佛总连同各大宗教宣读宗教和谐声明

文鑫龙

新加坡佛教总会为庆祝我国建国41周年，于8月6日召集宗教联合会在各大宗教代表宣读宗教和谐宣言，同时成立“仁王护国祈福法会”，祈求世界和平，我国国运昌隆，马林百列集选区国会议员王世丰医生受邀请为大会主席，各大宗教代表及出席法会的僧侣们在佛总秘书陈友明居士的带领下宣读宗教和谐声明。接着各宗教代表一起在台上祈祷世界和平，确保社会稳定发展。

佛总主席广声法师表示历经四十一载国家上下同心一致努力奋斗下，才创造今日的新加坡奇迹。身为佛教徒应该懂得如何身体力行的去感恩和报恩，也应该懂得分享慈悲与关怀。

“我国独立这四十一年里，第一代及第二代领导层都为了国家和人民作出无私的贡献，并顺利让第三代领导层接班，在最近这几年里，已有多位开国元勋逝世。他们可说是为国鞠躬尽瘁，我们为他们祈祷，早日往生西方净土，花开见佛。”

最后，广声法师希望在这个良辰吉日祈求世界和平，干戈不施， Sunni消灭，取而代之的是祥和气和温馨气息充满人间。

王世丰医生表示建国旅程艰辛，即使在今日今日，我们仍不能掉以轻心。他说道：“为了确保可以永久维持种族与宗教的和谐关系，我们在立法上和行动上都有相应的措施，如设立保护少数族群权利的总统理事会、宗教和谐总统理事会、宗教互助和和谐圈、种族互相尊重、维护宗教和谐法令等。最近，我们也看到政府严肃对付在网上散布有挑拨种族和宗教不和谐的人士，或许有人认为这是反应过度，然而我们不要忘记“星星之火，足以燎原”，我国不是天然资源，人力物力资源丰富的泱泱大
Sound of the Tide across the Sea: Taixu’s Mission to Singapore

Chia Meng Tat, Jack

Introduction

The Republican period in China (1912-1949) was a time whereby the Buddhist community faced bitter clashes between “traditional and reformist visions of an appropriate response to the post-dynastic context and the secularizing influences of modernity”. Venerable Taixu (1890-1947) was one of the most prominent figures among the Chinese Buddhist reformers during the Republican period. An energetic and intelligent monk highly revered by Buddhists both in China and overseas, Taixu called for a revitalization of Buddhism through “institutional reorganization, modern education, compassionate social action, and ecumenical cooperation in global mission”. To achieve his ecumenical vision, Taixu embarked on a global mission to establish regional and worldwide Buddhist organizations. Taixu came to Singapore on three occasions to propagate the Dharma: September to October 1926; August 1928; and April 1940. Although the Venerable resided in Singapore for a relatively short period of time, he made significant contributions to the development of Buddhism and established close friendship with the local Chinese community leaders.

This essay aims to scrutinize the significance of Taixu’s mission to Singapore. First, I will present a brief description of Buddhism and the overseas Chinese community in Singapore during the early twentieth century. Next, I attempt to demonstrate the significance of Taixu’s mission to Singapore by examining his contributions to Sino-Singapore cultural interactions in terms of three themes – establishment of Zhonghua Fojiao Hui, Taixu’s vision for a regional Buddhist federation, and friendship with local Chinese leaders. Finally, it is the contention of this essay that Taixu’s mission is an important symbol of Sino-Singapore cultural interactions during the Republican period.

Literature Review and Methodology

Taixu’s ideas on Buddhist reform and his global mission have received a fair amount of attention by Buddhologists and historians alike. A number of books and articles have been published over the recent years. Li Mingyou in his article “Taixu Jiqi Fojiao Gexin Yundong” (Taixu and Buddhist Reform Movements) mentioned that Taixu was the first Buddhist missionary who traveled to Europe and America to propagate the Dharma. He argued that Taixu’s efforts laid the foundation for the growth of Buddhism in the West. Don Pittman’s Taixu’s Reforms: Towards a Modern Chinese Buddhism singled Taixu out as an “ethical pessimist”. He pointed out that the Venerable was concerned about “explicating the Buddhist vision, and accordingly devoted considerable attention to reviving interest in the complex idealistic philosophy of the Weishi (Consciousness-Only) school”. In his recent article “Jianlun Taixu De Renjian Fojiao Sixiang ‘Yu Jindai Wenhua Qineng’ (A Study of Taixu’s Humanistic Buddhist Thoughts and the New Cultural Movement), Wang Rongguo maintained that Taixu’s humanistic Buddhist thinking was a product of the New Cultural Movement. It is noted that most scholarly writings either focus on Taixu’s reformist ideas or his missions to the West. Hence, the significance of his mission to Singapore has received very little attention in these literatures.

A considerable number of publications on the history of Buddhism in Singapore are available. However, these works have made little references to Taixu’s mission to Singapore and did not analyze his contributions to Sino-Singapore interactions. Vivienne Wee, a sociologist, did not mention Taixu in her article “Buddhism in Singapore”. Venerable Shi Chuanfa’s Xinjiapo Fojiao Fazhanshi (A History of the Development of Buddhism in Singapore) accredited Taixu’s contributions to the development of Buddhism in Singapore in a short narrative account. A recent publication, Ong Y.D.’s Buddhism in Singapore: A Short Narrative History, mentioned that Taixu “raised awareness of Buddhism among the Chinese community in Singapore during his visits”. Nevertheless, written primarily to provide general readers with a “concise narrative history” of the development of Buddhism in Singapore, Ong fails to analyze Taixu’s mission in terms of Sino-Singapore interactions.

Previous studies lack a critical assessment of Taixu’s mission to Singapore and often downplayed or ignored the significance of his contributions to Sino-Singapore cultural interactions. This essay, by illustrating Taixu’s mission, attempts to fill some of these gaps. While utilizing primary sources from Taixu’s writings, I supplement these records with secondary sources to construct a panoramic view of his mission to Singapore. This in turn will add a new perspective to the Sino-Singapore cultural interactions during the Republican period – a period in which the Buddhist community in China experienced a period of modernization and reformation.

Buddhism and the Overseas Chinese Community

During the nineteenth century, there was a phenomenal increase in Chinese migration to Southeast Asia in general, and Singapore in particular. With the establishment of Singapore as a British colony in 1819, multitudes of Chinese migrants flooded to the island for work and commerce. By 1911, the Chinese made up 72% of the total population in Singapore. These Chinese migrants brought along their religious beliefs to Singapore. Most of the Chinese population practiced Chinese syncretic religions consisted of Buddhist, Confucianist and Taoist elements.

Buddhism arrived in Singapore together with the Chinese migrants in the nineteenth century. The late nineteenth century marked the institutionalization of Buddhism in Singapore. As Buddhist monks from China came to Singapore to preach the Dharma to the migrant community, Buddhist monasteries were established as a place of worship and to provide lodging for monks. Shuanglin Si, one of the oldest Buddhist monasteries in Singapore, was built in 1898 with the support of the local Chinese community. Pujue Si, the largest Buddhist monastery in Singapore, was founded by Venerable Zhunando in 1920. Monastic Buddhism thus became a feature of Buddhism in Singapore during the early twentieth century.

Having a general idea of Buddhism and the overseas Chinese community in Singapore during the twentieth century, the three themes studied here will demonstrate the significance of Taixu’s mission to Singapore and illustrate his contribution to Sino-Singapore cultural interactions.
Establishment of Zhonghua Fojiao Hui

In the summer of 1926, Taiixed was invited by the overseas Chinese community to propagate the Dharma and deliver talks in Singapore. Taiix put accepted the invitation and arrived in Singapore on September 1926. He presented a series of Dharma talks at the Victoria Memorial Hall and attracted a large number of overseas Chinese. Because most of the Buddhist monasteries in the early twentieth century were built mainly for the spiritual practice of the Sangha and to provide lodging for them, Taiixi felt that the establishment of a Buddhist association would be beneficial in propagating the Dharma to the lay Chinese community. Therefore, in one of his talks, Taiixi suggested the establishment of a Buddhist association to meet the spiritual needs of the lay people.

Taiixi's suggestions inspired Ning Da Yun, an overseas Chinese Buddhist residing in Singapore, to establish a Buddhist association for the benefit of the lay Buddhist community. Consequently, with the support of the local Chinese leaders, Ning founded the Zhonghua Fojiao Hui (The Chinese Buddhist Association) in 1927. Located in Kreta Ayer which lies in the heart of Chinatown, the Zhonghua Fojiao Hui became the first Buddhist association in Singapore. It laid the foundation for the emergence of associational Buddhism, providing education and social services for the lay Buddhist population in Singapore. Strategically located in Chinatown where most of the Chinese community resided, the Zhonghua Fojiao Hui contributed to the growth of Buddhism among the Chinese community.

The establishment of Zhonghua Fojiao Hui was a result of cultural migration from China. First, by naming the organization Zhonghua Fojiao Hui, it seems to suggest that the association was affiliated to the Zhonghua Fojiao Zonghui in China. Second, it demonstrates how Taiixi's attempt to revitalise and reform Buddhism in Republican China through institutional reorganisation had taken its roots in Singapore. Thus, Taiixi contributed to the emergence of associational Buddhism in Singapore and laid a foundation for future Buddhist organisations.

Vision for a Regional and Global Buddhist Federation

To achieve his ecumenical vision, Taiixi was planning for the establishment of a Shijie Fojiao Lianhe Hui (World Buddhist Federation) which would serve as a global Buddhist network for Buddhist organisations around the world. Taiixi suggested the establishment of a Nanyang Fojiao Hui (Nanyang Buddhist Federation), a regional Buddhist association for three Southeast Asian countries – Dutch East Indies, Malaysia and Singapore – with its headquarters in Singapore. He believed that Singapore could serve as a regional hub for the propagation of Buddhism and hoped that the federation could link the three Southeast Asian countries to the global Buddhist network.

Singapore was strategically important for Taiixi's vision for a regional Buddhist federation. He saw potential in the development of Buddhism in Singapore and believed that if a regional Buddhist hub was to be established in Singapore, it could contribute to the growth of Buddhist education, provision of social services and research in Buddhist studies. For unknown reasons, Taiixi's vision for a regional Buddhist federation was never realized. Nevertheless, it reflects his attempt to influence the Buddhist community in Singapore with his ecumenical vision, showing how ideas of Buddhist reforms during the Republican Period were brought from China to Singapore.

Friendship with Local Chinese Leaders

When Taiixi was in Singapore, he was well-received by prominent leaders from the local Chinese community. Taiixi established close friendship with two of the well-established local leaders – Tan Kah Kee and Aw Boon Haw.

Tan Kah Kee (1874-1961), a wealthy businessman, was held in high regard as a community leader in Singapore. He was twice the chairman of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and helped to reorganise the Hokkien clan association. When Taiixi first visited Singapore in 1926, Tan provided a warm welcome to the Venerable and invited him to his rubber plantation, factories and shops.

Aw Boon Haw (1882-1954) sold Tiger Balm – a famous topical pain relieving ointment – and became a rich and successful businessman. He was a philanthropist and made generous donations to hospitals, schools and Buddhist monasteries. When Taiixi came to Singapore, Aw gave the Venerable a warm reception and invited him to his mansion to reside for a couple of days. Taiixi engaged Aw in a discussion on Buddhism and commerce during his stay at Aw's mansion. He advised Aw to be an honest and righteous businessman and continue to make contributions to charity. He also encouraged Aw to observe the Buddhist teachings in his daily life.

Taiixi's friendship with the local Chinese community leaders reflects the close connections between religious leader from mainland China and overseas Chinese in Singapore. First, friendly ties with the local Chinese leaders allowed Taiixi to obtain financial support and gave him the opportunity to preach the Dharma to them. As local Chinese leaders were important benefactors of the Buddhist temples in Singapore during the early twentieth century, Taiixi needed the support from these wealthy Chinese businessmen to conduct talks and Buddhist activities. Second, Taiixi's friendship with the local Chinese leaders also indicates the strong cultural ties between China and the overseas Chinese community. Local leaders would have felt more culturally and religiously inclined to Taiixi and were keen to receive him in Singapore. This explains why they were eager to build their friendship with the Venerable and to learn from him.

Conclusion

This essay has examined the significance of Taiixi's mission to Singapore. I argue that Taiixi's mission is an important symbol of Sino-Singapore cultural interactions during the Republican period in China. Taiixi introduced ideas to revitalise and reform Buddhism from Republican China to Singapore and contributed to the establishment of the Zhonghua Fojiao Hui, the first Buddhist association in Singapore. He also saw the potential of Singapore as a regional hub for the propagation of Buddhism and a linking point to the global Buddhist network. Although a regional Buddhist federation was never established in Singapore, Taiixi's suggestions illustrated the importance of Singapore in his global ecumenical vision. Finally, Taiixi's mission contributed to the Sino-Singapore communication and this was shown in the Venerable's friendship with the local Chinese leaders. Feeling culturally and religiously inclined to Taiixi, the local Chinese leaders were keen to receive him in Singapore and offer him their valuable support.