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1. Please suggest whether the phrase ‘to explode the distinctions’ can be changed to ‘to explore the distinctions’ in the sentence ‘In short, “Buddhism” … and “public”’.

No, I do mean 'explode' as in 'demolish' – perhaps it would be less confusing to simply say 'demolish'?

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Abstract

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While Marx believes he has advanced the cause of critique by accepting its repudiation of religion as given and then applying it to other historical impediments to human emancipation, the real effect of his efforts at breaking down socially efficacious illusions is to restore us to the scene of religion. Destroying the false ideas that keep us apart and make us view one another as competitors or worse leads us to recognise the challenges of building community. This is the problematic of many religions and in his chapter Shields shows that it creates an immediate affinity between Marx’s problematic and that of political Buddhism in early twentieth-century China. Within 40 years of Marx’s passing thinkers around the world were already identifying points of connection between them, even notwithstanding the overt atheism of Engels and Lenin.

The various thought traditions of Asian Buddhism have long struggled with questions related to the issue of “liberation”, including its ontological, epistemological, ethical and, if less explicitly, economic and political implications. With the development of Marxist thought in the mid to late nineteenth century, a new paradigm for thinking about freedom in relation to economics, history, identity and socio-political transformation found its way to Asia, where it confronted traditional religious interpretations of freedom and equality as well as competing Western ones. Over the past century and a half, numerous attempts have been made to bring together socialism and Buddhism, both at the level of theory and practice. This chapter appraises Buddhist socialism by focusing on the links and disparities between Asian Buddhist concepts of suffering, self and awakening and socialist (Marxist and anarchist) theories of alienation, community and liberation. Geographically and temporally, our focus will be on China in the formative decades between 1900 and 1930.[1]

Buddhist Socialism in China, 1900–1930

Marxist thought was introduced to China in the early years of the twentieth century, most often, ~~as noted above~~, via translations from Russian or Japanese.[2] Japanese scholar Fukui Junzō’s (1871–1937) *Modern Socialism* (Jp. *Kindai shakai shugi*; Ch. *Jinshi shuhui zhuyi*), first published in 1899, was translated into Chinese by Zhao Bizen in 1903, presenting a reasonably accurate if somewhat dated account of both anarchism (especially Proudhon and Bakunin) and Marxism. This was closely followed by two other works of Japanese provenance, both by leading Christian socialists: Murai Tomoyoshi’s (1861–1944) *Socialism* (Jp. *Shakai shugi*; translated by Luo Dawei as *Shehui zheyi*) and Nishikawa’s Kōjirō’s *The Socialist Party* (Jp. *Shakai Minshūtō*; translated by Zhou Baigao as *Shehui zang*).[3] In the same year, Waseda University scholar Kumyama Sentarō’s (1875–1954) work *Modern Anarchism* (Jp. *Kinsei museifu shugi*) appeared in Chinese (under the title *Ziyou xue*, or *Freedom’s Blood*). This book, which would have significant influence on a generation of Chinese radicals, focused on Russian populist groups, and thus tended to conflate anarchism and nihilism.[4]

As in Japan, the earliest socialist texts were introduced prior to the establishment of Marxist “orthodoxy” (rooted, in particular, in dialectical materialism) on the heels of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, allowing for several decades of relative diversity in socialist thought—including not only the flourishing of anarchism but also the possibility of “religious” or “spiritual socialism.” Also like Japan, Chinese Marxist translators such as Ma Jungwu (1881–1940) aligned Marxism and socialism with other contemporary currents of Western thought, particularly the work of Darwin and associated concepts (often filtered through Herbert Spencer) of “social

1910 and 1930, up to and including the New Culture Movement (Ch. *Xin wenhua yundong*, 1915) and May Fourth Movement (Ch. *Wusi yundong*, 1919).[6] In fact, in China it was as often as not the anarchists, most of whom studied in Japan during the early years of the century, who introduced Marxist texts and ideas to China.[7]

For all these similarities, one significant difference between China and Japan in terms of political events was the fact that Japan found itself on the victorious side of two significant clashes—first the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895 and second, the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905—both of which reinforced the notion that, combined with Western "techniques", the Japanese "spirit" was invincible in battle not merely against China, the historical but now-diminished power next door, but even against a Western nation such as Russia. For China, on the other hand, the sting of the defeat in the conflict with Japan spurred a recognition that not only was their material strength lacking, so too, perhaps, were the traditional forms of Chinese thought and "culture" that stood behind them.[8] Combined with the relative weakness of the Qing administration compared to the Meiji government in Japan, this arguably gave Chinese intellectuals even more latitude for exploring and adopting of "foreign" ideas (though it is worth noting that even in Japan the Meiji regime went through several periods of Westernisation, followed by periods of reversals).

Li Dazhao (1889–1927), often considered the "father of Chinese Marxism", displays in his writings an eclecticism—much of which later orthodox critics would call "idealism"—that typifies East Asian socialism in the two decades between 1900 and 1920.[9] While Ishikawa argues that the elements of Li's thought that are often considered "Chinese" can be traced to the influence of Japanese Marxists like Kawakami Hajime, Kayahara Kazan (1870–1952) and Fukuda Tokuzō (1874–1930), this does not take away from the fact that, like Kawakami and most Japanese leftists of the period, Li was intent on forging a form of progressivism that was materialist in some respects and "spiritual" or "religious" in others—in addition to being influenced by both non-Marxist and non-Western cultural and philosophical ideas, including the works of Bergson, Emerson, Tolstoy and Chinese Daoism.[10] Indeed, any discussion of Marxism in late-Qing and early Republican China has to begin with the fact that early Chinese socialism was both relentlessly eclectic (and "indigenized") and heavily flavoured with self-consciously anarchist sensibilities. From 1907 until at least the founding of the CCP in 1922, anarchism was the dominant framework for Chinese radicalism.[11] And while the work of European anarchists, including Proudhon and Bakunin but especially Kropotkin and Tolstoy, had a significant impact, many of the first Chinese anarchists had been educated in Confucian or Neo-Confucian tradition, and adopted the Confucian emphasis on "minimal government, the goodness of human nature, and a notion of equality" as part of their hybrid anarcho-communist ideology. Peter Zarrow argues that, in fact, the "secular humanism" of (at least textual) Confucianism had a more significant influence on Chinese progressivism than Daoism or Buddhism—though this elides the fact that Song and Ming Neo-Confucianism was always already a hybrid form, blending classical Confucian ideas with those of philosophical Daoism and (Chan) Buddhism.[12] We will return to this below, but the key takeaway here is a broadly shared emphasis on moral cultivation, virtuous (and thus, minimal) leadership, sharing of goods, disdain for profit (Ch. *li*) and faith in a benevolent natural order at work.[13]

While the work of a handful of eclectic late-Qing Dynasty figures, such as Kang Youwei (1858–1927),[14] Tan Sitong (1865–1898)[15] and Zhang Binglin (1869–1936)[16] helped lay the groundwork for Buddhist socialism in China, here I focus on the generation that came of age in the early twentieth century, leading up to the Republican Revolution of 1911.[17] Unlike Kang, Tan and Zhang, the succeeding generation of progressive writers and activists, born in the 1880s and 1890s, were weaned on socialist and particularly anarchist ideas coming from Russia and the West.[18] Of these, the two figures with the clearest Buddhist credentials are Shifu (1884–1915) and Taixu (1890–1947).

Liu Shaobin took the name Liu Sifu ("thinking of restoration") as a young man, before adopting the sobriquet Shifu ("to teach renewal") upon becoming an anarchist. Like many other young Chinese progressives, Liu spent time in Japan (1904 through 1906), where he became involved with Sun Yatsen's Revolutionary Alliance (Ch. Tongmenghui).[19] Injured in a botched assassination attempt in 1907, Liu spent the next three years in prison, where he wrote essays indicating a turn towards "national essence" thought, following Zhang Binglin, among other Chinese progressives. While reflective in some respects of the longer-standing Japanese *kokusui* scholarship (and perhaps even the earlier *kokugaku* of "National Learning School")—in that both sought to move beyond centuries of "degenerate" cultural baggage to return to a pristine essence in the deep national past (and "character")—whereas Japanese *kokugaku* fought primarily against Chinese imports, including Confucianism, but also Sinified Buddhism, the Chinese version looked to purge China of indigenous and longstanding but misguided forms (such as classical Confucianism).[20] For anarchists like Liu Shipei (1884–1919), there was also a distinctly Rousseau-ian aspect to *guocui*, such that "national essence" was to be found in "natural man".[21] But of course we cannot neglect the fact that the Qing Dynasty—unlike the Edo shogunate or Meiji government—was itself of "foreign" (i.e. Manchu) origins, which gave the Chinese national essence movement a more concrete political foe. At any rate, for Chinese progressives, national essence supported the idea that "earliest China had been a pristine, anarchist society". For Shifu, this primitive anarchism was accompanied by a selfless spirit exemplified in the (foreign) Buddhist ideal of the bodhisattva, one who "dares to die" for others (more on this, below).[22] In November 1912, a year following the October 1911 Republican Revolution, Liu and a few other anarchists established the Conscience Society (Ch. *Xin she*) in Guangzhou, which would become the primary home for the Chinese anarchist movement. Below we will discuss the Conscience Society's 12 Principles as an example of Buddhist-Marxist-anarchist hybridity.

Born in 1890 of a proletarian background not far from the city of Hangzhou and raised by a devout Buddhist grandmother, Lu Gansen decided to become a monk while still a teenager. Receiving the ordination name Taixu (Great Void), he was ordained in 1906 at Tiantong monastery in Ningbo, and showed early affinities to Tiantai and Huayan, Chinese Buddhism's two oldest, most eclectic and esoteric schools. After a period of activity in Buddhist institutional reform, in 1909 Taixu went to Nanjing to study with lay Buddhist teacher Yang Wenhui (1837–1911), the so-called father of modern Buddhism in China. Taixu would also come into contact with Qiyun, an activist monk who had joined Sun Yatsen's Tongmenghui in Japan, and who was eventually imprisoned for his revolutionary activities upon his return to China. Around 1910, Taixu began to read the works of Western radicals, including Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin and Marx, and thereafter embraced anarchism. He also read the work of Zhang Binglin (who had also studied under Yang Wenhui) and in 1914 began a correspondence with Shifu. It is important to note that, during the short period of 1911–1914, Taixu held to a form of Buddhist anarchism that worked in both directions: first, as a means to reform Chinese Buddhism—less to do with doctrine than eliminating embedded hierarchies and sharing monastic property and incomes—and second, as a force for radically shaping Chinese society writ large.[23]

Like Zhang Binglin, Taixu was particularly inspired by the promise of anarchist internationalism; he criticised socialism for remaining stuck on the nation.[24] Echoing Bakunin against Marx, Taixu charged socialists with timidity (and hypocrisy) in its reliance on the state and governmental authority. For Taixu, anarchism alone acknowledged and effectively responded to the evil of social structures and considered humanity as a whole. Like most anarchists, Taixu looked towards a comprehensive revolution that would overturn all existing political, economic, legal—and even psychological—structures, paving the way for the emergence of "self-governing" (Ch. *zizhi*) and free contracts, which would in turn be replaced over time by the "natural way" (Ch. *rendao*) of humanity. Here we see a continuation of the lingering utopianism of late-Qing writer Kang Youwei, with its premise of the *Datong* as a perfected state of individual and communal existence. I concur with Zarrow that, as with Zhang, Liu Shipei and others, Taixu's use of "religious" or traditional vocabulary is not simply a superficial attempt to give "Chinese color" to modern concepts. Rather, "it reflects certain, perhaps largely latent, elements of the traditional value system, especially its universalism".[25] And while later Chinese anarchists dispensed with such blatant utopianism, "they still shared a faith in social evolution, a sense of the perfectibility of the individual, and a determination to rid the entire world of oppression". Taixu would himself become disillusioned by the shape of reform and revolution, such that by summer 1914—still just 24 years old—he entered a three-year period of monastic seclusion and never returned to direct political activity. And yet, his legacy, as that of Shifu, who passed away at 30 in 1915, lingered within progressive (if not Buddhist) circles for the next decade.

As Krebs notes, the significance of Buddhism in the work for late-Qing and Republican activists was for many years overlooked, due to the assumption that, as a "traditional" religion in China, Buddhism should not have much to offer to young progressives and radicals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a bias that may also be coloured by assumptions about the innate hostility to religion in socialism.[26] In the following section, we will consider the specific aspects of Buddhism that appealed to socialists and anarchists of the period, as well as the reasons that socialism and anarchism—as modern, Western imports—might find favour in the eyes of East Asian Buddhists (or Confucians).

Buddhist Socialism with Chinese Characteristics

The role of religion in progressive and radical politics has been a matter of debate since the mid-nineteenth century in the West, even prior to the work of Marx and Engels, which gave succour to the forms of anti-religious socialism that would come to dominate the radical politics of the twentieth century. In East Asia, while, as we have seen, early radicals were generally quite open about appropriating religious ideas, the definition of "religion" (and specifically the place of Asian traditions within such definitions) was a contested issue by the late nineteenth century. In addition, many East Asian progressives of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the predicament of Asian modernity as entailing a massive crisis in "culture", even in "faith" or "belief". Thus Tan Sitong, Zhang Binglin and Shifu looked not only to morality but also to Chinese religion itself as a potential source of revolutionary value—most often as an indigenous ideology that could play a role like that of Christianity in the West.[27] For all that Christianity was recognised as a binding force for the "success" of Western civilisation, it was criticised in China for being: (a) foreign; and (b) rooted in premodern forms of "superstition". One sees this logic best expressed by the Asian delegations to the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893.[28] Here the discourse of "occidentalism" or "reverse orientalism" shades into an argument that Asian traditions are both more "rational" (and thus "modern") but also, and perhaps more important for those making this case, more "humanistic" and thus potentially "universal" in a way that Christianity could never be.

In short, the value of Buddhism for Asian progressive writers and activists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was rooted in the following three claims: (1) unlike Christianity, Buddhism was "indigenous" to Asian cultures; (2) unlike many religious forms, Buddhism was well-suited to "modern" understandings of the world, including natural science, in its longstanding resistance to "superstition"[29]; and (3) like Christianity, Buddhism aspired to universality, and thus could provide a firm foundation for globalism. Of course, each of these assumptions is contestable, and something more needs to be said about each. While Buddhism of course arose in India, rather than East Asia, it is uncontroversial to point out that Buddhism—heavily Sinified—was by 1900 deeply rooted in East Asian civilisational forms, to such an extent that specifically Buddhist aspects had become difficult is not impossible to distinguish form more general religious practices and cultural forms (as the Japanese discovered during the brief but unsuccessful attempt to "disestablish" Buddhism in the early 1870s). Indeed, the very capacity for Buddhism to integrate with other East Asian [30]

The second of the above assumptions is perhaps the most contested, but fits with the general trend towards "Buddhist modernism" of the period—of which the above figures were clearly early representatives and generally vocal proponents.[31] I have written extensively about this elsewhere; here, let me simply note that most of the above Buddhist progressives were invested less in Buddhism as a set of institutions and ritual practices than as a set of beliefs, doctrines and—most crucially—*values*. It is also important to note that in both China and Japan, the late nineteenth century saw the emergence of Buddhist institutional and sectarian reforms. While a few Chinese and Japanese progressives (like Taixu) were priests actively involved in these reforms, most remained on the margins as laypersons. The place of the Buddhist layperson was in fact redefined at the time, as Buddhism was "secularized" in the sense of being reimagined as a set of ideas and practices broadly applicable to anyone with access to Buddhist texts and (lay) teachers. For the Japanese New Buddhists, in particular, a "this worldly" stance (Jp. *genseshugi*) became a primary foundation for "new Buddhism".[32] In short, "Buddhism" was understood to explode the distinctions between "religion" and "politics"—as well as between "private" and "public".[33] AQ1 This is also where progressive Buddhism begins to align with anarchism, as we see in the case of China, especially.

Suffering and/as Alienation[34]

Buddhism in all its cultural forms and sectarian varieties is rooted in a concept of "liberation"—and that liberation is understood by all Buddhists as a liberation from "suffering". Things begin to become cloudier, however, when we start to deconstruct the early Buddhist terms for suffering: *duḥkha* (Sanskrit) and *dukkha* (Pali). Many contemporary scholars point to the problems with the translation of these terms as "suffering", suggesting a more complex host of inter-related connotations including "dissatisfaction", "dis-ease", or "alienation". Clearly, the term includes not only physical pain and discomfort, but also, and seemingly more importantly, cognitive and emotional forms of dissatisfaction or the more clearly modernist/Marxist "alienation"—rooted primarily in an inability and unwillingness to accept change. Perhaps the best way to summarise this idea, which is formulated in the classic set of teachings known as the Four Noble Truths (Sk. *Arya Satya*), is that liberation from suffering entails a radical transformation of personal existence, which is traditionally understood as resulting in a condition known as *nirvāṇa* or "release". Although this release has implications in Buddhist tradition for what happens upon one's death, the primary significance is what occurs in this world; i.e. in the here and now. There are, of course, a multitude of interpretations of how this transformation is enacted, and what it implies for the "self" and world, but for now I will leave this matter in order to explore the classical Marxist understanding of liberation.

Despite the fact that most Marxists have understood Marxist liberation in purely materialistic terms; i.e. a release, via political and economic revolution, from all forms of suffering associated with economic poverty, social mistreatment and political injustice, Marx was primarily concerned with alienation and dehumanisation as *the* fundamental problems of human existence; and one that affects not only the proletariat but also all humans, to some degree.[35] Indeed, according to some Marxist scholars, such as Bill Martin and Leszek Kołakowski, mainstream or orthodox Marxism (including the influential work of Engels and Lenin) has deviated significantly from the ideas of Marx—especially early Marx—in adopting and promoting a form of "reductionist" philosophical materialism that ultimately leads to a fixation with Truth and subsequent devalorization of particular human beings ~~(see above for the argument that Buddhism provides humanistic balm to an otherwise hard-edged Marxist materialism)~~.[36]

Species Being, No-Self and Buddha Nature

Though Marx is well-known as a fierce critic of (Western, monotheistic) religious dogma, ritual and institutions, his vision of human liberation can be understood more broadly as the clearest and most sustained attempt in Western thought since the classical Greeks to reconnect the realms of individual and communal flourishing (and also of suffering). Marx clearly understood the potential in politics for fundamental, all-encompassing human liberation—as well as its opposite. As noted above, his starting point was not poverty or even injustice but rather *dehumanszation*: "the fact that individuals are alienated from their own labour and its material, spiritual, and social consequences in the form of goods, ideas, and political institutions, and not only from these but from their fellow beings and, ultimately, from themselves".[37] In his essay *On the Jewish Question* (1843), Marx develops his ideas of social emancipation in such a way as to push beyond merely political liberation towards a more complete "human emancipation". He contextualises his argument by criticising Bruno Bauer's call for liberating the state from religion, arguing that Bauer, as many others, had it backwards: "religious restrictions were not a cause of secular ones, but a manifestation of them".[38]

For Marx, Bauer's idea, like the fundamental premise of the French *Declaration of the Rights of Man* and the language of the Constitution of the United States Constitution, is limited and ultimately self-defeating, as it merely solidifies a theory of rights based on monadic individualism. In short, the state "does not help to abolish the egoistic character of private life but merely provides it with a legal framework". And thus, political revolution "does not liberate people from religion or the rule of property, it merely gives them the right to hold property and to profess their own religion". In short:

> Only when the real, individual man re-absorbs in himself the abstract, and as an individual human being has become a *species-being* in his everyday life, in his particular work, and in his particular situation, only when man has recognized and organized his "*forces propres*" as *social* forces, and consequently no longer separates social power from himself in the shape of *political* power, only then will human emancipation have been accomplished.[39]

Although the above ideas, expressed in "On the Jewish Question" and *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law*, would later be dismissed by Marx himself as "utopian", we cannot so readily dismiss the fundamental insights here, particularly as they relate to a possible interplay between Buddhist and Marxist understandings of human suffering and emancipation. Even in his later, more "scientific" writings, the necessity of a transformation of consciousness—an awakening to social ontology as means of overcoming alienation—remains a fundamental element. Akin to the realisation of Buddha-nature in some Mahāyāna texts and traditions, Marx's reformed consciousness was not simply a conscious turn towards an arbitrary ideal, but a revelation and explication of something that was always already there, albeit in an implicit fashion—a conversion of "an unconscious historical tendency into a conscious one, an objective trend into an act of will". In other words, revolution was not about converting reality into something new (via the will or obligation), but rather *understanding* reality more fully via a transformed consciousness—though a consciousness not separated from activity.[40]

Buddhist Practice/Marxist Praxis

Another related concept deeply embedded in Marx's writings is the unity of theory and practice—understood as *praxis* or the practical interpretation of human consciousness.[41] Though this slogan is often employed by Engels and later Marxists, what it frequently amounted to was the straightforward idea that practice was the basis of knowledge and the touchstone of truth—or, alternatively, that a theory can only be judged by its "fruits". While there is some merit to both of these interpretations, they miss the more fundamental and subtle Marxian thrust, which is part of his more general critique of the "contemplative" or "transcendental" conception of knowledge; i.e. the "traditional [Western] conception of truth as consisting in the conformity of our judgement with a state of affairs completely independent of our cognitive activity".[42] Knowledge in this familiar scenario ultimately amounts to a passive reception of a world "out there".

The Marxian critique of contemplative knowledge has rarely been revisited since Marx's time, but is another potentially fertile point of contact with traditional and modern Buddhist thought. The emphasis on the "mind" in early Buddhist thought—as one finds expressed, for example, in the opening stanzas of the *Dhammapada*—suggests that Buddhism, too, may fall into the contemplative or transcendental trap. And yet, it is equally clear from the classical texts that even early Indian Buddhism placed a high premium on engagement with the world—whether as a *bhikkhu* or a "lay" follower. That said, the closest equivalent to the Marxian conception of knowledge as a unity of theory and practice in terms that might be considered "political" may come from later forms of Mahāyāna Buddhism that emerged in East Asia and mixed with the relentlessly pragmatic and this-worldly foundations of classical and early modern Chinese thought (e.g. the influential eclecticism of Wang Yangming). Modern Chinese Buddhist progressives like Shifu were convinced that Buddhism was first and foremost *experiential*, which meant that Buddhist ideas and insights were ineluctably tied to "practice"—which he, like his peers in China and Japan, understood in social and political terms rather than, or at the very least in addition to, ritual forms or even meditation.[43]

The Appeal of Anarchism

At this point, I would like to shift attention away from the links between Buddhist and Marxist doctrine to discuss anarchism—and particularly the reasons for the appeal of anarchist ideas for East Asian progressive Buddhist during the formative decades between 1900 and 1930. As noted above, for much of this time the lines dividing anarchism from other branches of socialism in East Asia were blurry, at best, and while this created some confusion, it also led to creative hybridizations.

Anarchist texts appeared in both Japan and China at a very early stage, often within a few years of their appearance in Europe (where censorship was often more of an issue). The works of Kropotkin and Tolstoy were particularly influential, but there were also reports of Russian resistance movements associated with "nihilism" that were incorporated into these discussions. Indeed, as elsewhere, anarchism was often conflated with nihilism in the minds of proponents and critics alike. At the same time, due in no small part to the impact of Kropotkin, anarchism in East Asian tended towards anarcho-socialism or anarcho-communism, with an emphasis on community building and "mutual aid". Where anarchism differed most from "socialism" (particularly of the Marxist sort) was the fierce resistance to the State and all forms of political authority—as has been said in this regard, anarchism combines a socialist critique of capitalist economics with a liberal (or libertarian) critique of the state form.[44]

One aspect of anarchism that appealed to East Asian progressives was its utopianism, which is most evident in the generally positive assumptions about human nature and capacity of individuals to work together to create communities of human flourishing. As noted above, the classical Chinese concept of Datong was reinvested with an anarchist flavour by late nineteenth-century Chinese reformists like Kang Youwei and Zhang Binglin. Zarrow argues that this utopian aspect became less apparent in the years following the death of Liu Shifu (1915), during which "anarchism became a political philosophy, almost a feat of social engineering, as much or more than it was a personal utopian faith". Arguably, this move to a more "Marxist-style" anarchism allowed for a continuation of cooperation between anarchists and Marxists/communists through the founding of the CCP and even beyond. But it also may have infected Chinese Marxism, and eventually, the PRC, with a stronger utopian flavour.[45]

It is worth noting that for some Buddhist progressives, especially those who were ordained and continued to live within Buddhist institutional structures such as Taixu, *Datong* or the idealised "great community" had clear historical precedent in the Buddhist monastic *sangha*. While some lay-oriented Buddhist progressives redescribed the *sangha* as "society", the "people" (or even, the proletariat), Taixu looked to the traditional monastic lifestyle as a potential model for at least some aspects of a future anarcho-

class or caste divisions, or family, and most importantly, emphasised communal work, companionship and a simple, "natural" existence based on mutual aid and the sharing of most goods and property.

In addition to the utopian aspect of anarchism, another powerful feature was the emphasis on "action". While admittedly less central in Kropotkin and Tolstoy than in the work of Bakunin and some other classical anarchists, the anarchist critique of "pure theory" aligned well with the East Asian (Mahāyāna) emphasis on "practice" and the Neo-Confucian conflation of knowledge and practice, noted above (as well as a Marxist reading of *praxis*). Related to this is the longstanding anarchist focus on radical personal transformation, which sometimes gives even classical anarchism a "religious" flavour—and was, like utopia, subject to suspicion on the part of Marxists. But again, here "religion" must be framed within a particular context, which is less about "belief" or "devotion" than about a complete "transformation" (or awakening) that is cognitive, emotional and moral—and which must necessarily, almost by definition, radiate outwards beyond the individual.[46]

Anarcho-Communism and the Empty/Social Self

As noted, Kropotkin's work had immense influence on Chinese anarchism, because it was considered: (a) scientific; (b) moral; and (c) naturalistic and thereby universal. The term "anarcho-communism" was first used by Kroptotkin around 1880 to reflect what Bakunin had meant by the term "collectivism"—essentially, a revolutionary association that lacks a centralised leadership (before and after the revolution). It was thus opposed to Marxism—especially Leninist/vanguardist forms of Marxism—on the one hand, and libertarian/Stirnerite forms of anarchism on the other. In East Asia, it was anarcho-communism, inspired by Kroptokin and to some extent Tolstoy, that emerged as the dominant strain.

This brings us to conceptions of the self in anarchism and Buddhism. We have already touched upon Marxist understandings of the self, including correlations between "species-being" as a marker of full human emancipation and the interdependent, dynamic, even "empty" self as understood by classical Buddhism. As Zarrow reminds us, while in Western terms anarcho-communism was very much on the "collectivist" side of the broader anarchist spectrum, in an East Asian context even this "left wing" of anarchism falls within the scope of "liberalism"; i.e. a political movement that champions individual rights. Moreover, "[i]ndividualism, which in the West might mean something opposed to society or community, was in China the corollary of attacks on the patriarchal family, traditional marriage system, and Confucian morality. The Chinese vision of an anarchist world did not make much of the individual *against* society, but as free within a true society".[47] While the precise understanding of a "social self" is always a fraught issue for anarchists, in East Asia the tensions are quite distinctive, and arguably easier to manage, given the longstanding cultural, philosophical and religious foundations for such a concept. Here again we might note the Chinese anarchist debts to Neo-Confucianism:

> Anarchist criticism of selfishness (*si*) and profit (*li*) was familiar ethics; the very term of which they were so fond, *gongli* (universal principle or justice) is a neologism formed out of two Neo-Confucian terms. That these universal principles are in the hearts and minds of all persons is a fair deduction from the Zhu Xi commentaries on the *Great Learning*. Thus the anarchists would give the masses unprecedented freedom, but these masses grew out of the potentially self-sufficient *min* (people) of the Neo-Confucians… Also long familiar to the Chinese was the anarchist praise of an individualism based on autonomy and independence yet without private (selfish) interest. The anarchists' training in metaphysical and ethical principles foreign to the West gave the Chinese interpretation of anarchism its unique slant.[48]

Along these lines, Taixu founded an association known as the Buddhist Personal Oath Society (Ch. Fojiao sishi hui), which had as its goal the conversion of "the private into public" (Ch. *hua si wei gong*), a concept very much in line with the classical Confucian notion of an outward radiation of virtue (from self to family and community). Not long after the establishment of this group Taixu tried to launch a Buddhist Alliance (Ch. Fojiao tongmeng hui) that would similarly reinforce "essentials" of individual behaviour that would then lead to institutional, and eventually, societal reform, beginning with "democratic socialism" (Ch. *minzhu shehui zhuyi*).[49] The basic premise here—one shared with Zhang Binglin and Shifu before him—is that the liberated self (Ch. *da wo*, "greater self" or *zhen wo*, "true self") implied a self that was ineluctably social or collective, as opposed to the "individual" (*xian wo*) or "self-interested self" (Ch. *zi wo*). In line with the naturalist tendencies of classical anarchism (especially the anarcho-communism of Kropotkin), the "social self" was in fact the deeper or "true" form of human being, whereas the disconnected "individual" was a delusion—albeit a powerful and destructive one.[50]

Final Considerations

As scholars of Marx such as Leszek Kołakowski have pointed out, for all Marx and Engels's concern for the "condition of the working class" under urban, industrial capitalism, "justice" is not a particularly central concept in classical Marxism. Like "rights", it was considered at worst a bourgeois fiction and at best a stopgap solution on the road to revolution. Even "equality", often upheld as the progressive or radical answer to the liberal fixation on "freedom", is less apparent than one might expect. Equality and injustice are secondary manifestations of the deeper problems brought forth by capitalist economics and bourgeois ideology (and for anarchists, by the State). While the targets may be different, one could make the same claim for classical Buddhism, where "rights", "justice" and "equality" can at best only be derived from more fundamental doctrines and values. It is true that Western scholars will often cite the Buddha's "rebellion against the caste system"[51] as evidence for a commitment to egalitarianism, and while not denying that

there was some textual and even institutional resistance to caste among early Buddhists, this was generally true of other renunciant movements (such as the Jains), and in actual practice meant more of an avoidance of the issue of caste than a commitment to ending it.[52]

Thus, rather than focus attention on abstract concepts like equality, poverty and injustice, East Asian progressive Buddhists of the early twentieth century tended to highlight the various forms of "suffering" (or alienation) generated by modern, industrial capitalism and the state structures on which it relies. In order to save Buddhism from the charge of being simply another "opiate of the people", they took pains to highlight the distinction between the "this worldliness" of Buddhist Dharma and the teachings of "typical" religions, to the extent that they frequently denied that Buddhism (or Dharma) can be considered a *religion* at all. This contrast is summarised by Indian Buddhist Marxist B. R. A. Ambedkar in the following phrase, reminiscent of Marx's own famous line about "the point of philosophy": "The purpose of Religion is to explain the origin of the world. The purpose of Dhamma is to reconstruct the world".[53]

The life and work of such figures, which, in no small part due to their particular religious ideals and affiliations, fall outside of generally accepted categories of economic, social and political theory, are useful in helping us to question these categories—especially but not exclusively their application to the context of modern Asia. And finally, while we must admit that Buddhist experiments in socialism and other forms of radical economic and political activism such as those discussed in this chapter were ideologically far removed from the mainstream of modern East and South Asian Buddhist thought, they nonetheless point to a significant undercurrent of Buddhist political protest and raise the potential of untapped theoretical possibilities for contemporary movements in Socially Engaged Buddhism.

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1 I have published extensively on the nexus of Buddhism and socialism in modern Japan; see, e.g. Shields (2017). Rather than repeat or summarise that work, for the purposes of this chapter I focus on China, while noting some of the similarities and differences between Buddhist socialism in China and Japan during this period.

2 According to Dong (2016), the first appearance of the name "Marx" in Chinese was a brief reference in *The Globe* newspaper on 15 February 1899. It is worth noting that, despite the eventual victory of a Marxist-inspired political revolution in 1949, until at least the mid-1920s, a few years after the founding of the Chinese Communist Party, Marx was little read, and even among progressives, not particularly influential in China.

3 See Tian (2005, p. 53).

4 Krebs (1998, p. 35).

5 Ma spent several years in Japan (1902–1903), where he met Sun Yatsen and no doubt encountered Japanese progressives associated with the *Heimin Shimbun*. In addition to selections from Marx's *Grundrisse* and Darwin's *Origin of Species*, he would go on to translate works by Byron, Mill and German polymath Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919). See Pusey (1983) on the role played by Darwin in modern Chinese thought and culture.

6 See Zarrow (1990, pp. 196, 209): "The years from the Revolution of 1911 through the 1920s were the heyday of Chinese anarchism, especially from the New Culture movement of the mid-1910s to about 1925."

7 The work of Japanese anarchist Kōtoku Shūsui had a significant impact on early Chinese socialism. See Zarrow (1990, pp. 1–2) and Hazama (1976).

8 See Hong (1991, p. 11).

9 The Chinese Communist Party was established in July 1921, while the Japanese Communist Party was founded exactly a year later, in July 1922. Both countries were preceded by the United States, whose Communist Party was formed in May 1919. Ishikawa (2002, p. 33) argues that, in fact, the CCP was modeled explicitly after the USCP.

10 Ishikawa (2002, p. 28).

11 Zarrow (1990, p. 3).

12 Zarrow (1990, pp. 12–13).

13 Incidentally, these are aspects shared as well by modern Buddhism—at least as interpreted by the New Buddhist Fellowship in Japan during this same period (1899–1915); see Shields (2017, Chapter 3).

14 An influential thinker and writer who can lay claim to be author of China's first (modern) utopia: *Datong shu* (Book of the Datong), Kang advocated "the abolition of nations and the establishment of a world parliament, public housing, vegetarianism, equality, and indeed, eventually, universal Buddhahood" (Zarrow 1990, p. 19).

15 Arguably the most influential thinker on the next generation of young activists, Tan developed an idealistic philosophy rooted in Buddhism, Western science as well as the ideas of Ming period Neo-Confucian reformer Wang Yangming (1472–1529)—who had emphasised, in Chan/Zen but also plausibly Marxist fashion, the fundamental connection between (true) *knowledge* and (effective) *practice*.

16 Already a well-known philologist, critic and revolutionary, during a three-year imprisonment from 1903 to 1906 Zhang Binglin (aka Zhang Taiyan) began to study and implement Buddhism in his revolutionary work.

17 There were several other figures of this period associated with both Buddhism and revolutionary activities, including ordained Buddhist monk Huang Zongyan (1865–1921) and the iconoclastic poet and artist Su Manshu (1884–1918).

18 As can be seen on the table above, Kropotkin's *Conquest of Bread* was published in Chinese in 1906, and excerpts appeared soon after in the anarchist journal *Natural Justice*.

19 By 1905 there were an estimated 8000 Chinese students in Japan.

20 At the risk of being overgenerous, one way of reading this is that, whereas the Japanese *kokusui* and *kokugaku* sought a deeper, earlier, indigenous "unity", Chinese national learning looked to an earlier diversity of thought (and authority) that had been codified and made rigid by a single, dominant, school, *rujia*.

21 Krebs (1998, p. 30).

22 Krebs (1998, p. 6).

23 See Krebs (1998, pp. 85–87) and Pittman (2001, p. 68). For more on Taixu, see Ritzinger (2017).

24 Zarrow (1990, p. 216). A distinction opened up within early Chinese socialists between "narrow" (Ch. *xiayi*) and "broad" (Ch. *guangyi*) paths: essentially, *narrow* (or *free*) socialists held closer to anarchism, while *broad* socialists were more eclectic, embracing various forms of social democracy, "state socialism", and other progressive hybrids. Taixu saw himself very much in the *narrow* (i.e. anarchist) camp, and helped form the Socialist Party (Ch. Shehui Dang) in October 1912 as a splinter group from the broadly inclined Chinese Socialist Party (Ch. Zhongguo Shehui Dang) founded by Jiang Kanghu in 1911 (and favoured by Sun Yatsen); see Krebs (1998, p. 77).

25 Zarrow (1990, pp. 25, 217).

26 See Krebs (1998, p. 56).

27 Krebs (1998, p. 27).

28 See, e.g. Snodgrass (2003) and Ketelaar (1990).

29 Like the Japanese New Buddhists, "Zhang Taiyan and Taixu sought to establish 'a religion without a god' (*washen lun*), by which they meant to remove superstition and retain spiritual power based on clear understanding and personal commitment" (Krebs 1998, p. 96).

30 Kōtoku gave a lecture in 1907 to the Chinese anarchists in Tokyo which relied heavily on Kropotkin but also emphasised that anarchist revolution had to be internationally rather than nationally minded; and yet at the same time, Asian anarchists must begin with a sense of pan-Asian solidarity before reaching out to others.

31 For a definitive overview of Buddhist modernism (though better on South, Southeast and Western Buddhism than on the Buddhist modernisms of East Asia) see McMahan (2008); on China, see Welch (1968) and Chan (2018); on Japan, see Ketelaar (1990) and Snodgrass (2003).

32 See Krebs (1998, p. 95). This in direct contrast to political leaders such as Yuan Shikai (1859–1916)—and later, Mao Zedong—who sought to confiscate religious properties, which would be controlled by the state.

33 See Krebs (1998, p. 98) for insightful remarks on how to understand "secularization" in the context of late-Qing China.

34 The following section borrows from my article "Liberation as Revolutionary Praxis: Rethinking Buddhist Materialism" (2013).

35 See Kołakowski (2008, p. 183).

36 See Martin (2008, p. 317).

37 Kołakowski (2008, p. 183).

38 Marx, "Jewish", pp. 152–154.

39 Marx "Jewish", p. 168.

40 This is best summarised in the famous quote from Marx's *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law* ("Religion is the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet found himself or has already lost himself again…"), which sets the famous "opiate" condemnation in a broader context, and hints at subtleties often ignored in Marx's perspective on religion vis-à-vis politics and criticism. MECW 3: 175–176.

41 One of the only Marxist thinkers to take up this issue in earnest was Karl Korsch (1886–1961), who saw it as the very essence of Marxism. See, e.g. his *Marxismus und Philosophie* (1923).

42 Kołakowski (2008, p. 1035).

43 See Krebs (1998, p. 57).

44 Given that all major "successful" socialist revolutions of the twentieth century were statist in nature, this resistance assured that anarchists would fall out of the historical record, despite the significance of their role in Russia and (especially) China.

45 See Zarrow (1990, pp. 211, 223).

46 See Krebs (1998, p. 193) for a discussion of the personal intellectual journey of Shifu from Buddhism to and through anarchism—a path linked by "his conviction that belief and action were inseparable."

47 Zarrow (1990, p. 240).

48 Zarrow (1990, p. 243). Another appeal of anarchism—particularly Kropotkin—was his resistance to Social Darwinism and mainstream (Spencerian)

49 Krebs (1998, p. 89).

50 One unresolved complication here was the question of self-sacrifice. Generally, suicide is a taboo within classical Buddhist understanding, due to the suffering that is caused by doing harm to oneself as a sentient being. And yet, both the *Jātaka*s and various Mahāyāna scriptures provide examples of the Buddha and bodhisattvas sacrificing themselves (or at least, their bodies) for others. Tan Sitong pushed the model of the bodhisattva for the "self-sacrificing patriots" of his day and played his own part by dying as a martyr after the failure of the Hundred Days Reform of 1898. Shifu, as well, "was moved by the bodhisattva ideal as he prepared to sacrifice himself in an assassination plot", while Taixu believed that anarchism "encouraged self-sacrifice and would help people escape their respective hells into the heaven of equality, liberty, and happiness" (Zarrow 1990, p. 216).

51 See, e.g. Sunkara (2019, p. 48).

52 See, e.g. Faure (2009, p. 99).

53 Ambedkar (2001, p. 237).