‘This-Worldly’ Pure Lands and East Asian Modernity

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Abstract: Between the late 1910s and the late 1920s, several Buddhist thinkers across East Asia published doctrinal manifestos that redefined the concept of the Pure Land as an ideal human community—one that could and should be realized in this world. The present study examines a selection of such essays representing three different local contexts—Republican China, Taishō-period Japan, and colonial Taiwan—identifying their shared themes and situating them within broader discussions of Buddhist modernism, particularly the discourse of demythologization. As the study demonstrates, visions of a ‘this-worldly Pure Land’ in modern East Asia were proposed as extensions of the Buddhist tradition of interpretation, which sought to determine the ultimate meaning of Pure Land scriptures in light of other Buddhist texts and doctrines. ‘This-worldly’ reinterpretations were, in various ways and degrees, distinguished from the premodern concept of the ‘Mind-Only Pure Land’ and refocused toward the ethical ideals of Mahāyāna Buddhism, especially those embodied by the altruistic bodhisattva. At the same time, this ‘ethical turn’ in the interpretation of the Pure Land appears to have been grounded in a new understanding of historical time and a distinctly modern notion of progress—conceived as a consciously directed historical process oriented toward a collective expectation of a better future.

Keywords: Taixu, Tang Dayuan, Watanabe Kaigyoku, Shiio Benkyō, Lin Qiuwu, demythologization, Pure Land Buddhism

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1. Introduction: The Phenomenon of This-Worldly Pure Lands

Chinese doctrinal tradition makes a well-known distinction between pure lands understood as paradise-like realms presided by buddhas or bodhisattvas (such as the Western Pure Land of Buddha Amitābha), on the one hand, and the 'Mind-only Pure Land' perceived by an awakened mind on the other. Some modern typologies introduce yet another category: the so-called 'Pure Land(s) in the Human Realm' (*renjian jingtu* 人間淨土),[1] located in the world inhabited and experienced by human beings. Although some contemporary authors cite ancient canonical precedents for this concept, it appears to be of a rather modern origin. It was popularized by two essays written by the monk Taixu 太虛 (1890–1947) and published in his journal *Haichaoyin* 海潮音 [Sound of the Sea Tide] in 1926 and 1931.[2] While ideas expressed in these two texts resist simple generalizations, 'Pure Land in the Human Realm' has usually been understood as an ideal human community of the future that can be realized within the present, 'impure' world through the purifying actions of Buddhist practitioners. Construed in this sense, 'Pure Land in the Human Realm' became one of the keywords of the contemporary movement

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[1] In East Asian Buddhist literature the Chinese term *jingtu* 淨土 (Jp. *jōdo*) can refer to a generalized concept of a pure land, or specifically to the Pure Land of Budda Amitābha, in which case it is often capitalized. Since in the essays discussed in this study the idea of a pure land is closely associated with the imagery of Amitābha's Pure Land, the present study will adopt the latter spelling for the sake of consistency.

[2] Taixu, 'Jianshe renjian jingtu lun' and *idem*, 'Chuangzao renjian jingtu'. The latter text is a transcript of a talk from November 1930, but appeared in *Haichaoyin* in February 1931. For the English translations and studies of both these texts, see Jones, *Taixu's*.

known as Human-Realm or Humanistic Buddhism (*renjian Fojiao* 人間佛教).[3]

The attention paid by scholars to this movement, and to Taixu himself, may have created an impression that 'Pure Land in the Human Realm' is a unique innovation in the history of Pure Land thought. However, Taixu's essays were only one instance in a broader set of similar manifestos that appeared across East Asia within the span of a decade. In 1918, Shiio Benkyō 椎尾弁匡 (1876–1971), a scholar and priest of the Japanese Jōdo school (Jōdo-shū 浄土宗), published a serial essay called 'Jōdokyō to shakai' 浄土教と社会 [Pure Land Buddhism and Society], which culminates in the idea of constructing a 'social Pure Land' (*shakaiteki jōdo* 社会的浄土) in this world.[4] In a published talk dated to 1920, another Jōdo priest, Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡辺海旭 (1872–1933), defined Pure Land Buddhism as a religion of 'spiritual reconstruction' (*seishin no kaizō* 精神の改造) which can transform this imperfect world into a perfected Pure Land.[5] In 1924, Taixu's lay associate Tang Dayuan 唐大圓 (1890[?]–1949) called for the creation of a New Pure Land (*xin jingtu* 新淨土), conceived as a Buddhist response to contemporary socialism and the New Village (*xincun* 新村) movement.[6] In late-1920s Taiwan—then under Japanese colonial rule—the young monk and activist Zhengfeng 證峰, also known under lay name Lin Qiuwu[7] 林秋梧 (1903–1934), urged fellow Buddhists to transform their

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[3] Jones, *Taixu's*, 129–39. As noted by Jones (49–50), Taixu's original concept of the 'Human Realm' is broad enough to include 'other-worldly' realms inhabited by humans according to traditional cosmology. The emphasis on improving the 'earthly' human society is less ambiguous in the second essay.

[4] Shiio, 'Jōdokyō to shakai' (1–3).

[5] Watanabe, 'Sengo shisō oyobi seikatsu no shidō to shite Hōnen Shōnin no kyōgi'. The modern edition quoted here is based on a September 1920 issue of *Zōjōji nichiyō kōenshū* 増上寺日曜講演集.

[6] Tang, *Jianshe xin jingtu*.

[7] Also spelt as Lin Chiu-wu and Lim Tshiu-ngôo. For the sake of consistency, Lin's name and terminology from his works are rendered in Mandarin pronunciation using *hanyu pinyin* romanization.

island into a 'present-world Pure Land' (*xianshi jingtu* 現世淨土). By this he meant an egalitarian and peaceful society in which technological and cultural progress benefits all, regardless of class or ethnicity.[8]

The above list is not meant as an exhaustive catalogue.[9] Further examples of similar ideas may likely be found, also in other modern Buddhist traditions, including Korean and Vietnamese sources. The sample of selected cases has been chosen to illustrate an overlooked pattern: within a relatively short period, roughly corresponding to the decade of the 1920s, several Buddhist thinkers in different parts of East Asia redefined the concept of the Pure Land as an ideal human community that could and should be constructed in this world. They presented this new understanding in the form of doctrinal manifestos published in Buddhist journals. They also labelled it with new adjectives that distinguish their 'this-worldly' Pure Lands from both Western Pure Land and the Mind-only Pure Land of canonical tradition.[10] Moreover, this doctrinal innovation took place

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[8] Unlike other authors discussed in this study, Lin does not devote a separate essay to explaining his idea of a 'present-world Pure Land'. The term features most prominently in 'Jieji douzheng yu Fojiao' from 1929 and reappears in 'Foshuo jiangunü jing jianghua (2)' published in 1933. These two texts are here considered in connection with other works by Lin which clarify and contextualize his idea: the essay 'Wei Taiwan Fojiao rejiao!' from 1928 and a fragment of *Zhenxin zhishuo baihua zhujie* (1933) devoted to a critique of traditional Pure Land Buddhism.

[9] To quote just one example, in a doctrinal debate raised by *Yixin nianfo ji de wangsheng lun* 一心念佛即得往生論 [On the Immediate Rebirth in the Pure Land through the Single-Minded Recollection of the Buddha] by the Chinese monk Shoupei 守培 (1884–1955), Shoupei averred that rebirth in the Pure Land can be achieved in the present life by those who correctly perform their social obligations. See Shoupei, '"Yixin nianfo ji de wangsheng lun" zhi zaibian'. For the full text of the debate, see HWJZ, 274–319.

[10] Watanabe Kaigyoku does not propose such a new adjective for the Pure Land. His rhetorical focus is more on the process of 'reconstruction' which creates the Pure Land in this world. In other respects, his essay is thematically similar enough to those of other authors to warrant its inclusion in the present study.

in *at least* three different local contexts: that of Republican China, Taishō-era Japan, and colonial Taiwan. This diversity of contexts shows that this-worldly Pure Lands are not isolated phenomena specific to individual figures, Buddhist schools, or 'national' Buddhist traditions. They can be studied from a broader perspective, as a phenomenon that includes multiple Pure Land traditions of modern East Asia.

Adopting such a broad perspective, however, poses formidable methodological challenges. The proponents of this-worldly Pure Lands did not refer to one another's writings and did not form a self-conscious movement.[11] Each of them introduced this idea in very specific circumstances that were shaped by their prior writings, specific polemical targets and distinct socio-political realities. There are good reasons, therefore, why previous scholars have tended to analyse these ideas within the intellectual biographies of particular authors. Taixu's visibly evolving notion of the earthly Pure Land has been studied in the context of his modernist reinterpretation of the cult of Buddha Maitreya and his broader projects of bringing Chinese Buddhism closer to 'human life' (*rensheng* 人生) or 'human realm' (*renjian* 人間).[12] Tang Dayuan's 'New Pure Land' is an episode in his quest to ground Pure Land practice in doctrinal understanding based on Consciousness-only (*weishi* 唯識) thought.[13] Lin Qiuwu's worldly idea of the Pure Land represents one motif in his wide-ranging critique of traditional Taiwanese Buddhism, informed by his left-wing political agenda.[14] The Pure Land thought of Shiio and Watanabe

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[11] This is only to say that essays under consideration do not explicitly refer to the ideas mentioned in other essays. The issue of probable mutual inspirations (for example between Tang Dayuan and Taixu) would need to be discussed separately.

[12] See e.g., Li, *Taixu ji qi renjian Fojiao*, 90–104, or Ritzinger, *Anarchy*.

[13] Zamorski, 'An Old Savior in a New Paradise'.

[14] Li, *Taiwan geming seng*, 104–92; Yang, 'Taiwan geming seng', 51–57; Jones, 'Buddhism and Marxism in Taiwan'; Yan, 'Cong "jieji douzheng" dao "xianshi jingtu"'; *idem*, 'Lin Qiuwu "zuoyi foxue"; Jiang, 'Lin Qiuwu de xin pipan chanxue'.

reflects their long-standing academic and practical interest in socially engaged applications of Mahāyāna Buddhism.[15] Moreover, essays considered in this study are not necessarily their authors' final words on the issue of the Pure Land; their thoughts on this subject evolved after publication, sometimes taking them in either more radical or more conservative directions.

A panoramic approach to 'this-worldly' pure lands will inevitably simplify and flatten many of these important nuances. However, such an approach also allows us to pose questions that could not be asked by looking at each individual case in isolation. Individual studies on this-worldly Pure Lands have generally construed them as more or less direct critiques of traditional forms of Pure Land devotion. Conversely, they have identified references to various non-Buddhist ideas that reflect the already Westernized and secular outlook of East Asia in the 1920s such as modern political movements, modern science and technology, and contemporary philosophy of religion. However, this tension between tradition and modernity is difficult to generalize into a consistent picture. In Japan, the parameters of 'Pure Land tradition' were defined by institutionalized schools such as Jōdo-shū, whose orthodoxy emphasized literal belief in Western Pure Land and reliance on Amitābha's Other Power. In China, by contrast, traditional Pure Land practice was much less institutionalized, and more closely associated with self-cultivation and notions of innate Buddhahood. Likewise, modern inspirations behind this-worldly Pure Lands reflect their authors' very diverse backgrounds and the varied ways in which they engaged with Westernized ideas and institutions.[16]

A framework for understanding the tension between tradition

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[15] For secondary studies, see Fujiyoshi, *Gendai no jōdokyō*, 51–171, *idem*, 'Watanabe Kaigyoku'; Serikawa, *Kingendai Bukkyō shisō*, 241–75, Penwell, 'Watanabe Kaigyoku'.

[16] To consider one example: whereas Watanabe Kaigyoku received his doctoral degree from the German Kaiser Wilhelm University in Strasbourg, Taixu encountered Western ideas while pursuing traditional monastic education in China.

and modernity which appears general enough to cover the phenomenon of this-worldly Pure Lands is the idea of demythologization, which previous scholarship has often associated with Buddhist modernism. Heinz Bechert's analysis defines demythologization as 'symbolic interpretation of traditional myths' and 'modernization of the concepts of cosmology'.[17] Drawing on this definition, David McMahan argues that Buddhist modernism 'internalizes what in traditional accounts are ontological realities', but in some cases 'also externalizes them into concrete, visible realities', thus reframing Buddhist practice as a remedy for 'social ills' addressed by contemporary activists. McMahan acknowledges that precedents for non-literal and 'internalized' interpretations of Buddhist cosmology can already be found in pre-modern Asian traditions. Nonetheless, he distinguishes such cases from a distinctively modern tendency: to abandon literal understanding of beliefs sanctioned by the Buddhist canon and to reinterpret them as referring to human consciousness or society.[18] The concept of demythologization (*hishinwaka* 非神話化)—understood as modern 'existential' reinterpretation of traditional beliefs—has also been applied by Fujiyoshi Jikai to the writings of Shiio and Watanabe[19] and at least implied in some previous studies on Taixu.[20] In each case, the discourse of demythologization assumes a very broad notion of modernity as an 'attitude of questioning the present' that originated in the Enlightenment West and which claims to represent the perspective of a rational, autonomous and self-determining subject.[21] Demythologization is conceived as a response to an unprec-

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[17] Bechert, 'Buddhistic Modernism', 255

[18] McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 46–47.

[19] Fujiyoshi, 'Jōdokyō ni okeru hishinwaka no mondai', 158–63, *idem*, 'Watanabe Kaigyoku', 165–66.

[20] See e.g., Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism*, 293; for an overview, see Jones, *Taixu's*, 31–36.

[21] On definition of modernity as discourse that interrogates the present, see Gaonkar, 'On Alternative Modernities', 13–14 (following Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment', 309–12). On modern subjectivity (following Kant and Hegel), see Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 16–18.

edented secular critique of traditional religious beliefs, which either rejects them, or reformulates them in ways that are more believable or relevant to this modern subject.[22] In this broad sense, demythologization can be applied to the basic canonical foundations of all East Asian Pure Land traditions—namely, the scriptural descriptions of the Western Pure Land—as long as these are understood as referring to an objective reality.

Applying this model to the texts examined here, however, raises certain problems. One obvious problem is the case of Taixu, whose image as a 'demythologizer' has been challenged in some recent studies. As has been pointed out by Charles B. Jones and Justin Ritzinger, Taixu's vision of an earthly Pure Land was not meant to supersede the traditional Western Paradise; in fact, it was articulated from the perspective of a fairly conservative Buddhist exegete who upholds many seemingly traditional and other-worldly beliefs.[23] This curious blend of traditional and modern rhetoric can, of course, be explained as logical inconsistency, tactical strategy or some other peculiarity of Taixu's thought. However, it has also been read as evidence that pre-existing concepts of Buddhist modernism need to be revised or fine-tuned to account for the greater role of traditional elements in articulating modernist agendas.[24] The present study adopts this latter approach: it aims to show that interpretive conundrums raised by Taixu's writings apply—in a general sense—to the broader cohort of the advocates of this-worldly Pure Lands. While their ideas certainly represent a critique of Buddhist tradition, they are never simple cases of a modernist backlash against mythical cosmology. As will be shown below, for these authors Buddhist tradition is not only a tradition of literal belief in the other-worldly paradise described in

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[22] On 'critique' as rejection, deconstruction, or demystification which assumes 'reason's capacity to unveil error' see Brown, 'Introduction', 9.

[23] As stated by Justin Ritzinger (*Anarchy in the Pure Land*, 188): 'Taixu deliberately resists attempts to rationalize away pure lands on either worldly or Buddhist grounds. Demythol[o]gization, at least beyond a certain point, is explicitly rejected'. See also Jones, *Taixu's*, 141–44.

[24] Ritzinger, *Anarchy*, 7–12, 17.

canonical scriptures; it is also a tradition of *interpreting* these scriptures in light of other Buddhist texts, as well as principles of Buddhist philosophy and Buddhist ethical ideals. This interpretive tradition already provides some means to circumscribe the realistic understanding of the Pure Land, to 'internalize' it through the concept of purified mind, and relate it to more 'this-worldly' concerns through the concept of bodhisattva spirit. Seen in this light, Buddhist demythologization cannot be understood as a simple shift from literal belief to its critical interpretation; rather, it must be a shift towards *a new kind* of critical interpretation, which addresses distinctly modern concerns.

The present study attempts to identify how this latter shift occurred, and what were the major concerns behind it. This requires discussing several questions: which patterns of traditional interpretation did the authors reject, modify or emphasize in order to represent the Pure Land as 'this-worldly'? To what extent did they have to rely on Western or secular concepts to articulate their stance? In what respect do their own interpretations of the Pure Land introduce a 'modern' perspective in the sense outlined above? In order to answer these questions it will be necessary to investigate, in the first instance, canonical Buddhist inspirations behind the idea of 'this-worldly' Pure Lands: the vision of the Western Pure Land imagined as a paradisiacal land; the exegetical tradition focused on the concept of 'Mind-only Pure Land'; and the ethical ideal of a bodhisattva. After clarifying this background, it will be possible to examine the reasons for which this-worldly Pure Land thinkers went beyond pre-modern attempts at 'symbolic', 'internalized', and 'subjectivized' interpretations of the Pure Land and proposed a new direction of its interpretation.

2. The Western Pure Land versus This-worldly Pure Land

Traditional East Asian imagery of the Pure Land—the world of 'Utmost Bliss' (Ch. *jile*, Jp. *gokuraku* 極樂) presided over by Buddha Amitābha—is mostly derived from the Chinese translations of the so-called Pure Land sūtras. The *Shorter Sukhāvatvyūha*, best known in East Asia as the *Amituo jing* 阿彌陀經 [Jp. Amidakyō; Sūtra of Amitābha] locates Amitābha's realm in the far western quarter of the

universe and expatiates in vivid detail on its blissful and miraculous qualities. The land in question is described as a veritable paradise for Buddhist practitioners—an ideal world that knows no suffering or evil and presents no obstacles for those aspiring to final awakening.[25] The *Longer Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtra* (best known in its early fifth-century Chinese translation as the *Wuliangshou jing* 無量壽經 [Jp. Muryōjukyō; Sūtra on the (Buddha of) Immeasurable Life] explains that this magnificent land was established through the power of vows taken in the distant past by Bodhisattva Dharmākara, the future Buddha Amitābha.[26] Within the text of either sūtra, there is no explicit philosophical commentary that would qualify these mythical descriptions, or suggest that they are merely 'symbols' intended to convey some other meaning. In principle, what the *Sukhāvatīvyūha* sūtras tell us about the Pure Land might be read as a description of a paradise-like realm that really exists—as, in fact, it has been read by many pious Buddhists since the first centuries of the common era.

When the authors discussed in this paper mention the 'Pure Land' they usually assume that their readers will associate this concept with the other-worldly imagery described above. However, they also qualify their visions of the Pure Land with adjectives such as 'human-realm', 'present-world', 'social', or simply 'new'. Such qualifications clearly suggest that these visions are based on a certain *interpretation* of this concept. None of the authors discussed in this study have much to say about the theory behind their interpretation and its methods. However, its mechanism can be observed in those passages which directly quote or paraphrase scriptural descriptions of the Western Pure Land's glories such as palaces of gold and towers of jade, trees adorned with jewels, and food and clothing appearing spontaneously before those in need. According to the Taiwanese monk Lin Qiuwu, these are descriptions of a 'happy' and 'equal' society that lacks nothing in terms of housing, transport, hygiene,

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[25] See Eltschinger, 'Pure Land Sūtras', 215–23. For the English translations of both Sanskrit and Chinese versions of the *Sukhāvatī-vyūha* texts, see Gomez, *Land of Bliss*.

[26] Eltschinger, 'Pure Land Sūtras', 215–20.

affluence, and facilities for enjoyment. Thus understood, the Pure Land corresponds to the Marxist ideal of a classless society providing for everyone according to their skills and needs.[27] For Watanabe Kaigyoku, the Pure Land sūtras intend to describe a world in which 'imperfect matter' becomes perfected, whereas human life becomes 'rational and ideal'.[28] The glorious figure of the Buddha, on the other hand, demonstrates the purified spirit of those who create and inhabit such an ideal world.[29] Shiio Benkyō likewise interprets the canonical descriptions of the Western Pure Land as easily understood approximations of a reality where 'proper conditions' occur spontaneously—in stark contrast to the present world which is lacking in beauty, comfort, and wisdom.[30] In Taixu's essays a similar kind of interpretation extends not only to Amitābha's land, but a wider variety of supernatural realms described in canonical literature; in general: 'the pure lands referred to in the Buddhist canon are posited in opposition to our present defiled world'.[31]

As can be seen, for these authors, seemingly mythical descriptions of the Western Pure Land are significant mostly because they reveal something important about the present reality—namely, that it is not yet materially perfect, rationally organized, or ethically just. Its splendid characteristics are meant to bring into relief the pitiful state of the worldly affairs, often described in very concrete terms that reflect turbulent politics of the 1920s East Asia such as social injustices of colonial Taiwan, 'labour issues' plaguing Japanese society, and dangers posed to China by internal and external political forces.[32]

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[27] Lin, 'Jieji douzheng yu Fojiao', 56–57; *idem*, 'Foshuo jiangunü jing jianghua (2)', 22–24.

[28] Watanabe, 'Sengo shisō', 73 (これ不完全なる物質が完全となり、生活其他のものが合理的理想的なるものとなることであって...).

[29] Ibid.

[30] Shiio, 'Jōdokyō to shakai' (2), 4–5.

[31] Jones, *Taixu's*, 121 (Taixu, 'Chuangzao renjian jingtu', 5: 在佛典中所謂淨土, 是與我們現所居的穢土比對而言). For a summary of this motif in Taixu's essays, see Jones, *Taixu's*, 42–44.

[32] Lin, 'Jieji douzheng yu Fojiao', 56–57; 'Foshuo jiangunü jing jianghua (2)',

It may be surmised that the intended aim of this reinterpretation is to make the Western Pure Land more believable and more relatable to the experience of modern people. In this sense, it may indeed be considered as an 'implicit' case of demythologization in the sense outlined above.[33] There is, however, an important caveat. Rudolf Bultmann's original notion of demythologization (*Entmythologisierung*), as proposed in his famous 1941 essay 'New Testament and Mythology', was not intended to describe *any* interpretation of religious text that is symbolic and more consistent with modern expectations. Rather, it referred to a specific hermeneutical method (the so-called 'existential interpretation') of reading the New Testament, which was consciously differentiated from what Bultmann called 'previous attempts at demythologization'. Bultmann distinguishes demythologization from the ancient tradition of allegorical interpretation, which 'spiritualizes' mythical events into 'processes within the soul' but still preserves the original literal meaning of the text. According to Bultmann, since a traditional allegorical approach keeps the literal meaning intact, it cannot address the dilemma of contemporary believers, who can no longer reconcile a literal understanding of their sacred scriptures with a modern 'scientific worldview'.[34] At the same time, Bultmann distinguishes his own approach from modernist philosophical interpretations of Christian religion which in his opinion reduce Jesus Christ to a teacher of morals or symbol of impersonal truths. As a Christian theologian, Bultmann seeks a new guiding principle for interpreting the New Testament—one that would accommodate modern secular critique of religion, and yet preserve the significance of the story of Jesus, instead of debunking it as a mere myth.[35]

23; Watanabe, 'Sengo shisō', 75–76, Taixu, 'Jianshe renjian jingtu lun', 5 (Jones, *Taixu's*, 58).

[33] For the notion of implicit demythologization, see McMahan, *The Making*, 49.

[34] Bultmann, 'New Testament and Mythology', 13. See also Ricoeur, 'Preface to Bultmann', 58.

[35] Bultmann, 'New Testament and Mythology', 13–15; *idem*, 'Jesus Christ and Mythology', 310–11.

Looking back at this-worldly Pure Lands with this more original understanding of demythologization in mind, we can observe several important differences. First, in comparison with Bultmann, East Asian authors appear much less concerned with the inevitable collapse of literal faith in confrontation with modern science. In the essays discussed here one can find only scattered allusions to the scorn and disbelief with which contemporary people view Pure Land faith. However, there is no unanimous tendency to discard this literal faith as incompatible with modernity. Lin Qiuwu, the most impatient critic of naïve devotion, insists that 'modern people' should no longer be told about the 'future-worldly Pure Land' (來世的淨土), which may be appealing only to elderly villagers; they should only be taught about the 'present-worldly Pure Land', which can be constructed everywhere (in particular, on the island of Taiwan) and whose possibility can be demonstrated by science.[36] However, such iconoclastic rhetoric makes Lin an outlier in the sample. Taixu's arguably most disparaging remark concerning the Western Pure Land can be found in his 1930 lecture on 'Constructing the Pure Land in the Human Realm'; there, he criticizes those Buddhists who only aspire for better rebirth in the next life while neglecting efforts to improve the present world. Yet, in a preceding passage of the same essay, Taixu avers that Amitābha's Western Pure Land may well exist on one of the planets observable by contemporary astronomers.[37] The remaining essays do not even raise the issue of Western Pure Land's scientific plausibility. As will be shown below, some of them explicitly argue for an understanding of the Pure Land as a real place, rather than merely an idea or symbol.

This difference between Buddhist authors and Bultmann should not be seen as evidence of their lack of awareness of modern tensions between religion and science.[38] It is, rather, a reflection of a different

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[36] Lin, 'Jieji douzheng yu Fojiao', 56.

[37] Taixu, 'Chuangzao renjian jingtu', 5 (Jones, *Taixu's*, 121–22).

[38] For the Japanese context of this issue, see Kashiwahara, 'Changes', 7–30. For Taixu and Tang Dayuan's views on Buddhism and science, see Hammerstrom, *The Science of Chinese Buddhism*.

approach, which puts more trust in the traditional patterns of scriptural exegesis. For Buddhist 'demythologizers' the basic framework for discussing Western Pure Land is not the modern contrast between myth and science, but rather the traditional distinction between an ultimate and provisional sense of Buddhist teachings.[39] Even for Lin Qiuwu, the Western Pure Land retains some vestigial significance as (already outdated) 'teaching expedient' (教化方便), a provisional mode of Buddhist teaching which conforms to listeners' expectations and limitations, but intends to guide them towards the ultimate truth.[40] For authors such as Taixu, Shiio Benkyō or Tang Dayuan, who defend the 'real' existence of the Pure Land, this 'reality' is always understood in a specific sense circumscribed by Buddhist philosophy of mind (Ch. *xin*, Jp. *shin* 心) and dharma-realm (Skt. *dharmadhātu*, Ch. *fajie*, Jp. *hokkai* 法界). In sum, a 'this-worldly' interpretation is not explicitly introduced as a new and distinctively modern way of reading Pure Land sūtras. Rather, it is implicitly understood as an exposition of their ultimate meaning in a more traditional sense.

As has been pointed out, in the Christian context Bultmann equates traditional interpretation of religious texts with an interpretation that preserves their literal meaning, while adding additional layers of symbolic meanings. It is debatable to what extent this observation can be applied to pre-modern patterns of interpreting Pure Land scriptures, which often construe their meaning in light of the Buddhist philosophy of emptiness, mind, and the doctrine of Buddha-Nature. While the literalism of *Sukhāvatīvyūha* sūtras may allow for some comparisons with the New Testament, canonical passages in other sūtras claim that the Pure Land can be attained by purifying one's own mind,[41] or imply that Buddha Amitābha is not different from the mind which cognizes this buddha.[42] By juxtapos-

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[39] Lamotte, 'Assessment', 4–24, esp. 17.

[40] As opposed to the 'true faith of the Patriarchal Tradition' (祖門正信)—a reference to Chan. See Lin, 'Zhenxin zhishuo', 8.

[41] See the next section of this paper.

[42] E.g., passages from *Banzhou sanmei jing* 般舟三昧經 [Pratyutpan-

ing such claims with the imagery derived from the *Sukhāvatīvyūha* sūtras, pre-modern East Asian exegetes arrived at the concepts of 'Mind-only Pure Land' (Ch. *weixin jingtu*, Jp. *yuishin jōdo* 唯心淨土) and 'Self-Nature Amitābha' (*zixing Mituo*, Jp. *jishō* [*no*] *Mida* 自性彌陀), which (depending on interpretation) either challenge, or at least qualify, the other-worldly character of the Pure Land. All authors discussed in this essay are aware of this traditional exegetical discourse. In fact, as will be discussed below, the idea of 'Mind-only Pure Land' provides them with an indispensable, although ambiguous, context against which they define their own understanding of Pure Land's 'this-worldliness'.

3. This-worldly Pure-Land versus Mind-only Pure Land

The concept of 'Mind-only Pure Land' has a complex doctrinal history that developed along different trajectories in China and Japan. The basic idea associated with this formula may perhaps be illustrated by the famous quote from Kumārājīva's translation of the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* from the fifth century:

> Therefore (...), if a bodhisattva wishes to attain a pure land he should purify his mind. According to the purity of his mind is his buddha land pure! 是故(...)若菩薩欲得淨土, 當淨其心. 隨其心淨, 則佛土淨.[43]

This quote was famously paraphrased in the classic Chan text *Liuzu dashi fabao tanjing* 六祖大師法寶壇經 [The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch], which is usually dated to the eighth century. There, it is used polemically in a sermon that questions the need

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na-samādhi-sūtra] or *Guan Wuliangshoufo jing* 觀無量壽佛經 [Sūtra on Contemplating the Buddha of Immeasurable Life] and their interpretations developed within Tiantai (Tendai) and Chan (Zen) traditions. See e.g., Sueki, *Jōdo shisō ron*, 56–63.

[43] McRae, *The Sutra*, 78; *Weimojie jing*, *T* no. 475, 14: 1.538c4–5.

to seek rebirth in a literally understood Western paradise. The text counsels those who are 'enlightened' not to recite the name of Buddha Amitābha in hope of rebirth in his land after death, but rather to practice good deeds, get rid of evil views and to recognize their 'self-natures' (the true nature of their minds) as identical with those of the buddhas. In this way, the Pure Land many be manifested everywhere, 'right in front' of any diligent practitioner.[44] Due to such sceptical overtones, the ideas of 'Mind-only Pure Land' and 'Self-Nature Amitābha' became an anathema to the orthodox exponents of Japanese Pure Land schools, such as Jōdo-Shū or Jōdo-Shinshū. Those schools traditionally upheld a more realist reading of the Pure Land and put much emphasis on the actual agency of Buddha Amitābha's 'other-Power' (*tariki* 他力).[45] In China, on the other hand, generations of Pure Land apologists defended rebirth in the Western Pure Land as a valid goal of Buddhist practice but also sought to reconcile this belief with the (variously understood) 'Mind-only' approach, using both practical and philosophical arguments.[46]

As can be seen, the concept of 'Mind-only Pure Land' is associated with a way of understanding Pure Land scriptures which is not strictly literal, and yet appears impeccably Buddhist, in the sense of being supported by canonical texts and widely acknowledged doctrinal principles. Understood as a counterpart of the purified mind, the Pure Land can be manifested everywhere—not only in the afterlife, but also in the present world. Moreover, the pithy injunction of the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* may be taken to mean that the responsibility for this purification does not rest with any saviour figure, such as bodhisattva Dharmākara (Buddha Amitābha), but rather with practitioners themselves. At the same time, the sūtra explicitly relates this process to the practice of a bodhisattva—someone who altruistically engages with other 'sentient beings'. In all these respects, the idea of 'Mind-only Pure Land' appears to justify an interpretation in which

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[44] *Liuzu dashi fabao tanjing*, *T* no. 2008, 48: 1.352a13–c11; McRae, *The Platform Sutra*, 38–41.

[45] Shibata, 'Yuishin jōdo' (1), 2.

[46] Jones, *Chinese Pure Land Buddhism*, 106–26.

the Pure Land is a reality continuous with everyday life, rather than an other-worldly land associated with celestial Buddha Amitābha and deceased ancestors.

In spite of these apparent similarities, proponents of this-worldly Pure Lands take remarkably varied stances towards this 'Mind-only' thought. Lin Qiuwu approvingly quotes the critique of Pure Land piety voiced in the *Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch*. In a rhetoric similar to that of the Chan tradition, Lin claims that the Pure Land is not different from this world, that it is not limited to the Western quarter of the universe, and that it can be constructed by the practitioners themselves.[47] The last motif—namely, that practitioners can construct their own Pure Land through cultivating their minds rather than seek to be reborn in Amitābha's Pure Land after death—is also underlined in Taixu's second essay.[48] However, Taixu stops short from explicitly presenting his 'Pure Land in the Human Realm' as a modern adaptation of the 'purified land' of either *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* or the *Platform Sūtra*.[49] According to Charles B. Jones, Taixu hesitated to endorse this perspective, as he regarded it as too optimistic: 'it taught that there is nothing inherently wrong with the present world, and thus no need to expend any effort in reforming it'.[50] References to the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* feature more prominently in the arguments of Watanabe Kaigyoku, whose program of 'purification' as a 'reconstruction' of the present world takes its major cues from this text.[51] Yet, as a priest of the Jōdo school, Watanabe retains the traditional Japanese notion of Pure Land Buddhism as a religion of 'other-Power'. On the other hand, Shiio Benkyō explicitly rejects

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[47] See Lin, 'Wei Taiwan Fojiao rejiao!', 51; *idem*, 'Jieji douzheng', 56. For an explicit endorsement of the *Platform Sūtra*, see Lin, 'Zhenxin zhishuo', 8.

[48] Taixu, 'Chuangzao renjian jingtu', 6. Jones, *Taixu's*, 122.

[49] For an extensive study of this problem, see Goodell, 'Taixu's Pure Land on Earth', 171–200.

[50] Jones, *Taixu's*, 141. In his second essay Taixu describes 'optimists' as those who believe that 'the present world of humanity is already a wondrous pure land'. Ibid., 123.

[51] Watanabe, 'Sengo shisō', 62–63.

the discourse of 'Mind-only Pure Land' and 'Self-Nature Amitābha'. Shiio believes that these concepts are likely to be misunderstood as reducing Pure Land and Amitābha to phenomena internal to one's own individual flesh.[52] Shiio contrasts this with proper understanding based on the idea of 'perfect endowment of form and mind' (Jp. *shikishin engu* 色心圓具), which (in a rough sense) explicates Pure Land as a visible manifestation of the ineffable ultimate reality. From this perspective, Shiio defends the traditional view of the Pure Land as an effectively real place and a manifestation of Amitābha's compassionate intent—in keeping with the theory of 'pointing in the direction [of the Pure Land] and establishing [its] characteristics' (Jp. *shihō rissō* 指方立相) attributed to the seventh-century Chinese patriarch Zendō (Ch. Shandao 善導).[53]

An even more explicit rejection of the 'Mind-only Pure Land' stance can be found in the essay of Tang Dayuan. In the opening lines of this text, Tang invokes the traditional distinction between the two modalities of recollecting' Buddha Amitābha (Ch. *nianfo*, Jp. *nenbutsu* 念佛)—a practice synonymous with Pure Land Buddhism in East Asia:

> To solely seek rebirth [in the Land] of Utmost Bliss by upholding the [Buddha's] name —this is 'recollection [of] phenomenon'; to also be able to penetrate the intrinsic (awakened) Nature of one's own mind—this is 'recollection [of the] principle'. My own idea is different. What the [ancients] describe as two kinds of recollection: of 'phenomenon' and of 'principle', I consider as [mere] recollection of principle—not as recollection of real phenomena. What is [then] recollection of real phenomena? It is what I call 'recollection that leads to establishment of the New Pure Land'. 以但持名求生極樂者為事念. 復能通達即心自性者為理念. 吾意不然. 以彼所說理事二念, 均 是 理 念, 非是真正事念. 念眞正事念云何? 即吾所謂建立新淨土念.[54]

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[52] Shiio, 'Jōdokyō to shakai' (2), 3.

[53] Ibid., (2), 2–6; (3), 4–5; see also Serikawa, *Kingendai Bukkyō*, 263–64.

[54] Tang, 'Jianshe xin jingtu', 7.

To wit: recollecting phenomena (Ch. *shinian* 事念) means reciting Amitābha's name with the purpose of rebirth in a literally understood Western land; 'recollecting the principle' (*linian* 理念) aims at realizing one's inherent Buddha-Nature and innately pure Mind, not unlike the meditative practice of Chan. Tang argues that both these traditional understandings of *nianfo* in fact pertain only to (abstract) 'principles' and do not engage with 'real' phenomena or real facts. This is how Tang introduces his 'New Pure Land': by placing it on the *more* literal side of the spectrum of possible interpretations. This emphasis on the empirical 'reality' of the seemingly utopian 'New Pure Land' becomes clearer in the subsequent paragraphs of Tang's essay. There, he rhetorically contrasts the Buddhist New Pure Land with the failed efforts of non-Buddhists who attempted to create a model human community: the contemporary 'New Village' (*xincun* 新村) movement, and the ancient Chinese Mohist school. By arguing that his New Pure Land is more 'realistic' than those projects, Tang claims that it is not merely a lofty idea or a utopian proposal, but a real place that can actually be manifested and experienced in this world.[55] The New Pure Land can be manifested by ordinary people who engage in their usual occupations as peasants, artisans, merchants and scholars, while reflecting on their lack of permanent self, recollecting Buddha Amitābha in communion with his 'Vow-Power', and purifying their minds from passions and illusions. Tang starkly distinguishes his 'pragmatic' or 'evidence-based' (*shishi qiushi* 實事求是)[56] Pure Land from the 'Mind-only' Pure Land based on the *Vimalakīrti-sutra*, which can be established merely by 'performing Buddha-Recollection to purify one's mind'.[57] In the somewhat cryptic coda of his essay, Tang insists that Amitābha the compassionate saviour and his glorious land are both to be understood as real entities—no less real than the practitioners themselves.[58]

As a call for a more concrete and empirical understanding of the

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[55] Tang, 'Jianshe xin jingtu', 8–10.

[56] Ibid., 9.

[57] Ibid., 11.

[58] Ibid.

Pure Land, Tang's essay articulates a sentiment that appears to be widely shared among the discussed authors. None of them present Pure Land practice as a quest for meditative insight with regard to one's own true nature. Conversely, all of them underline the close connection between the construction of the Pure Land and the secular concerns of ordinary people. Watanabe Kaigyoku regards business, manual labour and education as different forms of 'auxiliary practices' (Jp. *jogyō* 助行) that accompany Buddha-recollection.[59] In an even more down-to-earth manner, Taixu's second essay mentions politics (government), industry, education, arts and morals as key factors that must work together if the present world is to become more like a Pure land.[60] Lin Qiuwu conceives of the Pure Land as a place that satisfies such basic human needs as efficient transport, hygienic environment and opportunities for leisure.[61] Understood as an earthly paradise, the Land of the Utmost Bliss:

> (...) is not a kind of 'utopia', nor a piecemeal 'idea'. It is a place that can easily be reached by all those who have resolve, who diligently strive forward, the revolutionaries (not seditious rebels) (...) 也不是一種的烏托斯邦(Utopia), 一片的概念(Idea); 是有心人, 精進者, 革命家(不是謀叛者)個個都容易得到的地方.[62]

In comparison with the 'Mind-only Pure Land', there is clearly a shift of emphasis: from the recovery of the inherent purity of mind towards action aimed at improving the external world; and from the somewhat elitist practice of self-cultivation to a more inclusive range of this-worldly activities. In either case, the new interpretation locates the Pure Land not so much 'only in the Mind' as within the realm of human interactions. In this way, 'purification' can be presented as an egalitarian and a universally accessible practice, which does not require extensive meditative training or a profound under-

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[59] Watanabe, 'Sengo shisō', 71.

[60] Taixu, 'Chuangzao renjian jingtu', 7. Jones, *Taixu's*, 124.

[61] Lin, 'Jieji douzheng', 56.

[62] Lin, 'Wei Taiwan Fojiao rejiao!', 51–52.

standing of Buddhist philosophy. Its result—the 'purified land'—can be imagined as intersubjectively perceivable and demonstrable to everyone, rather than perceived through individual insight. At the same time, the construction of a this-worldly Pure Land is presented as a collective effort, not a solitary practice aimed at one's own self-liberation. As succinctly stated by Tang Dayuan, one cannot 'merely seek a vain repose in one's own Pure Land, without caring for others'.[63]

In sum, the explicit or implicit reservations against a Mind-only Pure Land expressed in the studied essays can be narrowed down to certain problematic implications of the concept of 'Mind-only', which appears to limit the Pure Land to an experience of an individual subject. In a similar vein, none of the discussed authors adopts an interpretation which 'internalizes' Buddha Amitābha as a symbol of one's own inherently enlightened 'self-Nature'. Excluding the works of Lin Qiuwu (who dismisses Amitābha as a literary figure)[64] and the second essay of Taixu (which also strongly emphasizes the agency of practitioners) all essays considered here endorse Amitābha—or bodhisattva Dharmākara, Amitābha in his causal stage—as an embodiment of compassion whose inspiration is crucial for transforming this imperfect world into a pure land.[65] As someone who makes vows to create his Pure Land, and perseveres in constructing it through effort and sacrifice, the figure of Dharmākara/Amitābha serves as a reminder that the Pure Land is an *inter*subjective reality, created for the sake of, and together with, other 'sentient beings'.

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[63] Tang, 'Jianshe xin jingtu', 7 (猶不可徒安住自己的淨土, 不顧他人). For a similar statement of Watanabe, see 'Sengo shisō', 77–78. In a later work Shiio defines the Pure Land as a 'world in which one socially co-exists with others' (*Shakai no shūkyō*, 245: 決して個人的のものではない...社会的に共存して居る世界である).

[64] Lin, 'Zhenxin zhishuo', 8. For Lin's critique of the notion of 'other-Power', see also Yan, 'Cong jieji douzheng', 159, 159 n. 42.

[65] Watanabe, 'Sengo shisō', 69, 78; Shiio, 'Jōdokyō to shakai' (2), 2–5; Taixu, 'Jianshe renjian jingtu lun', 36–39; Jones, *Taixu's*, 112–20, Tang, 'Jianshe xin jingtu', 8–11.

4. The Ethical Turn

As the above examples show, while the idea of a this-worldly Pure Land is closely linked to a critique of traditional ways of understanding and practicing the Pure Land, this critique does not focus on the issue of outdated mythical cosmology. The problem at stake, is rather, the degree of ethical commitment expected from Buddhist practitioners. When Taixu and Lin Qiuwu criticize popular Pure Land devotion, it is mostly because they perceive its preoccupation with 'other-worldly' rebirth as selfish escapism reminiscent of theistic religions, such as Christianity, or the Buddhist 'Small Vehicle'.[66] When Shiio Benkyō or Tang Dayuan refuse to endorse traditional views on 'Mind-only Pure Land', it is because they fear it implies reduction of the Pure Land to the interior domain of solitary experience. In either case, traditional views on the Pure Land are reconsidered as contrary to the spirit of the Great Vehicle of Buddhism, the Mahāyāna, which is constituted by the ideal of a compassionate bodhisattva.

The crux of this argument is not by any means new. One of the most influential texts in the history of East Asian Pure Land Buddhism is an apologetic treatise called *Jingtu shiyi lun* 淨土十疑論 [Ten Doubts about the Pure Land] traditionally attributed to the famous scholiast Tiantai Zhiyi 天台智顗 (538–597). The first doubt discussed in this text confronts Pure Land aspirants with the following quandary:

> All the Buddhas and bodhisattvas have taken great compassion to be their activity, and thus they should only desire birth within the three worlds, in the five impurities and in the three paths (of painful rebirth), in order that they might save all the creatures therein from pain. For what reason therefore do they seek rebirth in the Pure Land? This is forsaking all creatures and putting one's own self at ease; this is not great compassion; this is only for one's own benefit,

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[66] Taixu, 'Chuangzao renjian jingtu', 6; Jones, *Taixu's*, 122. See also Yang, 'Taiwan geming seng', 55–56.

> and this hinders the way of Bodhi. 諸佛菩薩以大悲為業, 若欲救度眾, 秖應願生三界, 於五濁三塗中救苦眾生. 因何求生淨土自安其身, 捨離眾生則是無大慈悲, 專為自利, 障菩提道.[67]

The author's response (which follows a similar argument from an earlier treatise by the Pure Land apologist Daochuo 道綽, 562–645)[68] is that bodhisattva practice is simply too difficult for ordinary people living in the turbulent conditions of the present world. The weak 'worldlings' (Ch. *fanfu*, Jp. *bonbu* 凡夫) ought to prioritize striving for a rebirth in the Western Pure Land after death. They can successfully practice a bodhisattva's lofty altruism only after they have developed awakened minds in the setting of Amitābha's land. In contrast with this minimalistic solution suggested by the author of the medieval treatise, this-worldly Pure Land thinkers claim that aspiration towards a *properly understood* Pure Land is never solely intended for one's own benefit. In this case, proper understanding of the Pure Land cannot be elucidated only by aligning it with Buddhist doctrinal principles. It still needs to be demonstrated how these doctrinal principles can be convincingly related to ethical concerns of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

In China, Taixu and Tang Dayuan resolve this problem by putting an activist spin on their interpretation of Consciousness-only (*weishi* 唯識) thought. They explain how one's environment, or intersubjectively shared reality, can be shaped by the individual 'power of the mind', or by bringing to fruition one's good 'seeds' (Skt. *bīja*, Ch. *zhongzi* 種子) contained within individual consciousness. They combine such motifs with Huayan-inspired metaphysics of the 'Dharma-realm' (*fajie* 法界)—or simply 'the universe' (*yuzhou* 宇宙)—in which wholesome actions of an individual can influence the totality of an interconnected cosmos.[69] Lin Qiuwu proposes a

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[67] Pruden, *Ching-t'u-shi-yi-lun*, 133; *Jingtu shi yi lun*, *T* no. 1961, 47: 1.77b24–27.

[68] *An le ji*, *T* no. 1958, 47: 1. 9a10–a21.

[69] See Taixu, 'Chuangzao renjian jingtu', 5, 6–8; Jones, *Taixu's*, 122, 124–25; and Tang, 'Jianshe xin jingtu', 10–11.

socially egalitarian interpretation of Buddha-Nature thought centred on the notion of 'One Buddha' (*yi fo* 一佛): the essential unity of all sentient beings, mediated by their common inherent Buddhahood.[70] The Japanese priests predictably look in the direction of the canonical texts of their own Jōdo school: they quote mostly from the Pure Land sūtras, the *Jingtu lun* 淨土論 [Pure Land Treatise] attributed to Vasubandhu, works of Shandao and Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212). They highlight those passages that are amenable to altruistic and activist interpretations, and propose new interpretations of those passages that might have been understood as promoting selfish escapism. For example, Watanabe argues at length that traditional calls to 'despise [this] defiled land' (Jp. *onri edo* 厭離穢土) and 'aspire for the [other-worldly] Pure Land' (*gongu jōdo* 欣求浄土)[71] are meant to instil a sense of dissatisfaction with the present condition of the world, and to motivate selfless engagement in worldly affairs.[72]

For the authors discussed in this essay, this 'ethical turn' in the interpretation of the Pure Land amounts to recovering its original spirit—if not its letter—as a Mahāyāna teaching. At the same time, it is quite apparent that in this process they propose new readings of the tradition, which have no clear precedents in pre-modern Buddhist literature. In fact, by redefining the Pure Land as an (essentially)[73] human community transformed by moral values, they enter a territory which was not even traditionally regarded as the intellectual 'home turf' of Buddhist thinkers. Perhaps for this reason, this-worldly Pure Lands are so often juxtaposed with (usually better known) non-Bud-

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[70] Yang, 'Taiwan geming seng', 48–57.

[71] Terms popularized by Ōjōyōshū 往生要集 by Genshin 源信 (942–1017). See *T* no. 2682, 84: 1: 33a11, 15.

[72] Watanabe, 'Sengo shisō', 65. For similar arguments by Shiio, see 'Jōdokyō to shakai', 2–6.

[73] Lin Qiuwu argues that bodhisattva's resolve to bring happiness and remove suffering includes not only all humankind, but also 'all living beings' (一切生物; Lin, 'Foshuo jiangunü jing' (2), 22). Watanabe Kaigyoku mentions an attitude of 'reverence' (*kyōkei* 恭敬) that extends even towards a grain of rice or a blade of grass (Watanabe, 'Sengo shisō', 75).

dhist conceptions of ideal communities. Taixu's foundational essay about the Pure Land in the Human Realm from 1926 lists as much as six categories of utopias culled from Indian mythology, Christian theology, Daoist and Confucian thought, ancient Western philosophy and modern literature.[74] Tang Dayuan concedes that his idea of a New Pure Land is actually 'fairly similar' to the goals of the 'socialist' New Village movement.[75] Lin Qiuwu states that the Buddhist Land of Utmost Bliss is essentially no different from the classless '[communist] society expected by the Marxists'[76] and refers to the society of Great Unity (*Datong* 大同)—the quintessential utopia of modernizing China.[77]

These comparisons introduce certain paradoxes. Their explicit aim is to portray the Buddhist concept of the Pure Land as the ultimate and superior vision of an ideal human community—one which incorporates all valid insights of non-Buddhist utopias, while avoiding their limitations. At the same time, by adducing secular visions of ideal societies, this-worldly Pure Land thinkers concede that proper interpretation of the Pure Land may require a frame of reference which is, after all, not limited to canonical Buddhist texts and ideas. In fact, non-Buddhist notions mentioned above are invoked in their writings not only to clarify the new interpretation of the Pure Land, but also to articulate the guiding principle of its interpretation—the Mahāyāna ideal of compassion. For example, Taixu redefines 'Dharma-realm' as a social ideal by comparing it to the society of Great Unity;[78] Lin Qiuwu describes those undertaking the practice of a bodhisattva as 'harbingers of social revolution', relating this concept to Marxist ideas;[79] and Watanabe and Shiio couch their interpreta-

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[74] Taixu, 'Jianshe renjian jingtu lun', 24. Jones, *Taixu's*, 93–94.

[75] Tang, 'Jianshe xin jingtu', 9.

[76] Lin, 'Jieji douzheng yu Fojiao', 56–57 (馬克思主義所期待的XX社會). The two Xs are censored references to a forbidden political ideology; see Yang, 'Taiwan geming seng', 54 n. 33.

[77] Lin, 'Jieji douzheng', 54–57.

[78] Zamorski, 'Dharma-realm', 104–07.

[79] Jones, 'Buddhism and Marxism', 96 (Lin, 'Foshuo jiangunü jing' (2), 22: 能

tions of Mahāyāna in a broader discourse on religion (*shūkyō* 宗教) as a force for 'reconstruction' and improvement of society.[80] As these examples indicate, although the ethical reinterpretation of the Pure Land tradition is clearly an attempt to restore its status as an authentic Mahāyāna teaching, it also introduces certain new assumptions that were shaped outside the canonical Buddhist framework.

5. The Modern Keywords: Society and Progress

So far it has been shown how this-worldly Pure Land thinkers tend to present their ideas as products of 'intra-Buddhist' doctrinal critique which reconsiders literal meaning of the Pure Land in light of Buddhist doctrinal principles. 'This-worldliness' of a Pure Land is presented not as a modern innovation, but rather as straightforward restatement, or an obvious implication, of Buddhist doctrinal principles: the idea that descriptions of the Western Pure Land should be interpreted in light of their ultimate meaning; the claim that the Pure Land can be coextensive with this very world; and the postulate that the Pure Land is constructed by bringing benefit to others. At the same time, in the essays considered in this study these ostensibly traditional principles are often expressed with words of Western origin that were only recently borrowed, (or perhaps, 'reappropriated') into literary Japanese and Chinese.[81] In some cases, such a choice of words may be understood as a secular paraphrase of Buddhist doctrinal jargon or its translation into a language more accessible to contemporary readers. Quite often, however, these new concepts convey substantially new ideas that could hardly have been meaningfully expressed with the language of pre-modern doctrinal tradition.

One such unmistakably modern keyword that is ubiquitous in

修菩薩行的便是社會改革的前衛分子).

[80] See e.g., Watanabe, 'Sengo shisō', 60; Shiio explores these ideas in more detail in *Shakai no shūkyō*, 25–30.

[81] On the 'reappropriation' of Western concepts in modern East Asia, see Koyasu, 'Posuto ahen sensō', 131–34.

descriptions of this-worldly Pure Lands is the notion of 'society' (Ch. *shehui* 社會, Jp. *shakai* 社会). Taixu literally defines the Pure Land as 'a kind of good society'.[82] Lin Qiuwu prefers the expression 'a happy society'.[83] Tang Dayuan's manifesto mentions 'socialism' (*shehuizhuyi* 社會主義) as a secular counterpart of his movement to establish a 'New Pure Land'. The term 'society' is also one of the keywords in the manifestos of Watanabe and Shiio—both of whom were included by Fujiyoshi Jikai in the so-called 'social faction' of the Jōdo school (*jōdo-shū shakaiha* 浄土宗社会派).[84] In the 1920s, the concept of 'society' was still a relatively recent addition to the vocabulary of East Asian Buddhists and a clear proof of the ongoing 'Westernization' of their language.[85] At the same time, its application to the Pure Land is clearly one of these cases where a new word is not merely a fashionable buzzword. Redefining the Pure Land as a kind of 'society' points to a deeper change in the understanding of this concept.

The Pure Land depicted in the Buddhist canon (and, it may be added, traditional Buddhist art) consists of a retinue of pious practitioners who undergo perpetual instruction from the celestial Amitābha in blissful surroundings that do not require any mundane effort on their part; their community is hierarchical and static and provides fairly limited variety of mutual interactions. As suggested by the Chinese Buddhist revivalist Yang Wenhui 楊文會 (1837–1911), a modern analogy for the Pure Land is probably a 'gigantic school' or a Buddhist seminary.[86] This-worldly pure lands, however, are clearly meant to be communities of a different kind: they are populated by

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[82] Jones, *Taixu's*, 120; Taixu, 'Chuangzao renjian jingtu', 4 (良好之社會). Taixu also referred to the Pure Land as an 'already enlightened society'; see Taixu, *Wei mo jie jing jiwen xu*, *TX* no. 19, 30: 905: 已經覺悟的社會.

[83] Lin, 'Foshuo jiangunü jing' (2), 22 (快活的社會).

[84] This term apparently originated with Fujiyoshi Jikai's 1979 article 'Jōdo shū shakai ha no hito bito'. See also Fujiyoshi, *Gendai no jōdokyō*, 72–73, 94–95; and Serikawa, *Kingendai Bukkyō shisō*, 153.

[85] Jin and Liu, *Guannianshi*, 175–219, Kimura, 'Meijiki ni okeru shakai gainen', 244–65.

[86] Yang, *Yang Renshan Quanji*, 132 (極大學堂).

people of various occupations and backgrounds who cooperate in various ways to achieve their common goals. Such 'horizontal' bonds between like-minded Buddhists had certainly been recognized in pre-modern Pure Land *praxis*: in the 'Lotus societies' of Amitābha devotees in China or movements that evolved into Japanese Pure Land schools. In fact, Taixu (in his 1926 essay) and Tang Dayuan appear to model their new visions of Pure Lands on idealized Buddhist communities.[87] However, this-worldly Pure Lands are conceived on a much bigger scale and with a much more complex structure than typical religious associations. Watanabe and Tang envisage them as cosmopolitan communities that will progressively embrace the entire humanity;[88] others emphasize how this process begins with an overhaul of local political communities. 'If people today could apply their minds to good and bring forth pure thoughts'—asks Taixu—'then how hard would it be to turn this impure and evil China into a Chinese pure land?'.[89] Lin Qiuwu implores Taiwanese Buddhists to 'extinguish completely all the demons and monsters that inhabit the island of Taiwan—whether they are visible or not' and to transform Taiwan into the 'most peaceful and joyous Land of Ultimate Bliss for the Taiwanese'.[90] Shiio Benkyō muses about 'negating one's own self', 'abandoning one's little ego', and becoming one with the household (*ie* 家), country (*kokka* 国家) and society (*shakai* 社会) as a prerequisite for creating his 'social' Pure Land. In this way, he effectively coordinates 'this-worldly' interpretation of Pure Land Buddhism with conservative ideology—foreshadowing his subsequent involvement in the now infamous 'Imperial Way Buddhism'.[91]

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[87] Tang, 'Jianshe xin jingtu', 11; Taixu, 'Jianshe renjian jingtu lun', 26–29 (Jones, *Taixu's*, 98–101).

[88] Tang, 'Jianshe xin jingtu', 9; Watanabe, 'Sengo shisō', 70–71.

[89] Jones, *Taixu's*, 122; Taixu, 'Chuangzao renjian jingtu', 5–6 (今日若能以良好之心知, 發純正之思想...亦何難轉濁惡之中國, 一變而為淨土之中國耶).

[90] Lin, 'Wei Taiwan Fojiao rejiao!', 52 (把臺灣島內有形無形一切魑魅魍魎，消除盡淨...台灣人的一個安安穩穩快快活活的極樂世界).

[91] Shiio, 'Jōdokyō to shakai' (3), 2; Serikawa, *Kingendai Bukkyō*, 261. For Shiio's engagement in the Imperial Way Buddhism, see Victoria, *Zen at War*, 81–84.

Redefining the Pure Land as an enlightened counterpart of secular societies explains why its new definitions are replete with references to modern politics. It may again be observed that the political application of Pure Land imagery is not, in itself, a modern phenomenon. It is enough to recall the example of Sui Yangdi's 隋煬帝 imperial edict from 581 that proclaims 'fields of this world as becoming forever identical with the Buddha-land'.[92] In the case of modern authors, however, the Pure Land becomes politicized in a very specific sense. As has already been observed, this-worldly Pure Lands are often described not only as places free from ignorance and suffering, but also as societies free from conflicts and tensions characteristic of modernity: imperialist aggressions, bloody revolutions, and other forms of disharmony between nations and social classes.[93] Transformation of an impure society into a perfected Pure Land is not only supposed to spiritually enlighten or uplift people who are undergoing such secular tribulations, but actually avert such disasters by infusing societies with Buddhist values. In this sense, construction of this-worldly Pure Land is a process that is supposed to occur within secular history of respective societies, and which is intended to *shape* this history in a desired way. Some this-worldly Pure Land thinkers may understand this process as restoration of the world's original purity—in keeping with the traditional East Asian 'Buddha-Nature' thought. In general, it is expressed with words that suggest future-oriented movement associated with contemporaneous secular activism: 'reconstruction' or 'transformation' (Ch. *gaizao*, Jp. *kaizō* 改造), 'revolution' (Ch. *geming* 革命), 'advancement' (Jp. *kōjō* 向上), 'construction' (Ch. *jianshe*, Jp. *kensetsu* 建設), or simply 'progress' (Ch. *jinbu*, Jp. *shinpo* 進步, Ch. *jinhua*, Jp. *shinka* 進化).

Considering the above, we may argue that in this-worldly dis-

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[92] Wright, *Buddhism*, 67.

[93] Not all discussed authors are equally explicit in this regard. In the essays of Tang Dayuan (cf. 'Jianshe xin jingtu', 8) and Shiio Benkyō such overtly political themes are only hinted at, rather than enumerated. However, both these authors make clear that their interpretation of the Pure Land is supposed to resolve all range of problems afflicting contemporary societies.

course the concept of the Pure Land becomes 'temporalized' in the sense suggested by Reinhart Koselleck: 'conceived and used in a way in which the change of the existing conditions is desirable, necessary, and therefore required'.[94] Koselleck understood such 'temporalization' of concepts as a distinctively modern development which reflects a new understanding of historical time, one which began to take shape around the eighteenth century in Western Europe. This new understanding breaks with traditional metaphors which portrayed flow of time in terms of degenerative 'aging' or cyclical return of successive natural phases; it introduces the new idea of progress, understood as a historical process that is consciously arranged in an expectation of a better future. Koselleck maintains that before this change the concept of 'moving forward' (*profectus*, *progressus*), a future-oriented improvement, typically referred to individual spiritual advancement on the path to salvation.[95] This pre-modern notion of 'spiritual progress' did not contradict belief in the world's decline; it was not orientated towards the 'earthly future' and 'inner-worldly goals' of human society, but rather towards individual perfection and the other-worldly Kingdom of God.[96] The modern idea of progress, on the other hand, is defined by a collective expectation of a future that will be radically different from, and better than, what has hitherto been experienced. This expectation can be translated into organized action which is consciously intended to shape the course of history in a desired direction: 'Progress as historical experience is redeemable only if the people are conscious of their task of arranging or staging this progress'.[97]

Koselleck's narrative cannot be straightforwardly projected on the intellectual context of East Asia. However, it may still be argued that it provides some important clues for understanding the conceptual change that occurred in discussed essays with regard to the notion

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[94] Koselleck, 'The Temporalisation of Concepts', 22.

[95] Koselleck, '"Progress" and "Decline"', 221–29; *idem*, 'The Temporalisation of Concepts', 16–24.

[96] Koselleck, 'Progress and Decline', 224, 225, 229.

[97] Koselleck, 'The Temporalisation of Concepts', 19.

of the Pure Land. In the Buddhist tradition the idea of aspiring for rebirth in an 'other-worldly' Western Land after death is indeed linked to belief in an inescapable decline of the present world. As argued by the aforementioned monk Daochuo, after the departure of the historical Buddha, human capacities for self-cultivation undergo an unstoppable decline, culminating in the present age of the Latter Dharma (Ch. *mofa*, Jp. *mappō* 末法).[98] This fatalistic assessment resembles traditional concepts which Koselleck considers as antithetical to the modern concept of progress. The 'Mind-only' paradigm of Pure Land practice assumes a more optimistic stance, according to which one's present condition can be improved by transformative self-cultivation, or by realizing the potential of purity inherent in one's own mind. The authors discussed in this essay go beyond this traditional notion of purification of mind, inasmuch as they understand it as merely individual and spiritual advancement—not unlike 'spiritual progress' mentioned by Koselleck. The contrast they aim to draw is not the one between 'this' and an 'other' (better) world, nor that between an impure and a purified mind; rather, it is the contrast between the experienced imperfections of present society and the expected perfection of the Pure Land—an expectation of a better future which can be realized through collective and self-consciously organized action. As stated succinctly by Taixu:

> In sum, the present human world is far from perfect, but if human and other sentient beings are willing to go and create a pure land, it would not be impossible. All that is needed is to put aside preconceived notions and then put forth reasonable efforts to create it! 要之，當下的人間確是不完美的，但是人等有情如願意要去創造成淨土, 并不是沒有可能的希望. 只要能夠革去成見, 用合理的努力去創造罷了![99]

It may be argued that this modern understanding of progress becomes the supreme guiding principle for the interpretation of

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[98] *An le ji*, *T* no. 1958, 47:13c8–11.

[99] Jones, *Taixu's*, 123; Taixu, 'Chuangzao renjian jingtu', 7.

Pure Land thought, not only in the vision of Taixu, but also in the case of other authors. This principle leads them to identify the true meaning of Pure Land scriptures with a call to transform secular society—rather than with the hope of blissful rebirth in the next life, or with an individual realization of the nature of one's own mind. It also prompts them to reconsider the connection between the Pure Land and the ancient ideal of a bodhisattva, and to rewrite this ideal in the new language of modern visions of social progress. Whether this development should be regarded as an ingenious restoration of an ancient ideal (as maintained by its advocates), or as an unwarranted secularization and politicization of a religious concept (as argued by its critics) remains a question that a descriptive study like this one will not attempt to resolve.

6. Conclusions

As the preceding discussion has shown, this-worldly Pure Land thinkers take very diverse stances on a wide range of doctrinal issues. However, certain recurring patterns allow us to make generalizations about the entire trend. As this study demonstrates, visions of a 'this-worldly Pure Land' in modern East Asia were proposed as extensions of the Buddhist tradition of interpretation, which sought to determine the ultimate meaning of Pure Land scriptures in light of other Buddhist texts and doctrines. 'This-worldly' reinterpretations were, in various ways and degrees, distinguished from the premodern concept of the 'Mind-Only Pure Land' and refocused toward the ethical ideals of Mahāyāna Buddhism, especially those embodied by the altruistic bodhisattva. At the same time, this 'ethical turn' in the interpretation of the Pure Land appears to have been grounded in a new understanding of historical time and a distinctly modern notion of progress. In the writings examined here, the Pure Land was envisioned as an enlightened counterpart to the present society, whether conceived as a localized nation or humanity as a whole. It was relocated from the Western paradise and (at least in certain sense) from the realm of Mind and transposed into secular history. This redefinition entailed a call to collective ethical action, rather than a purely individual quest

for rebirth or awakening. It is important to note that this-worldly Pure Lands emerge from a critique of tradition which extends not only to literal 'other-worldly' belief, but also to traditional patterns of 'symbolic interpretation' which internalize the Pure Land by relating it to the purity of mind. The authors discussed here refrain from associating the Pure Land with mind understood as an interior realm of an individual subject. They relate this concept to modern ideas of intersubjectivity represented by self-determining community of rational individuals working towards a common good. At the same time, their interpretations clearly aim at presenting such notions as doctrinally Buddhist—rather than secular—ideals.

There are, of course, many ways in which these conclusions might be refined or challenged, either by broadening the sample of considered cases, or by reconsidering the evidence given above. For example, the issue of (dis)continuity between Mind-only and this-worldly Pure Land requires more in-depth investigation, especially considering the multi-layered meanings of the concept of 'Mind' in traditional Buddhist thought and the fact that many modern (especially Chinese) authors understand Consciousness-only thought as a Buddhist philosophy of intersubjectivity. Another significant question is how exactly the idea of social progress entered the thought of particular authors discussed in this study and how it was manifested in their other writings. It is important to clarify whether this occurred through direct borrowing from Western secular thought, or whether it was mediated by, for example, Confucian or Christian ideas, or perhaps even Buddhist motifs that had been overlooked in the foregoing discussion.[100] A fuller account of the phenomenon of this-worldly Pure Lands would need to include alternative modernist agendas, such as the 'subjectivist turn'[101] taken by some Japanese thinkers, as well as critiques of this idea raised from within Buddhist community.

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[100] On the possible mediating role of Confucian concepts in the East Asian reception of the Western notion of 'progress', see e.g. Furth, 'Intellectual Change', 13–38; Watanabe, 'Shinpo to chūka'.

[101] Especially those affiliated with the Japanese school of Jōdo-Shinshū. Blum and Rhodes, *Cultivating Spirituality*, 163.

Despite its numerous limitations, this study aims to draw attention to several general themes that may deserve further consideration. First, the history of Pure Land Buddhism is not only a history of popular belief and practice (in the Chinese context) or institutional orthodoxy (in the Japanese context)—but also a history of a sophisticated tradition of interpretation. In the modern period this tradition became even more complex, incorporating new notions of subjectivity and intersubjectivity transmitted from the West. Second, this new phase in Pure Land thought in East Asia brought a conceptual transformation in which traditional Buddhist doctrinal vocabulary became blended with or superseded by newly translated or newly coined terms. The study of this process does not need to be limited to narrowly conceived 'conceptual history'—however, it demands simultaneous sensitivity to philological, historical and philosophical issues. Finally, since many of these new keywords were shared across Chinese, Japanese, as well as Korean and Vietnamese writings, there is a justification for adopting a comparative East Asian framework in the study of modern Pure Land thought. Pursuing such a framework, however, remains as promising, as it is fraught with challenges.

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Abbreviations

HWJZ	*Haichaoyin wenku* 海潮音文庫, vol. 11. See Secondary Sources, Ciren shi zhuren, Taixu, and Fan, eds.
MFQ	*Minguo Fojiao wenxian qikan jicheng* 民國佛教文獻期刊集成. See Secondary Sources, Huang, ed.
T	*Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經. See Secondary Sources, Takakusu and Watanabe, eds.
TX	*Taixu dashi quanshu* 太虛大師全書. See Secondary Sources, Taixu dashi quanshu bianzuan weiyuanhuiji, ed.

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