphysics presents the mind as the origin of this-worldly illusory phenomena and proffers the realisation of other-worldly emptiness by 'negating this mind' (降伏其心),[29] and 'transcending this-worldly life' (超脫世界).[30] Underscoring the Buddhist distinction between this-worldly phenomenality and other-worldly emptiness, this Confucian proponent characterizes Buddhist metaphysics as the 'nihilist teaching of illusion and extinguishing' (幻妄寂滅之論).[31] It follows that, soteriologically, sentient beings shall turn inward to train their individual minds through meditative practice to achieve liberation. In 'respectfully cultivating the internal mind to make it straight' (敬以直內), Buddhists, however, are unable to 'righteously regulate external affairs to make them upright' (義以方外).[32] Thus, Zhu Xi discerns that Buddhists prioritize the inner liberation of oneself over the outer obligation to others, especially family members. In his terms, Buddhism 'eradicates social ethics' (人倫滅盡),[33] and

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[27] In his article, Justin Tiwald specifies three aspects of Zhu's critique of Buddhism: soteriology, meditative practice, and the metaphysics of emptiness. See Tiwald, 'Zhu Xi's'. Developing Tiwald's insight, I want to go further to show how and why these three aspects are interlinked, which is a task entertained but unfinished by Tiwald. That is why I reverse Tiwald's order of these aspects in this paragraph to show how Zhu Xi makes a case for Buddhist weakness in social ethics. Hereby, I have to reconsider Tiwald's argument that 'several of Zhu Xi's most powerful arguments against Buddhism are best understood as objections not to Buddhism's explicit doctrines, but rather to the implicit presuppositions of those doctrines and concomitant practices.' See Tiwald, 'Zhu Xi's', 154. I contend that from a (neo-)Confucian perspective, Zhu Xi is, indeed, problematizing and criticizing the Buddhist doctrine of emptiness presented in Chan.

[28] *Zhuzi*, *juan* 126.

[29] Ibid., 3026.

[30] Ibid., 3032.

[31] Ibid., 3009.

[32] Ibid., 3027.

[33] Ibid., 3014.

'abolishes human relationships' (廢三綱五常).[34] Not undergirded by concrete interpersonal relationships, 'compassion without condition' (*wuyuanci* 無緣慈) in the Buddhist sense,[35] similar to the Mohist 'love without distinction' (*aiwuchadeng* 愛無差等),[36] becomes too abstract to be feasible. Zhu Xi's comparison between Buddhism and Mohism, indeed, mirrors Longlian's remark on Confucian resistance to Buddhism.

Also singling out the concept of mind,[37] Wang Yangming concurs, 'Buddhists have a selfish and self-benefiting mind' (佛氏有個自私自利之心).[38] Unsurprisingly, he consolidates the image of Buddhism as a solipsist doctrine of other-worldly transcendence:

> The Buddhists, however, renounce things and objects, and regard the mind as an illusion, thus gradually entering empty quiescence. If Buddhists do not engage with the this-worldly realm, they cannot manage affairs under heaven. 釋氏卻要盡絕事物, 把心看做幻相, 漸入虛寂去了. 與世間若無些子交涉, 所以不可治天下.[39]

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[34] *Zhuzi*, *juan* 126, 3014.

[35] Ibid., 3031.

[36] Ibid., 3007.

[37] Chan Wing-Tsit places Wang Yangming's critique of Buddhism 'under four headings': first, the untenability of reaching the Zen teaching of the absence of thought; second, Buddhist attachments to the non-distinction of good and evil as their failure in non-attachment; third, the disengagement of daily affairs in the Zen method of sudden enlightenment; and fourth, the uselessness of Buddhist cultivation in administrating the world. Aiming to determine how Buddhistic Wang Yangming is, Chan only remarks that these four headings 'are nonetheless cogent, for they are centrally directed at the most important aspect of Zen Buddhism, namely, the function of the mind.' See Chan, 'How Buddhistic is Wang Yang-ming?', 211–14. Hence, just like Tiwald, Chan has not clarified the connection between these four aspects, especially how they unveil the function of the mind. This is what I hope to achieve here.

[38] *Chuanxi lu*, *juan* 2, 75.

[39] Ibid., *juan* 3, 121.

Since Buddhists aim to empty their minds by divorcing themselves from this-worldly attachments, they are determined to withdraw from interpersonal relationships.[40] More importantly, Buddhists explain away the distinction between the 'wholesome' (*shan* 善) and the 'unwholesome' (*e* 惡) in their realisation of other-worldly emptiness.[41] Throughout his writings, Wang Yangming furthers Zhu Xi's critique of Buddhism. On this front, Zhu Xi views this-worldly life as substantive, because the production of life unfolds under the 'ultimate principle' (*li* 理), which is not empty but real.[42] Yet, for Wang Yangming, it is crucial to engage in this-worldly life, because such life is issued from the real, non-empty Confucian 'heart-mind' (*xin* 心).[43] Regardless of their doctrinal differences, these neo-Confucians unanimously infer, from the Buddhist metaphysic of the mind, a solipsist turn inward to achieve other-worldly emptiness; an achievement at the expense of reducing this-worldly phenomena to illusory nothingness and rejecting this-worldly ethical responsibilities.

In this context, the modernization of China exacerbated the depreciation of Buddhism. Since the second half of the nineteenth century, East Asian authorities mobilized the discourse of modernity to label Buddhism as a socially disengaged religion unconducive to national advancement. In response, Buddhist reformers strove to render Buddhism compatible with modernity. It is in this socio-political climate that the Yogācāra school of Buddhism, a school known for its comprehensive study of the mind, recaptured the reformers' attention in early republican China. Monastics and laity alike were convinced that the Yogācāra analysis of mental activities met the modern criteria of being scientific, progressive, and rational. Out of this conviction, Taixu and Ouyang Jingwu established Buddhist academies to promote the study of doctrinal ideas. They sincerely hoped to derive a plan from Yogācāra to rescue Buddhism from its crisis and rebuild China into a modern nation.

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40 *Chuanxi lu*, *juan* 3, 112.

41 Ibid., *juan* 2, 75.

42 *Zhuzi*, *juan* 126, 3016.

43 *Chuanxi lu*, *juan* 3, 121.

In his later thought, Ouyang reevaluated Confucianism in order to synthesize Confucian ethics with the Bodhisattvas' practice.[44] Many of his students, especially Xiong Shili and Liang Shuming, more straightforwardly announced their endorsement of Confucianism. Driven by the same ambition to surpass the Western modernization paradigm, these modern Confucians reinvigorated neo-Confucian sentiments on Buddhist failure in social ethics. The Buddhist-Confucian exchange in the early republican period, thus, started with their respective portrayals of other-worldly emptiness and cumulated in their dissimilar proposals for social ethics.

For Ouyang,[45] various objects/dharmas are empty by nature. When sentient beings comprehend such an empty nature, they realize suchness.[46] Yet, as long as they remain ignorant of this empty nature, the arising-and-perishing phenomena appear as unchanging entities in sentient beings' experience.[47] Thus, Ouyang suggests that this-worldly phenomena and other-worldly emptiness do not constitute two separate realities but become two interlinked perceptual fields in the minds of sentient beings. In his terms, dharmas have emptiness as their 'substance' (*ti* 體) and the arising-perishing phenomena as their 'function' (*yong* 用), the fluidity of which is mediated by the mind.[48]

Regardless, Ouyang's portrayal of this-worldly phenomenality and other-worldly emptiness still strikes Xiong Shili as a depiction of 'two separate realities' (兩種實有).[49] To remedy the fluidity of these two realities, Xiong recommends applying the *ti-yong* binary

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[44] Aviv, *Differentiating*, 151–60.

[45] In this exchange, both Ouyang and Xiong evoke the philosophical binary of *ti-yong*. According to Aviv, Ouyang's utilization of this binary is quite intricate. Historically, Ouyang's discussion of phenomenality and emptiness was inspired by the debate over the authenticity of the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith*, a text that promotes the prevalent theory of the mind targeted by neo-Confucians. See Aviv, *Differentiating*, 78–89.

[46] Ouyang, 'Weishi jueze tan', 38.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Xiong, 'Weishi', 529.

directly to the mind itself. John Makeham refers to this move as Xiong's refutation of Yogācāra's ontological dualism or pluralism in a Confucian formulation of radical ontological monism.[50] In doing so, Xiong sides with Wang Yangming to delineate the mind as not empty but real. The mind, or more specifically, the heart-mind, is, by its *ti* or substance, the vital force that connects every particular individual with the universal cosmos through the heart-mind's *yong* or function of (re)producing life.[51] Restimulating the neo-Confucian sentiment, Xiong is disheartened by the Buddhist oversight of this-worldly vitality, as well as their ethical refusal to retain such vitality.[52] As pinpointed by Wing-cheuk Chan, Xiong underscores that 'Buddhism... hence failed to see that the True Mind is a moral mind.'[53] Despite his familiarity with the Bodhisattva ideal, Xiong maintains that 'the [Bodhisattvas'] ultimate goal is the other-worldly and the extinguishing' (以出世與寂滅為歸趣).[54] Adamant, Xiong believes that only Confucianism, with its salient affirmation of this-worldly life, can lay a path for modern China and its people.[55]

It pains Ouyang to watch his student turning his back on Buddhism.[56] Recognizing how Xiong treats phenomenality and emptiness as ontologically bifurcated rather than experientially correlated, Ouyang worries that Xiong is entrapped in the nihilist extreme of 'understanding emptiness erroneously' (惡取空).[57]

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[50] See Makeham, 'Xiong Shili's', 244–60. As examined by Makeham, Xiong derives his critique of Yogācāra dualism not only from the dichotomy between phenomenality and emptiness, but also from the divide between actualized mental acts and unactualized mental tendencies qua seeds. However, Yogācārins make these distinctions not to promote dualist thinking, as Xiong would assume, but rather to proffer the possibility of fluid transformation. See Li, *Comparing*, 155–82.

[51] Xiong, 'Xin Weishi', 83–85.

[52] Xiong, 'Shili lunxue', 254.

[53] Chan, 'New Confucianism', 369.

[54] Xiong, 'Shili Lunxue', 254.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ouyang, 'Yu Xiong Zizhen', 341.

[57] Ibid., 340.

Ouyang's other student, Liang Shuming, shares this worry. Liang cautions that Xiong identifies the heart-mind as the unity of subject and object on the experiential level, but remains unaware of sentient beings' inherent tendency to get attached to such a heart-mind.[58] Therefore, Liang urges sentient beings to conduct the Bodhisattvas' practice in this-worldly life to annihilate this innate tendency and achieve universal awakening.[59] Echoing the optimism of Ouyang, Liang confirms the possibility for sentient beings to eliminate attachments and transform their ignorance into awakening, gradually.[60]

Nonetheless, Liang's concern is not so much about Buddhist metaphysics; namely, it is not about the fluidity between this-worldly phenomenality and other-worldly emptiness. Like Ouyang, Liang can hardly locate any concrete building blocks of social ethics inside the Buddhist canon. In part, Liang's attitude is rooted in his reading of Yogācāra as a doctrine that focuses on the personal mind.[61] As such, he cannot derive a way from Buddhist resources to close the rift between the internal mind and external this-worldly affairs. Therefore, Liang endorses Confucianism to account for interpersonal relationships. He incorporates Confucian moral theory as one version of the Bodhisattvas' practice in the this-worldly realm. Due to China's crisis in the 1920s, Liang encourages people to practice Confucian ethics to initiate the process of removing attachments.[62] It is for this reason that he refuses to consider socially engaged Buddhism the most viable option for China at that time. However, Liang stresses in many places that Confucian philosophy is a preparatory step towards universal awakening.[63] Given his subtle reliance on Buddhism, Thierry Meynard remarks that Liang remains a Buddhist throughout

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58 Liang, 'Du Xiong', 772.

59 Ibid., 773.

60 Ibid., 776.

61 Liang, *Dong-Xi wenhua*, 304. For Liang's changing viewpoints on Buddhism, see Li, 'Liang the Buddhist'.

62 Liang, *Dong-Xi wenhua*, 534–35.

63 Liang, 'Du Xiong', 773.

his life, even after his pronounced endorsement of Confucianism.[64]

Buddhist reformers are proactive in communicating with modern Confucians. As Eyal Aviv notes, Ouyang searches for authentic Confucianism in his later thought to harmonize Confucian ethics with the Bodhisattvas' practice.[65] Indeed, Ouyang seeks to represent Confucianism as one of the this-worldly teachings to be adopted by Bodhisattvas in order to save China from its modernization crisis. Ouyang is also mindful of solipsism. He underscores that, although each mind produces an individual 'world' (*yuzhou* 宇宙), all these worlds remain 'mutually-inseparable' (不能相離) and 'reciprocally-unhindered' (不相障礙).[67] As Jessica Zu investigates, Ouyang situates these minds in the web of social relations, as those between parents and children, between husband and wife, between friends, and between all sentient beings.[68] By associating sentient beings with Confucian social roles, Ouyang articulates concrete interpersonal relationships in Confucian terms to justify the project of the Buddhicized family. When sentient beings fulfil Confucian social roles and cultivate their heart-minds to be virtuous, such cultivation also translates into their Bodhisattvas' practice of purifying the minds for universal awakening.[69] In this way, Ouyang attests to the feasibility of Buddhist social ethics.

Another proponent of the Buddhicized family is Taixu, the master known for his initiative of 'humanistic Buddhism' (*renjian fojiao* 人間佛教).[70] For Taixu, Buddhists should follow the Bodhisattvas' path to return to the this-worldly realm and reaffirm the value of human life.[71] Dubbing Confucianism as 'narrow' (*ai* 隘),

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[64] Meynard, *The Religious Philosophy*, 202.

[65] Aviv, *Differentiating*, 159–60.

[66] Ouyang, 'Kong-Fo', 327.

[67] Ouyang, 'Fofa', 10.

[68] Zu, 'Ouyang Jingwu's', 74.

[69] Ibid., 72–81.

[70] For Taixu's reform, see Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism*; Ritzinger, *Anarchy*.

[71] Taixu, 'Zaiyi', 50.

Taixu strives to prove the complementarity of these two teachings.[72] Humanistic Buddhism expands Confucian ethics because Buddhists aspire to universal awakening.[73] Now that the Bodhisattvas' path is an amplified version of Confucian ethics, Buddhism prescribes this-worldly morality with a focus on 'repaying kindness' (*bao'en* 報恩).[74] This repayment starts with filial piety to parents, continues with responsibility for social and national well-being, and ends with reverence for all sagely teachings.[75] Moreover, 'if women can fulfil their duties, they are the Bodhisattvas' (如女子能完成其責任, 就是菩薩).[76] As envisioned by Taixu, a modern woman shall 'establish her full personhood' (建立其完全之人格) through forging a career as an independent citizen in the public sphere and fulfilling traditional Confucian familial roles at home: a woman 'should still be a demure daughter for her parents' (對於父母仍應為淑女), 'should still be a good wife for her husband' (對於丈夫仍應為良妻), and 'should still be a virtuous mother for her children' (對於子女仍應為賢母).[77] The Buddhicized family, thus, has a pivotal place in humanistic Buddhism.[78]

2. Laying Down the Madhyamaka Framework: Emptiness and Agency

As discussed above, in early republican China, when modern Buddhists and Confucians explored a future for their country to surpass the Western paradigm, they debated the plausibility of Buddhist ethics. With similar ambitions of reviving their tradition and nation,

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72 Taixu, 'Zaiyi', 62.

73 Ibid.

74 Taixu, 'Zenyang jianshe renjian fojiao', 356.

75 Ibid., 356–57.

76 Taixu, 'Zenyang zuo xiandai nüzi', 269.

77 Ibid., 267.

78 Taixu, 'Youpoyi jiaoyu yu Fohua jiating', 411–19. According to Chang Hongxing, Taixu's prescription of women's social roles exposes his ambivalence on womanhood. See Chang, 'Taixu dashi de nüxingguan yanjiu'.

these reformists confronted each other, but more often than not, they complemented and completed the thoughts of one another. Indebted to Buddhist metaphysics of the mind, modern Confucians were concerned about the Buddhist weakness in social ethics, because Buddhists would reduce this-worldly responsibilities into meaningless illusions for their soteriological goal of realizing other-worldly emptiness. In exchange, Buddhist reformers expounded on the fluidity between this-worldly affairs and other-worldly awakening to incorporate Confucian ethics into the Bodhisattvas' practice. Such hybrid ethics can substantiate the socially engaged quality of Buddhism.

When the Buddhist-Confucian exchange reached its heyday, Longlian was still undergoing her training in Buddhism. Although she attended the lectures of Wang Enyang, another student of Ouyang, she recalled that it was Fazun who introduced her to major Yogācāra treatises, such as Vasubandhu's *Triṃśikāvijñaptimātratā* (Ch. *Weishi sanshisong* 唯識三十頌, Thirty Verses of Consciousness-Only) and Xuanzang's 玄奘 (ca. 602–664) *Cheng weishi lun* 成唯識論 [Perfection of Consciousness-Only].[79] Influenced by Fazun and Nenghai, Longlian does not prioritize Yogācāra. To explicate emptiness and ethics, she turns to Madhyamaka, a school that draws upon dependent-arising to define emptiness as the negation of intrinsic existence.

In an indirect rejoinder to modern Confucians, Longlian anonymously mentions a 'great scholar' (*daxuewenjia* 大學問家) who posits dependent-arising as a substantial reality and 'opposes dependent-arising with no-self' (把緣生和無我對立).[80] Longlian criticizes this view as a 'huge mistake' (*dacuowu* 大錯誤): if someone juxtaposes phenomenality and emptiness as two separate realities, this person fails to grasp the Buddhist teaching of emptiness.[81] Far from being a finalized state, 'emptiness is to empty our attachments' (空就是空掉我們的那個執著).[82] There are, further, two types of attachments:

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[79] Aidaotang, dir., *Dangdai diyi biqiuni*, 26:35–26:54.

[80] Longlian, '*Baifa*', 187.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Longlian, '*Xinjing*', 197.

'attachments to existence' (*zhiyou* 執有), which are tantamount to eternalism, and 'attachments to non-existence' (*zhikong* 執空), which amount to nihilism.[83] If sentient beings are attached to existence, they perceive various things as unchanging, consequently generating desire and suffering.[84] Yet, if they go to the other extreme, they denounce karmic efficacy and discard morality for good.[85]

In this sense, the correct view of the Buddhist middle way, as proposed by Longlian, is about realizing emptiness against extremes. Emptiness is not a fixed entity or an absolute idea. Emptiness is *to* empty. It is a dialectical activity of emptying any possible inclination towards extremes and attachments. In short, Longlian uses the maxim of 'dependent-arising qua emptiness' (*yuanqi xingkong* 緣起性空) to outline such fluid metaphysics:

> The five aggregates revolve around the aspects of the mind, among which only one is about the aspect of the matter; the other four refer to the mental ones. These aggregates bespeak one way of categorizing this-worldly things, inside the Buddhist teaching. Nonetheless, the Buddhist teaching is not a doctrine of dual entities qua dualism. An entity amounts to a noumenon or an intrinsic nature (Skt. *svabhāva*). On the contrary, the Buddhist teaching states that this-worldly things have no intrinsic nature but arise due to causes and conditions. Their lack of intrinsic nature suggests that the five aggregates are dependent-arising qua emptiness... We shall follow the Madhyamaka School to deliberate steadily and observe how this-worldly things, without exception, interdependently arise and have no intrinsic nature... Only through the utilization of wisdom to contemplate and illuminate, will there be a perception of five aggregates qua all this-worldly things as dependent-arising qua emptiness. Hence, it is said [in the *Heart Sūtra*] that [Bodhisattvas like Avalokiteśvara] illuminate the five aggregates to be empty. Based on the illuminated view of five aggregates' being empty, [these Bodhisattvas] can be fearless of

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[83] Longlian, '*Baifa*', 43.

[84] Ibid., 44.

[85] Ibid.

> saṃsāra to guide all suffering sentient beings. These sentient beings are entrapped in the river of saṃsāra because they cannot illuminate the five aggregates to be empty. 五蘊偏重講心即精神方面, 只有一色蘊講的是物質, 其餘四蘊都是講精神方面的. 五蘊也是佛法對世界萬物歸納的一種, 但佛法並非二元論. 元是本體, 自性意. 而佛法講世間萬物都沒有自性, 都是因緣所生, 沒有自性的, 五蘊是 '緣起性空' 的...我們應如中觀宗所說的應慢慢地思維觀察, 看世間萬物哪一樣不是緣生的, 哪一樣是有自性的...只有用智慧去觀照時, 才能見到五蘊 (世間萬物) 都是緣起性空, 故說照見五蘊皆空. 在照見五蘊皆空的基礎上才能不畏生死地度一切苦厄的眾生. 眾生之所以在生死見河裡流轉, 就是由於不能照見五蘊皆空.[86]

In unpacking the fluid metaphysics of emptiness, Longlian decentres the role of the mind. As a Mādhyamika, she speaks of emptiness as a dialectical activity. Emptiness unfolds through dependent-arising. All things in this-worldly conventional reality interdependently arise with one another, which ultimately makes them empty of intrinsic existence. To realize emptiness is to empty any possible attachment to intrinsic existence. Hence, such emptying starts with extirpating the mind-matter dualism as a rejection of an essential self. Then, it is to eliminate the intrinsic essence of every phenomenon, including mind and matter. Afterwards, it is to eradicate the tendency to abide in emptiness as a renegotiation between the correct view of emptiness and the Bodhisattvas' commitment to guide others. And this dialectical activity of emptying goes ad infinitum until it realizes universal awakening.

Even though Longlian views the Madhyamaka understanding of emptiness to be more 'exhaustive' (*chedi* 徹底) than that in Yogācāra,[87] she upholds the significance of Yogācāra for the Bodhisattvas' practice. In her terms, the Madhyamaka teaching enables practitioners to acquire the 'correct view' (*zhenguan* 真觀) of emptiness, which shall motivate the 'proper practice' (*zhengxing* 正行) on the Bodhisattvas' path.[88] Following her mentors Fazun and Nenghai,

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[86] Longlian, '*Xinjing*', 198–99.

[87] Ibid., 196.

[88] Ibid., 195.

Longlian considers the correct view as the 'deep *prajñā*' (*shenbore* 深般若) in Madhyamaka, the compassionate practice as the 'broad *prajñā*' (*guangbore* 廣般若) in Yogācāra.[89] Thus, she aligns Madhyamaka and Yogācāra as the two complementary axes of Mahāyāna. For Longlian, it is the Bodhisattvas' practice that distinguishes Mahāyāna from other Buddhist teachings.[90]

When Bodhisattvas enact the correct view of emptiness in their selfless actions, they are also resolved to re-engage with this-worldly life and reconnect with other sentient beings. Connecting this-worldly phenomenality and other-worldly emptiness in the dialectical activity of emptying, Longlian contends that no Buddhist practitioner can do away with this-worldly life. Phenomenality is neither a pure illusion nor an absolute entity. Anyone who aspires to liberation needs to cultivate the Bodhisattvas' practice with other sentient beings in this-worldly life. Upon outlining her Madhyamaka metaphysics of emptiness, Longlian bridges the gap between the metaphysical discussion of dependent-arising and the soteriology of the Bodhisattvas' practice. To map out a moral theory, she still needs to clarify how sentient beings, though empty of any intrinsic existence, can remove attachment and realize emptiness. The answer to this problem transpires at the beginning of her article on morality:

> Buddhism interprets *dao* with a variety of meanings:
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> 1. *Dao* means leading. The karmic path of wholesomeness and unwholesomeness leads to the fruition of suffering and joy. The wholesome is the *dao* and the unwholesome is not the dao. Such is the this-worldly *dao*.
> 2. Dao refers to the path of nirvāṇa that points to the city of nirvāṇa. Such is the other-worldly *dao*.
> 3. Awakening the bodhi mind of compassion, enacting the Bodhisattvas' practice, and achieving the supreme Buddhahood is the *dao* of awakening.
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> *De* also contains many meanings. The merit acquired from acting

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89 Longlian, '*Xinjing*', 195.

90 Ibid., 191.

> in accordance with the *dao* is called *de*, for instance, the four merits of nirvāṇa, the three merits of the dharma-body, etc. A necessary virtue for a person is also called *de*, such as the ten virtues of the good spiritual friends or the five virtues of the monastic officers.
>
> Buddhist learning is about the three unpolluted trainings of monastic discipline, meditation, and wisdom. However, it is commonplace to talk about the *de* of monastic discipline and rare to hear about the *de* of meditation and wisdom. Hence, the Buddhist approach to morality usually centres on the value of actions for assessment. The Buddhist viewpoint on morality is mostly instantiated in the training of monastic discipline. 佛教釋 '道' 有多義: 1. '道' 是 '通' 義, 善惡業道, 通生苦樂異熟果, 故名為 '道'. 善為道, 不善為非道. 此為世間道. 2. 道謂涅槃路, 能往涅槃城故. 此為出世間道. 3. 發菩提心, 修菩薩行, 至無上佛果, 為無上菩提道. '德' 亦有多義: 依道而行, 所獲勝利, 名為德, 如涅槃四德, 法身三德等; 某種人必具的條件, 亦稱為德, 如善知識十德, 知事五德. 佛教所學謂三無漏學, 即戒, 定, 慧. 但常稱戒德, 罕聞於定慧稱德, 是佛教於道德, 一般亦從行為的價值而衡量. 佛教的道德觀, 最具體的是戒學.[91]

Here, Longlian deploys the Chinese notion of 'the path and the virtue' (*daode* 道德) to formulate morality as the merit and virtue cultivated from acting in accordance with a path. As highlighted in the excerpt, 'the Buddhist approach to morality usually centres on the value of actions for assessment'. Action defines a person. Sentient beings act to forge the trajectory of their life and finalize their personhood. In short, they are what they act and do. Moral agency, thus, does not presume an unchanging self but is contingent on action. Longlian's definition of agency resonates with contemporary feminist philosophers, who put forward an account of performative agency:[92] sentient beings are what they act out to be meaningful, without any metaphysically intrinsic nature.

There are three different ways or paths of action. Some sentient beings act to integrate their life into a this-worldly path, where they

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[91] Longlian, 'Fojiao daodeguan', 3.

[92] See Butler, 'Performative Agency'; Wehrle, '"Bodies (that) Matter"'.

entrap themselves in endless suffering. Alternatively, the intentionality of other sentient beings is to liberate themselves from suffering, which determines their action to be on the other-worldly path. Those who enact the Bodhisattvas' practice aim to return to this-worldly life and guide others towards universal awakening. Depicting these paths, Longlian underlines the consistent 'influence of actions' (行為的影響) as 'karmic efficacy' (*yegan* 業感).[93] As such, she revalorizes karma to trace how sentient beings act differently to constitute their path and commit themselves to the correlated morality.

3. Mapping out Meta-Ethical Pluralism: Worlds and Moralities

Longlian is inspired by Tsongkhapa's (1357–1419) *Lamrim Chenmo* [The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment] in delineating the three paths.[94] However, she eschews the description of these paths as those for sentient beings with small, medium, and large capacities. In contrast, this exemplary nun speaks of these paths as different 'worlds' (*shi* 世). A world is karmically constituted and jointly enacted by sentient beings. What defines a world is the intentionality behind the actions of sentient beings on that path. Hence, shifting the focus from intellectual capacity to karmic intentionality, Longlian flattens out the hierarchy of these paths to underscore their plurality. When navigating these paths, sentient beings embrace the corresponding moralities. Instead of being unitary, moralities are diversely embedded in the plurality of worlds. Longlian differentiates the diversity of moralities through their 'profoundness and facileness' (*shenqian* 深淺),[95] not their superiority and inferiority. In this way, Longlian develops her ethical theory from the fluid metaphysics of emptiness. Upon correcting the Confucian construal of Buddhist metaphysics, she proposes social ethics in Buddhist terms. This twofold accomplishment showcases her determination to correct

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[93] Longlian, 'Fojiao daodeguan', 3.

[94] Ibid., 4.

[95] Ibid.

misperception and resurrect the authentic dharma.

For sentient beings who are ignorant of no-self, they are (re) born into the 'this-worldly' (*shijian* 世間) path of saṃsāra. A path is more than a static karmic subtotal of personal actions. Individual karma continues to be integrated into the karma shared by sentient beings who act out of similar intentionality. Positioning individual karma and shared karma in the Madhyamaka framework of dependent-arising qua emptiness, Longlian explicates the characteristics of this-worldly life:

> Due to the influence of the actions of each individual (namely, karmic efficacy), a sentient being experiences personal retribution. Those who share similar karma are born into the same world. There are billions of humans on earth, which makes the earth the result of the shared karma of billions of humans and countless animals. Despite residing on earth together, humans and animals have dissimilar individual experiences. Among humans, the experience of suffering and joy is also disparate. This shows the individual karma among the shared karma. 隨各人行為的影響 (業感) 而各受其報. 業同者生於同一環境. 地球上數十億人, 地球乃數十億人共業所感, 亦無數動物共業所感. 雖同在地球之上, 人與畜生又各有不同享受. 同在人中, 亦苦樂不均, 是為共業中之別業.[96]

In this passage, the this-worldly realm, like the earth, is the product of the shared karma of its residents. Utilizing karmic language, Longlian portrays the this-worldly realm as a karmic dynamic that is jointly achieved, meaningfully dwelled in, and collaboratively preserved by sentient beings.[97] I deduce from this portrayal a social ontology of this-worldly life. Since a sentient being is defined by action, a concrete interpersonal relationship is possible as an

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[96] Longlian, 'Fojiao daodeguan', 3.

[97] Longlian's Madhyamaka articulation of a shared world can be demarcated from that in Yogācāra because she does not mediate shared karma via a collective of minds. For the Yogācāra approach, see Kachru, *Other Lives*, 107; Zu, 'Adhipati', 21; Li, 'What is Shared'.

exchange of actions or, more precisely, as an interaction. Countless interactions coalesce the this-worldly realm of all sentient beings, subsequently bringing suffering and joy back to each individual.

Longlian cogently integrates the karmic constitution of this-worldly reality into the more holistic karmic network of dependent-arising qua emptiness. As she specifies, human actions are always cohered into the fabric of the endless activity of dependent-arising. What makes humans 'extraordinary' (*shusheng* 殊勝) is how they can be reflexively aware of such dependent-arising and attain illuminated views of emptiness.[98] Their views incentivize them to choose another path for self-transformation. Before they are ready for such transformation, though, sentient beings must regulate themselves and accumulate karmic merit. In this-worldly life, Longlian considers morality's minimum requirement to be adherence to the ten wholesome precepts against killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, mischief-making, cursing, flattery, greed, anger, and wrong views.[99] These precepts are karmically efficacious, regardless of whether a sentient being has 'received the Buddhist precepts' (*shoujie* 受戒).[100] According to Longlian, Confucians derive the same moral requirement from 'the way of empathy for others or pure knowing' (*shudao huo liangzhi* 恕道或良知).[101] Quite different from the earlier generation of modern Buddhists and Confucians, Longlian does not envision Confucian ethics as a version of the Bodhisattvas' practice. Rather, Confucian ethics pertains to the this-worldly morality of ordinary sentient beings.

When sentient beings succeed in self-regulation, some will aspire to eradicate the root of suffering on the 'other-worldly' (*chushijian* 出世間) path.[102] Under this aspiration, these sentient beings cut their ties with this-worldly life to join a monastic community.[103] Instead of

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98 Longlian, '*Xinjing*', 194.

99 Longlian, 'Fojiao daodeguan', 4.

100 Ibid., 5.

101 Ibid., 4.

102 Ibid., 5.

103 Ibid.

Buddhicizing families, Longlian revisits the Confucian delineation of family. She proceeds to reconceptualize the Buddhist monastic communities (qua the five orders of Bhikṣu, Bhikṣuṇī, Śikṣamāṇā, Śrāmaṇera, and Śrāmaṇerikā) as a type of family, broadly construed:

> The five orders of family renouncers must cultivate pure practices. If someone does not conduct pure practices, this sentient being cannot leave the realm of desire, let alone saṃsāra. Now that sentient beings have left family, they have withdrawn from the basic unit of regular social structure (i.e., family). However, family renouncers are not in solitude. Withdrawing from the small family defined by blood ties, they enter the large family of dharmic ties founded by Śakyamuni (i.e., monastic community). For monastics, the most basic requirement in their morality is the requirement of their order. 出家五眾, 必須修淨梵行. 不修梵行, 尚不能出欲界, 何能出生死. 既出家已, 即脫離一般社會機構的基本實體 (家). 但出家人並不是孤立的. 脫離了血緣親屬的小家庭, 便進入了釋迦牟尼締造的法親眷屬的大家庭 (僧團). 出家人的道德觀, 最基本的是僧團的基本要求.[104]

Longlian reimagines a monastic community as a large family of dharmic ties in contrast to a small family of blood ties. It follows that the Buddhist practice of leaving family constitutes an initial step of building a new family for other-worldly liberation. Monastics regulate their community through pure practices to ensure a smooth pursuit of wisdom and selfless compassion.[105] Contrary to the egocentric individualists in the Confucian portrait, monastics act collectively and collaboratively for their other-worldly centred community. In modern times, Longlian considers a well-regulated monastic community as a family of 'democracy' (*minzhu* 民主) and the 'rule of law' (*fazhi* 法治).[106] In elucidating community building, Longlian works out a social ontology for the other-worldly path. While Confucians configure the this-worldly path and the other-worldly practice as

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[104] Longlian, 'Fojiao daodeguan', 6.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Ibid.

two separate realities, Longlian conceives their contrast as karmically intentional. The this-worldly path can be demarcated from the other-worldly one when sentient beings perform personal or interpersonal actions with contrasting purposefulness.

In reimagining a monastic community as a democratic family of dharmic ties, Longlian opens up a discursive niche for practitioners, especially nuns, to renegotiate power, authority, and hierarchy. As corroborated by Wen-jie Qin's ethnographical work, Longlian and other Bhikṣuṇīs skilfully created new monastic family ideals.[107] Studying their community building stories from the lens of resistance, readers might conclude that these Bhikṣuṇīs failed to resist and oppose thoroughly the patriarchal values of traditional family models. However, in Saba Mahmood and Muhammad Velji's reappraisal, the language of resistance, together with its teleological understanding of feminism, comes with severe limitations.[108] Switching to the narrative of skilful creativity, readers will appreciate the collective agency of these Bhikṣuṇīs. Indeed, they *skilfully* mobilize resources to *create* the conditions for the possibility of redefining monastic family without explicit ruptures of the historical past of their tradition and culture. Their skilfulness, which matures in their community building practice, bespeaks these nuns' non-teleological feminism.

Cherishing the aspiration to transcend saṃsāra, sentient beings continue to know that their ultimate goal is universal awakening.[109] The Bodhisattva ideal, thereafter, becomes significant for those who decide to re-engage with this-worldly affairs. As unpacked in section 1, Confucians cast doubt on the feasibility of the Bodhisattva ideal, because Buddhists cannot maintain concrete interpersonal rela-

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[107] Qin, 'The Buddhist Revival', 117–216.

[108] For this reappraisal, see Mahmood, *Politics*, 1–39; Velji, 'The Philosophy of Piety', 216–90. While I applaud Velji's call for prioritizing creativity, I prefer the term 'non-teleological' to his notion of 'anti-teleological' for a more inclusive understanding of feminism. Due to limited space, I will not delve into this discussion here.

[109] Longlian, 'Fojiao daodeguan', 6.

tionships to manage this-worldly affairs. In the previous discussion, Longlian argues that sentient beings on the this-worldly path foster concrete interpersonal relationships because of karmic interactions, and monastics relate to each other due to dharmic ties. Then, how can Bodhisattvas connect to ordinary sentient beings who act with drastically different intentionality? Longlian tackles this question in sketching out the path of 'returning to this-worldly life' (*chushi fu rushi* 出世復入世):[110]

> The morality of Mahāyāna is premised on the bodhi mind of compassion and takes the wisdom of no-self as the skilful means (without such wisdom of no-self, Bodhisattvas can be neither fearless of saṃsāra nor non-abiding in nirvāṇa). Endless compassion and wisdom to benefit sentient beings is called the Buddha's original intention.
>
> Mahāyāna followers can awaken the bodhi mind of compassion by two skilful means. First, there is the practice transmitted by Bodhisattva Maitreya that comes with seven levels: 1. regarding all sentient beings equally; 2. regarding all sentient beings as previous parents and future Buddhas; 3. contemplating on their kindness; 4. contemplating on repaying their kindness; 5. contemplating on wishing them to attain joy; 6. contemplating on wishing them to depart from suffering; 7. aspiring to become a Buddha so as to help sentient beings ultimately remove suffering and attain joy.
>
> Second, there is the practice of self-other exchange taught by Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī. It is to treat others as oneself and treat oneself as others. It is important for oneself to become a Buddha but what is more important is helping others become Buddhas. 大乘佛教的道德觀, 是以菩提心為首導, 以無我慧為方便 (如果沒有無我慧, 便不能不畏生死, 不住涅槃), 悲智無盡, 利生無盡, 方為稱佛本懷. 大乘人發菩提心有二種方便. 第一是彌勒菩薩傳的修法, 有七重次第: 1. 觀一切眾生平等; 2. 觀一切眾生皆是前身父母, 未來諸佛; 3. 作有恩想; 4. 作報恩想; 5. 作願一切眾生得樂想; 6. 作願一切眾生離苦想; 7. 為令眾生究竟離苦得樂, 自己必須成佛. 第二是文殊菩薩傳的自他相

[110] Longlian, 'Fojiao daodeguan', 7.

> 換的修法, 就是把別人當成自己, 把自己當成別人, 自己固然要成佛, 更要緊的是使別人成佛.[111]

Drawing from *Lamrim Chenmo*, Longlian provides Bodhisattvas with two approaches to cultivating concrete interpersonal relationships.[112] I interpret them as the second-person approach and the first-person approach. The former reclaims interdependence through recuperating openness, and the latter regains such interdependence through destabilizing egocentrism.

The first-person approach has been succinctly examined by Emily McRae, who clarifies that 'through imaginative empathic projection we are reorienting ourselves emotionally, psychologically, and importantly, morally.'[113] Thus, in exchanging the self with the other, a Bodhisattva crafts a way of destabilizing egocentric tendencies, reorienting oneself with others, and re-establishing self-other relationships. It is a practice that starts with first-person experience and strives to open the first-person scope to 'include more and more members of the moral community'.[114] Through reorientation and

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[111] Ibid., 8–9.

[112] Tsongkhapa attributes the seven layers of causality to Atiśa. See Tsong-kha-pa, *The Great Treatise*, vol. 2, 28. As the Chinese translator of *Lamrim Chenmo*, Fazun specifies that Atiśa receives this teaching from the Dharmakīrti of the Golden Isle. Although Fazun does not modify the order of these levels, he confirms that this gradual training presupposes the 'mind of equality and equanimity' (*pingdengshexin* 平等捨心). See Fazun, 'Zongkaba', 270–73. Longlian's other mentor, Nenghai, ascribes these seven layers to Asaṅga. For Nenghai, Śāntideva's teaching of self-other exchange entails the deep prajñā that 'cultivates the mind of equality and equanimity' (修平等捨心), and Asaṅga's teaching epitomizes the broad *prajñā* that 'cultivates the mind of the Bodhisattva vow' (修菩提願心). See Nenghai, '*Putidao*', 99–100. Longlian, hence, continues to develop the theory of the path. In her teaching scripts, she always associates Maitreya with the Yogācāra teaching of broad *prajñā*, and Mañjuśrī with the Madhyamaka teaching of deep prajñā. See Longlian, '*Xinjing*', 195; *idem*, '*Baifa*', 25–26.

[113] McRae, 'Exchanging', 127.

[114] Ibid.

re-establishment, Bodhisattvas can cultivate genuine compassion for others.

The other way of awakening the bodhi mind of compassion, which Longlian attributes to the Yogācāra master Maitreya, comes with seven levels or phases in gradually developing interpersonal relationships. Here, she modifies the layout of these seven levels in *Lamrim Chenmo*, adding equality as the primary step and extending the contemplative objects from mothers to previous parents and future Buddhas. Now, what does 'previous parents and future Buddhas' mean? Literally, they entail fathers and mothers of a person in terms of blood ties. However, if Bodhisattvas take sentient beings to be parents in a literal sense, they seem to resume their attachments to illusory phenomena in this-worldly life. Hence, the contemplation of 'previous parents and future Buddhas' should open the door to a middle way between regarding sentient beings as substantially real and reducing them to nothingness. Broadening the parochial understanding of parents, Longlian has already reformulated families in terms of dharmic ties in her previous discussion on monastic community. Thus, I find it more tenable to read the phrase of 'previous parents and future Buddhas' as an analogy.

In Yogācāra literature, parents are, indeed, used analogically. The Tang Yogācāra master, Kuiji 窺基 (632–682), for instance, clarifies that Bodhisattvas position themselves as 'the uninvited friends who are figuratively referred to as parents' (為不請友, 譬之父母).[115] The parent analogy conveys Bodhisattvas' genuine care for sentient beings in parallel to parents' deep love for their children.[116] When Bodhisattvas contemplate sentient beings as previous parents and future Buddhas, they recuperate an openness that characterizes their inter-

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[115] *Shuo wugoucheng jing shu*, *T* no. 1782, 38: 1.1008c26.

[116] Reiko Ohnuma unpacks the ambivalent attitude towards motherly love in the Buddhist canon, given that love is both represented as the paradigmatic symbol of universal love and rejected as the reification of selfish attachment. See Ohnuma, *Ties*, 3–35. I want to thank Eyal Aviv for pointing me to this literature. Due to this ambivalent attitude, readers can understand why Longlian takes no-self and equality as the prerequisites for contemplating sentient beings as parents.

dependence with other sentient beings throughout karmic history. I consider such interdependence as a relationship from the second-person perspective.[117] This perspective enables the Bodhisattvas to embody interconnectedness, enact dependent-arising qua emptiness, and extirpate subject-object bifurcation. It thus explains why the first level of such cultivation demands a recognition of equality. By virtue of the second-person perceptive, Bodhisattvas engage in interpersonal relationships with genuine care and compassion.

Following this line of reasoning, I do not think Longlian aims to reintroduce filial piety to the Bodhisattvas' practice, like previous Buddhist and Confucian reformers. In particular, by advocating for contemplating sentient beings as previous parents and future Buddhas, Longlian does not urge all practitioners to literally undertake the social roles prescribed in Confucian ethics. Rather, through reconceptualizing the Bodhisattvas' compassionate mind, this eminent nun reimagines an equal, non-hierarchical web of social relations as an alternative to the Confucian model. In their cultivation, Bodhisattvas adhere to a set of moral codes known as three types of 'the Bodhisattvas' precepts' (*pusajie* 菩薩戒).[118]

Valuing the consistency of karmic efficacy, Longlian accounts for how and why sentient beings can act, both individually and collaboratively, to constitute the worlds of their paths. These sentient beings continue to consolidate their moralities on these paths and cultivate moral transformation across these paths. Longlian's effort to revalorize karmic efficacy, pluralize social ontology, and diversify morality makes her moral theory a version of meta-ethical pluralism. This pluralistic ethos affords Buddhists with more flexibility in practising socially engaged Buddhism.

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[117] For the second-person approach to interpersonal relationships in Yogācāra, see Li, 'Through the Mirror', 435–51.

[118] Longlian, 'Fojiao daodeguan', 9. For Longlian's categorization of the Bodhisattvas' precepts, see Bianchi, '*Yi jie wei shi*'; *idem*, 'Understanding *Jielü*'; *idem*, 'Yogācāra'.

4. Finalizing the Project: Moral Ambivalence and the Ethical Willingness to Engage

Like contemporary proponents of meta-ethical pluralism, Longlian is mindful of the experience of moral ambivalence. According to David Wong, moral ambivalence showcases how a diversity of equally meaningful moral values can clash in certain situations.[119] Although moral ambivalence can be overwhelming and discomforting, people can work together to reach a moral judgement.[120] Such cooperation, in turn, furnishes people with an opportunity to improve their personal morality and enhance their mutual understanding.

Ruminating upon morality in the Buddhist context, Longlian likewise pays attention to moral ambivalence in Bodhisattvas' practice. Undeniably, when Bodhisattvas re-engage with other sentient beings in this-worldly life, they act to navigate a plurality of worlds and negotiate a diversity of moralities. The resolution to ambivalence constitutes a crucial moment in their moral cultivation. How should Bodhisattvas act when they experience moral ambivalence? Longlian addresses this issue in her discussion on 'committing moral wrongs by nature' (開性罪).[121]

Already in her first monograph, Longlian advocates that, in principle, Bodhisattvas must abstain from moral wrongs by nature.[122] These moral wrongs stem from greed and anger, which can elicit mental defilements.[123] In practice, however, such a commitment is negotiable, given the specific situation. For several types of altruistic actions that appear as moral wrongs by nature, if Bodhisattvas fearlessly conduct them out of compassion without egocentric greed or anger, their actions are not morally transgressive.[124] On the contrary,

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[119] For more discussions on moral ambivalence, see Wong, *Natural Moralities*, 5–28.

[120] Ibid., 5.

[121] Longlian, 'Fojiao daodeguan', 9.

[122] Longlian, *Shedasheng*, 113.

[123] Ibid.

[124] Ibid., 114.

if Bodhisattvas are intimidated by their fear of moral wrongs and refuse to benefit others, their refusal obstructs the rise of compassion, which makes them violate their vows.[125]

To illustrate such a negotiation, Longlian deploys two examples that revolve around one moral wrong by nature: killing. In her first example, Longlian recounts the Buddhist story of killing one evil person to save five hundred practitioners about to attain arhatship. Examining this story, Longlian presents various types of moral reasoning in accordance with the moral values of sentient beings on their respective paths. In this-worldly life, killing other people counts as a moral wrong for Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. However, it is possible to justify killing the few to save the many, as presented in utilitarianism. Longlian describes such a justification as that about 'the few and the many' (少數與多數).[126] For Buddhists on the Bodhisattvas' path, Longlian details that karma and compassion can also be adduced to make a case for killing one evil person.[127] If someone were to take the lives of five hundred arhats-to-be, such an action would render this person evil and result in a rebirth in 'Avīci hell' (*wujiandiyu* 無間地獄).[128] Recontextualizing the karmic efficacy of the action of killing, Bodhisattvas will conclude that it is a compassionate move to end the life of this person before any evil action is conducted.[129] Nonetheless, Longlian still refers to the killing of one evil person as a 'great cause and condition' (大事因緣) that cannot be easily undertaken unless it is the last resort.[130] More specifically, monastics in the five orders should comply with the 'fundamental precepts' (*genbenjie* 根本戒) and carry out their duties to their monastic communities.[131] Although monastics are permitted to kill out of altruism and compassion, they must concurrently

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125 Longlian, *Shedasheng*, 114.

126 Longlian, 'Fojiao daodeguan', 9.

127 Ibid.

128 Ibid.

129 Ibid.

130 Ibid.

131 Ibid.

admit their failure in violating the fundamental precepts.[132]

In the second example, Longlian recapitulates a scenario in recent dharma talks where clerics are asked about the permissibility of killing enemies on the battlefield or executing death row inmates.[133] Due to the institutionalization of modern work ethics, Buddhist followers encounter such ambivalence more frequently. It should be noticed that Longlian is not reasoning over the structural legitimacy of war or the death penalty. Instead, she is pondering over what kinds of actions are categorically unprohibited and practically licensed when the principle of non-killing conflicts with other moral principles. For Longlian, it is crucial to identify the intention behind the action of killing. She remarks that attacking the enemy is the duty of those in military defence, and the execution of the death penalty is the job of those in law enforcement.[134] In her analysis, people take on these positions in the public system and are expected to undertake their tasks, not out of personal grudges against the perpetrators.[135] Their actions of killing are warranted by this-worldly legality. However, as observed by Longlian, ordained monastics no longer march on the this-worldly path and do not maintain mundane positions.[136] Normally, it is not their place to defend a country or ensure public security. Even if it comes to the point that monastics have to perform these actions for altruistic reasons, they should emulate the monk who took the life of King Langdarma (?–842).[137] Historically, after assassinating Langdarma to end this king's persecution of Buddhism, this monk, as Longlian recounts, accepted his monastic disqualification.[138] Reiterating her previous standpoint, Longlian underscores that ordained Buddhists, who follow the Bodhisattvas' precepts to conduct killing, should still confess their moral transgression against

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[132] Longlian, 'Fojiao daodeguan', 9.

[133] Ibid., 10.

[134] Ibid.

[135] Ibid.

[136] Ibid.

[137] Ibid.

[138] Ibid.

the fundamental precepts of monastics.[139]

In these two case studies, Longlian examines the experience of moral ambivalence for those on the Bodhisattvas' path. There is no doubt that compassion is the primary moral principle. When compassion comes into conflict with other moral principles, such as the Buddhist value of no-killing or modern work ethics, Bodhisattvas should use their wisdom to secure a skilful resolution of moral ambivalence. Thus, they are required to evaluate the situation, track their action's intentionality, and recontextualize their action's karmic efficacy. In this sense, compassion is grounded in the wisdom of no-self and interdependence, as Longlian elucidated earlier. For lay Buddhists, as long as their action aims for a greater good without self-interest, they are allowed to commit what seems to be morally wrong by nature. However, ordained Buddhists have an extra responsibility for their monastic community. They stand at the intersection of this-worldly duty, other-worldly commitment, and Bodhisattvas' responsibility. When monastics are resolved to commit moral wrongs out of compassion, they must also acknowledge their failure in breaking fundamental precepts and accept the penalty of losing their monastic ranks.

In expressing her determination to wrestle with moral ambivalence, Longlian indicates that some clerics would walk away upon being confronted with the problem of killing.[140] This eminent nun does not applaud the decision to walk away, since it would cost practitioners an opportunity to refine their practice as Bodhisattvas. Refraining from intellectual laziness, Longlian declares her willingness to continue the Buddhist excellent tradition of pursuing truth. It is a socially engaged tradition that can 'not only enable [Buddhism] to progress together with human civilization' (不但能與人類文明齊步前進) but also 'clear the path towards global peace' (為世界和平掃清道路).[141] Indeed, in resolving moral ambivalence, Bodhisattvas perfect their realisation of dependent-arising qua emptiness together with those whom they

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[139] Longlian, 'Fojiao daodeguan', 10.

[140] Ibid., 9.

[141] Longlian, 'Fojiao de youliang', 19.

intend to help. As such, these Bodhisattvas take the lead in promoting non-harming and other-benefiting for the peaceful co-existence of all sentient beings in the modern world.

In her deliberation on moral ambivalence, Longlian finalizes the mechanics of her moral theory, without refashioning Confucian ethics into an expression of the Bodhisattvas' practice. Using the maxim of dependent-arising qua emptiness, she puts forward a fluid metaphysics of this-worldly phenomenality and other-worldly emptiness. Positioning her moral theory in this fluid metaphysics, Longlian delineates agency through the performance of purposeful action, without assuming an essential self. Such an action-centred view of agency enables her to revalorize karmic efficacy, pluralize social ontology, and diversify moralities. Longlian encourages sentient beings to derive moral values from their own worlds and improve their moral practice gradually. Further repurposing Tibetan Buddhist literature, Longlian suggests that Bodhisattvas can establish concrete interpersonal relationships in this-worldly affairs. Zooming in on the experience of moral ambivalence, she links meta-ethical pluralism with applied ethics to illustrate the skilful flexibility of Bodhisattvas' practice.

As such, Longlian proffers a model of socially engaged Buddhism beyond the project of the Buddhicized family. This model preserves a space for Buddhist women to build their community as their family of dharmic ties. In this community, Buddhist women, especially nuns, take on monastic roles through which they can exercise their agency to perfect their personal cultivation and promote social well-being beyond the modern binary of the public workplace and the private family home. On this front, Longlian's work on morality takes on another layer of importance in Buddhist feminism.

Bibliography

Abbreviations

T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. See Secondary Sources, Takakusu and Watanabe, eds.

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