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TAIXU'S CONCEPT OF "BUDDHIST MINISTER" IN RELATION TO THE FORMATION AND PROFESSION OF BUDDHIST CHAPLAINCY IN THE US

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ABSTRACT

In the early 20th century, Master Taixu proposed the concept of "Buddhist Minister" to provide specific plans for reforming Buddhism in China—enhancing its social recognition and engagement. In his proposal, qualifications for becoming a Buddhist minister were in line with the "Three Stages of Formation," "Four Levels of Learning," and "Three Levels of Practicing." The proposal includes a specific paradigm of "Neo-Buddhology," that is, applied Buddhology in theory and practice. In the early 21st century, Professor Richard Osmer from Princeton Theological Seminary proposed the practical theological concepts of descriptive-empirical, interpretive, normative, and pragmatic paradigms in response to the extension of Christian church ministry into secular contexts. Under these four tasks of practical theological paradigm, the formation and profession of Buddhist chaplaincy in the US was developed. This article introduces Master Taixu's concept of a Buddhist Minister. It analyzes the influence of Professor Osmer's practical theological paradigm in the professional formation of Buddhist chaplaincy. Finally, this article discusses the potential enrichment and advancement of Buddhist chaplaincy in the US using Master Taixu's applied Buddhological paradigm. Such changes may inspire Buddhist and Christian dialogues with regard to religious/spiritual social services in the US.

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INTRODUCTION

Master Taixu (太虛 1890-1947) was an active, influential Buddhist reformer and leader in contemporary Chinese history whose insightful observations and practical efforts significantly influenced the revival of Buddhism in modern China.¹ The Master's era was one of intense self-criticism, ideological polarization, military conflict, and change. Facing such turbulent times, the nationalist government of the Republic of China took an anti-religion stance.² To facilitate the Chinese Buddhist community defending its right to exist, Master Taixu called for “a revitalization of Buddhism through institutional reorganization, modern education, compassionate social action, and ecumenical cooperation in global mission.”³

During this period, Master Taixu traveled widely. From 1927 to 1928, he traveled to European countries (the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Belgium) and the United States. He initiated comprehensive and in-depth dialogues between Buddhism and Christianity with local religious leaders and scholars. Master Taixu also visited seminaries, hospitals, orphanages, and social welfare programs developed by local Christian churches.⁴ These international travels widened the master's outlook on understanding Chinese Buddhism through the lens of Western philosophy and Christian theology.

It is unclear whether Taixu's proposed reforms of Chinese Buddhism were influenced by the Christianity he observed during his travels to European countries and the US between 1927 and 1928.⁵ To the Master, the development of a Buddhist ministerial system would facilitate the transition from traditional to more modern forms of Buddhism in China. It was his hope that through developing well-trained Buddhist ministers, the critique of the sangha of his time as being “largely incapable of contributing much of significance toward national goals” would be appropriately and effectively addressed.⁶

Under such circumstances, Master Taixu proposed the concept of professional “Buddhist Minister” in May 1931 to the national assembly in Nanjing city in his “*Shang guomin huiyi daibiao zhugong yijianshu* 上國民會議代表諸公意見書 [Suggestions for the Committee of Delegates to the National Assembly].”⁷ In the subsequent years of his public speeches such as “*Sengjiaoyu zhimude yuchengxu* 僧教育之目的與程序 [Purpose and Procedure for Monastic Education],” “*Fojiao yingban zhijiaoyu yusengjiaoyu* 佛教應辦之教育與僧教育 [Necessary Training and Education for Buddhist Monastics and Laity]” and “*Wode fojiao gaijin yundong lueshi* 我的佛教改進運動略史 [A Brief History of My Efforts for Buddhist Reformation],”⁸ the Master further

¹ Kunhong Hou 侯坤宏, *Taixu shidai: duowei shijiaoxide minguo fojiao* 太虛時代：多維視角下的民國佛教 [The Age of Taixu: Multidimensional Perspective of Buddhism in the Republic of China] (Taiwan: Chengchi University Press, 2018), 1.

² Don Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu's Reforms*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001, 1.

³ Ibid., 2.

⁴ Darui Long, “An Interfaith Dialogue Between the Chinese Buddhist Leader Taixu and Christians,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 20 (2000):171-173. & 176.

⁵ Darui Long, 2000, 178; Xia-nian Huang 黃夏年, ed., *Taixu ji* 太虛集 [Collection of Academic Works on Master Taixu] (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 1995), 344.

⁶ Don Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu's Reforms*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001, 28.

⁷ Taixu 太虛, “Suggestions for the Committee of Delegates to the National Assembly,” in Yin Shun 印順, ed., *Taixu dashi quanshu* 太虛大師全書 [Collection of Works by Master Taixu] (Taiwan: Shandao Temple Printing 臺灣善導寺流通版, 1980, Vol. 15), 18-24.

⁸ Taixu, “Purpose and Procedure for Monastic Education” (1980, Vol. 9), 473-480; Taixu, “Necessary Trainings and Education for Buddhist Monastics and Laity” (1980, Vol. 9), 481-488; Taixu, “A Brief History of My Efforts for Buddhist Reformation” (1980, Vol. 19), 67-121.

presented a tiered system of Buddhist Minister in accordance with the “*San jizhi*三級制 [Three Stages of Formation]”, “*Si xueji*四學級 [Four Levels of Learning]” and “*San zhiji*三職級 [Three Levels of Practicing]” that are based on Buddhist teachings as to establish a professional Buddhist ministerial system that would subsequently reform Buddhism in China to enhance its social recognition and engagement.

The Master's concept of Buddhist Minister combines the Buddhist teachings of renunciation with social engagement, forming a “Neo-Buddhology” (*Xinfoxue* 新佛學 in Chinese)—that is, applied Buddhology. The Buddhology proposed by the Master is based on the Buddhadharma but is fitted to modern times. Its practical aspects lay in preparing a Buddhist minister to provide appropriate, effective religious/spiritual services to people as needed.⁹ The religious/spiritual outlook of the Master's applied Buddhology was based on the basic principles and core values of Buddhist teachings. Its internal Buddhist structure aims to develop clarity in *Jiao*教 or *Buddhadharma*, rouse attention in *Li* 理 or *right understanding*, employ skillful means in *Xing*行 or *practice*, obtain *Guo*果 or *fruition in awakening*, as well as to achieve *Wen*聞 or *attentive listening*, engage in *Si*思 or *mindful reflection*, carry out *Xiu*修 or *appropriate cultivation* and grow *Hui*慧 or *right insight* for liberation from suffering. Its external social outlook aims to meet the challenges of historical context and the needs of people in society.¹⁰

The applied Buddhological paradigm proposed by the Master points out a path for the moral development and spiritual realization of a Buddhist minister through the practice of altruism as found in the Bodhisattva path from Mahayana Buddhism. This paradigm combines the Master's concept of *Rensheng fojiao* 人生佛教 or “Buddhism for Life” and *Renjian fojiao* 人間佛教 or “Buddhism for Human Society.”¹¹ That is, on both individual and social levels, the paradigm interprets the value of modern humanity in terms of religion, science, ethics, philosophy, and art.

Buddhist chaplaincy as a profession and a branch of social services first emerged in 1993 in the US healthcare system. In the subsequent thirty years, Buddhist chaplaincy expanded its services to the armed forces, prisons, police stations, non-for-profit organizations as well as private companies. US Buddhist chaplaincy in the 21st century has become a social service profession which offers religious/spiritual care and counseling to those in need outside of religious settings. The unfolding of Buddhist chaplaincy in the nation, its theory and practice, has been influenced by Christian theology in general and by Professor Richard Osmer's four tasks of practical theological paradigm in particular. It is arguable that the contemporary development of Buddhist chaplaincy in the US is based on the framework of the four practical theological tasks proposed by Professor Osmer.¹²

Buddhist chaplaincy in the US, as indicated by its name “Buddhist”, marks the profession as a branch of social services which has its roots in Buddhist basic principles and core values. Before one can

⁹ Taixu, “*Xinyu rongguan* 新與融貫 [Reform and Engagement]” (1980, Vol. 1), 450-451.

¹⁰ Taixu, “*Fojiaode jiaoshi jiaofa hejinhou dejianshe* 佛教的教史教法 and 今後的建設 [Buddhist History, Teachings, and Future Construction]” (1980, Vol. 1), 458-485; Taixu, “*Shijie foxueyuan zhifofa xitongguan* 世界佛學苑之佛法系統觀 [The Systemization of Buddhadharma for the World Buddhist Academy]” (1980, Vol. 1), 487-488.

¹¹ Taixu, “*Zenyang laijianshe renjian fojiao* 怎樣來建設人間佛教 [How to Advance Buddhism for Human Society]” (1980, Vol. 14), 431-456.

¹² Guan Zhen, “Buddhist Chaplaincy in the United States: Theory-Praxis Relationship in Formation and Profession,” *Journal of International Buddhist Studies* 13.1 (2022): 46-47.

be certified as a Buddhist chaplain in the US, one is required to receive Buddhist minister training—such as on scripture reading, meditation, chanting, and rituals—from one’s Buddhist tradition in order to establish a religious foundation in Buddhism. Upon completion of one’s training, one may then apply for ordination and be endorsed as a certified Buddhist minister and a chaplain working either in Buddhist communities or social institutions. In practice, a Buddhist chaplain is a Buddhist minister. It is, therefore, critical for Buddhist chaplaincy in the US to develop the profession based on applied Buddhology from existing Buddhist teachings and social service models.

To begin researching applied Buddhology that may serve as the foundation of Buddhist chaplaincy in the US, in January 2019, I invited Venerable Neng Ren 能仁 from the Research Institute of Buddhist Culture of China to conduct a preliminary exploration of Master Taixu’s concept of Buddhist Minister, hoping that the Master’s concept may serve as a basic model and reference point for the contemporary professional development of Buddhist chaplaincy in the US and beyond. As a result, the article “*Taixu fojiao zongjiaoshi linian le lun sengxinjianzhi yudangdai beimei fojiao zongjiaoshi zhuan ye* 太虛‘佛教宗教師’理念——略論僧信建制與當代北美佛教宗教師專業 [Taixu’s Concept of ‘Buddhist Minister’—The Development of Buddhist Monastic and Lay Ministerial System to the Contemporary Profession and Formation of Buddhist Chaplaincy in the US]” was completed.

The article was first presented at the “Buddhist Chaplaincy and Faith-Based Social Services” international conference held at Columbia University in New York City on May 4th-5th, 2019. The article was further presented at the 2nd Peking University International Symposium on “*Taixu yudangdai zhongguo* 太虛與近代中國 [Taixu and Modern China]” on November 2nd-3rd, 2019. It was published in the second series of *Beida foxue* 北大佛學 or *Journal of Buddhist Studies of Peking University* on October 1st, 2020 under the recommendation of Professor Wang Song, the director of the Buddhist Studies Center of Peking University. The article, for the first time, introduces Master Taixu’s preliminary concept of “Buddhist Minister” as a profession and the Master’s proposal for establishing a professional Buddhist ministerial system for Buddhist monastics and laity in the early 20th century in light of applied Buddhology. The article further analyzes the application and formation of Master Taixu’s concept of “Buddhist Minister” compared to contemporary Buddhist chaplaincy in the US, which is largely based on practical theology.¹³

This article, by adopting a literature review method, further introduces Master Taixu’s concept of a Buddhist Minister. It further analyzes the influence of Professor Osmer’s four tasks of practical theological paradigm in the development of Buddhist chaplaincy in the US. It then discusses the implications of the establishment of Buddhist chaplaincy in light of Master Taixu’s concepts of applied Buddhology. The introduction of Master Taixu’s thought into modern Buddhist chaplaincy may enrich and advance the current practice of Buddhist chaplaincy and further initiate a Buddhist-Christian dialogue with regard to religious/spiritual social services in the US.

¹³ Neng Ren 能仁 and Guan Zhen 振冠, “*Taixu fojiao zongjiaoshi linian le lun sengxinjianzhi yudangdai beimei fojiao zongjiaoshi* 太虛「佛教宗教師」理念——略論僧信建制與當代北美佛教宗教師 [Taixu’s Concept of ‘Buddhist Minister’—The Development of Buddhist Monastic and Lay Ministerial System to the Contemporary Profession and Formation of Buddhist Chaplaincy in the US],” *Beida foxue* 北大佛學 [Journal of Buddhist Studies, PKU] 2.1 (2020): 175-196.

TAIXU'S CONCEPT OF "BUDDHIST MINISTER" IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

At the national assembly held in Nanjing city (then capital) in May 1931, on behalf of the Buddhist Association of China, Master Taixu presented the "Suggestions for the Committee of Delegates to the National Assembly," introducing Buddhism as an asset for the promotion of values for social enhancement especially with respect to morality, spirituality, and humanity. The Master proposed that well-trained and ordained Buddhists should be treated as professional Buddhist ministers who are qualified and ready to meet the needs of people in society and serve in public domains such as hospitals, prisons, the armed forces, banks, and factories as to promote the well-being of humanity in society.¹⁴

The Master subsequently and formally put forward a professional Buddhist minister training system in line with the Three Stages of Formation—that is, educational formation for candidates, professional formation for full-time Buddhist ministers, and supervisory formation for senior Buddhist ministers who have served for 20 years or more. From the Master's perspective, just as lawyers in society need to go through strict professional training and assessment so as to obtain their qualifications and certifications to practice, the three stages of formation of a professional Buddhist minister set forth a standard Buddhist educational system encompassing field practice (internship) and national exams for the professional assessment and certification of a Buddhist minister.¹⁵

According to the Master's proposal, the three stages of formation for training Buddhist ministers lie in the education and practice of Buddhist *Lu* 律 or *morality* that concerns ethical conduct, *Jiao* 教 or *doctrine* that nourishes spirituality, *Guan* 觀 or *contemplation* that enhances mindful reflection, as well as skillful means in *practice* that refines engagement liberation from suffering for both self and others. In the Master's system, the Buddhist hermeneutical paradigm of "*Fofa yuanjiu fofa* 佛法研究佛法 [Employing Buddhadharma to Interpret Buddhadharma]" serves as the foundation for a Buddhist minister to provide services to Buddhist communities or social institutions as needed. The Master observes that only those who obtain the professional qualification of Buddhist minister in line with the three stages of formation can gain a firm foothold in today's changing, diversified international society to achieve the goal of "employing Buddhist teachings to promote social morality, spirituality, and humanity, and meanwhile benefit oneself through serving others in need."¹⁶

As such, in July 1931, when the Master gave a public lecture on "The Purpose and Procedure for Monastic Education" at Bailin Buddhist Institute in Peking, he presented the three stages of formation for establishing a professional Buddhist minister system as follows: (1) a learner, that is, a Buddhist minister candidate, engages in Buddhist education and field practice (internship), which mostly refers to novice Buddhists; (2) a certified Buddhist minister further requires the completion of courses on the basic principles and core values of Buddhism including passing required examinations;¹⁷ (3) a senior Buddhist minister or supervisor demonstrates qualification for becoming a senior Buddhist minister by serving for 20 years or over.

¹⁴ Taixu, "Suggestions for the Committee of Delegates to the National Assembly" (1980, Vol. 15), 19; Taixu, "Purpose and Procedure for Monastic Education" (1980, Vol. 9), 476.

¹⁵ Neng Ren and Guan Zhen 2020, 177-194.

¹⁶ Taixu, "*Zenli sengque zhidulun* 整理僧伽制度論 [On Reorganizing the Monastic System]" (1980, Vol. 9), 6-8.

¹⁷ Taixu, "A Brief History of My Efforts for Buddhist Reformation" (1980, Vol. 19), 111.

Master Taixu observes that only certified Buddhist ministers who have obtained professional qualifications in both Buddhist studies and social service can work as full-time Buddhist ministers, providing appropriate and effective religious/spiritual services to either Buddhist communities or social institutions (such as hospitals, banks, and factories). Accordingly, certified Buddhist ministers are the backbone of the professional Buddhist ministerial system. A senior Buddhist minister who has rich work experience serves as an example for candidates and as a supervisor for certified Buddhist ministers in the system.¹⁸

In the Master's professional Buddhist ministerial system, qualifications for becoming a certified Buddhist minister lie in Buddhist education, accumulation of social science knowledge, and experience in field practice. These elements allow a Buddhist minister to adequately provide services to those in need.¹⁹ In this regard, the Master combines the external disciplines (that is, social sciences, religious studies, liberal arts, social ethics, eastern and western philosophies) and the internal Buddhist training in the traditional eight Chinese Buddhist schools (that is, Tiantai, Huayan, Yogachara, Pure Land, Chan, Esoteric, Vinaya, Madhyamika). The Master further conceived of the "Four Levels of Learning" and "Three Levels of Practicing."

In both theory and practice, the four levels of learning aim to train Buddhist ministerial candidates to complete Buddhist education and field practice requirements using the four traditional Buddhist learning areas, that is, developing Buddhist *morality* for ethical conduct, studying *doctrine* for the growth of spirituality, enhancing *contemplation* for mindful reflection, and refining *spiritual practice* for skillful engagement in benefiting self and others. The first two learning areas, that is, *morality* and *doctrine*, constitute Buddhist theory and the ethical foundation for a Buddhist ministerial candidate to develop familiarity with Buddhism, while the learning areas of *contemplation* and *spiritual practice* constitute skillful methods of reflection and engagement useful for preparing a candidate to become a qualified minister benefiting others. This grouping of the four practices into two sets allows for their mutual enhancement and accomplishment. Just like the two wheels of a chariot or the two wings of a bird, they are indispensable.²⁰

Apart from the four levels of learning that prepare a candidate to become a certified Buddhist minister, the three levels of practicing correspond to the stages of formation from candidate to certified Buddhist minister. The Master indicated that before a candidate may become a Buddhist minister, the candidate must first enter a social institution (such as a hospital, nursing home, prison, military, bank, factory, etc.) under the supervision of a certified Buddhist minister to complete a prescribed internship. After this, one becomes an associate Buddhist minister. Next, to become a certified Buddhist minister, one must first complete the work of an associate Buddhist minister under the supervision of a senior Buddhist minister who has had at least 20 years of experience in the field. After accumulating the necessary experience and passing an exam, one can become a certified Buddhist minister. Here, the senior Buddhist minister supervises Buddhist ministerial candidates to ensure their overall quality of service, and this is the cornerstone of the professional Buddhist ministerial system proposed by the Master.²¹

¹⁸ Taixu, "Purpose and Procedure for Monastic Education" (1980, Vol. 9), 477-479.

¹⁹ Taixu, "*Jianshe xiandai zhongguo fojiaotai* 建設現代中國佛教談 [On Building Modern Chinese Buddhism]" (1980, Vol. 9), 268-271; Taixu, "A Brief History of My Efforts for Buddhist Reformation" (1980, Vol. 19), 107.

²⁰ Taixu, "Necessary Trainings and Education for Buddhist Monastics and Laity" (1980, Vol. 9), 484-486.

²¹ Neng Ren and Guan Zhen 2020, 179.

In Master Taixu's proposal, the professional Buddhist ministerial system, with its three stages of formation, four levels of learning, and three levels of practice, constitutes a new Buddhist framework for societal engagement. Consequently, the Master recognized that it was necessary to establish social legitimacy for professional Buddhist ministers. Concerning this, in August 1931, when the Master gave a lecture on "Necessary Training and Education for Buddhist Monastics and Laity" at the Buddhist Lay Assembly in northern China, he pointed out that the social legitimacy of Buddhist ministers could be realized through codifying the profession in *Civil Law*. He further observed that, in order to obtain professional certification as a Buddhist minister, one "must pass examinations laid out by the Examination Department (of the Republic of China) for becoming a certified Buddhist minister."²²

The Master's proposal for certifying Buddhist ministers on a national examination level is undoubtedly designed to codify the social status of the profession and standardize it using *Civil Law* and national examination. Further, he hoped that such a profession would lead Buddhism to participate in the founding of modern society and provide people with qualified religious/spiritual services. **Figure 1** is an illustration (as made by the author) of Master Taixu's proposal for establishing a professional Buddhist ministerial system during his time and its corresponding certification procedure:

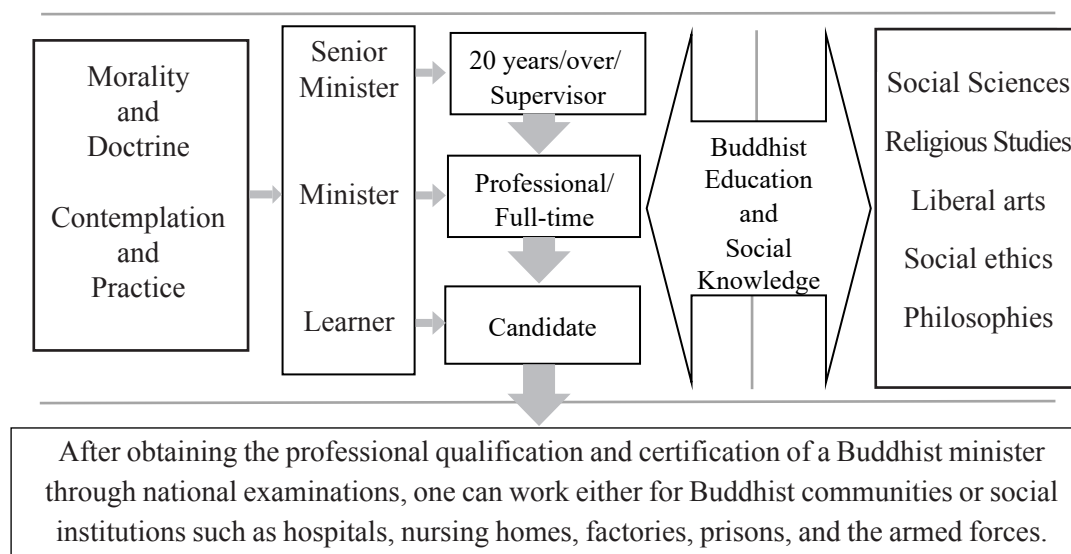


Figure 1: Procedure for becoming a Buddhist minister.

According to the Master's proposal, a qualified applicant must have a high school diploma before one may apply for the Buddhist minister candidacy. Upon acceptance, a candidate must then: (1) develop *Nei ming* 内明 or Inner Moral and Spiritual Qualities (that is, practice Buddhist teachings for enhancing morality and spirituality, especially for the quality of renunciation) and *Wai ming* 外明 or Outer Worldly Knowledge (that is, social sciences, religious studies, social ethics, liberal arts, philosophies, etc., as skillful means for social engagement); (2) complete required filed practice or internship;²³ (3) establish collaborative relationships or friendships with various occupations in society (such as professionals in industry, commerce, military, and medicine) in order to better serve and legitimize the profession.²⁴

²² Taixu, "Necessary Trainings and Education for Buddhist Monastics and Laity" (1980, Vol. 9), 488.

²³ Taixu, "Purpose and Procedure for Monastic Education" (1980, Vol. 9), 477-479.

²⁴ Taixu, "On Building Modern Chinese Buddhism" (1980, Vol. 9), 271.

After completing these steps and passing the assessment, a candidate is qualified to take a national examination and obtain the professional certification of a Buddhist minister. The Master insisted that a newly certified Buddhist minister needs to develop their professional identity through the core Buddhist practices of morality/ethics, concentration, and altruistic wisdom. In his September 1933 lecture, “The Systemization of Buddhadharma for the World Buddhist Academy,” the Master observed that core Buddhist teachings were contained in his “outline of Buddhism”, specifically clarity in *Buddhadharma*, attention to *right understanding*, skillful means in *practice*, and fruition in *awakening*. As such, a Buddhist minister should utilize worldly knowledge in the spirit of the Bodhisattva Path in order to benefit society, using Buddhadharma to promote social progress rather than being something useless as was commonly thought during the Master’s time.²⁵

In that vein, based on the teachings of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka Sūtra* and the *Bodhisattva Prātimokṣa Sūtra*, the Master indicated that the essence of the Bodhisattva Path in Mahayana Buddhism was to dedicate life to “practicing generosity and compassion which can benefit all sentient beings and the world.”²⁶ As the Master further observed, this can be extended to the professional development of a Buddhist ministerial system that combines both monastics and laity. The Master elaborated on this kind of Buddhist ministerial system as crucial for better-serving society and promoting Buddhist teachings and values “from one nation to another and ultimately benefiting the world altogether.”²⁷

In July 1940, when the Master gave a talk entitled “A Brief History of My Efforts for Buddhist Reformation” at the summer session of the Sino-Tibetan Buddhist Institute, he indicated that the value of professional lay Buddhist ministers is rooted in the Bodhisattva Path of Mahayana Buddhism which aims to appropriately and broadly benefit diverse groups of people. The Master expected that while certified monastic Buddhist ministers engage in the profession to “propagate Buddhadharma as a spiritual vocation, and benefit sentient beings as a fundamental cause,” trained and qualified lay Buddhist ministers would assist monastic Buddhist ministers in offering Buddhist services to various social institutions in different countries as to realize the universality of Buddhism in practice, that is, benefiting people and society with morality and spirituality.²⁸

The Master’s proposal for establishing parallel professional monastic and lay Buddhist ministerial training systems came from his public speeches given between May 1931 and July 1940. These speeches, including “Purpose and Procedure for Monastic Education,” “Necessary Training and Education for Buddhist Monastics and Laity,” and “A Brief History of My Efforts for Buddhist Reformation,” showed that the foundation of his training system was to “Employ Buddhadharma to Interpret Buddhadharma,” itself rooted in “*Fofa dechangzhu zhenli* 佛法的常住真理 [the living truth of the Buddhadharma],” as the Master put it. Buddhist ministers were expected to act as bodhisattvas so that “Buddhadharma can be

²⁵ Taixu, “*Zhixing zishu* 志行自述 [My Efforts in Reforming Buddhism]” (1980, Vol. 9), 186-189; Taixu, “*Xinyu rongguan* 新與融貫 [Reform and Engagement]” (1980, Vol. 1), 451; Taixu, Taixu, “Buddhist History, Teachings, and Future Construction” (1980, Vol. 1), 471-476; Taixu, “The Systemization of Buddhadharma for the World Buddhist Academy” (1980, Vol. 1), 487-488.

²⁶ Taixu, “*Fochengzong yaolun* 佛乘宗要論 [Essentials of Buddhism]” (1980, Vol. 1), 221.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Taixu, “A Brief History of My Efforts for Buddhist Reformation” (1980, Vol. 19), 181; Neng Ren and Guan Zhen 2020, 183-187.

active in human society and all can find joyfulness in daily practice,” thus unifying the Buddhist teachings of renunciation with that of worldly/socially engaged modes of practice.²⁹

Based on this, in August 1937, the Master put forward the concept of “Neo-Buddhology” when he gave a lecture on “Reform and Engagement” at the World Buddhist Academy in Wuchang district, Hubei province, China. The Master’s new Buddhology was rooted in the basic principles and core values of traditional Buddhist teachings, yet it aimed to transform Buddhism into a modern world religion capable of meeting the needs of various groups of people in a diverse world. The Master observed:

Neo[-Buddhology] requires that the Buddha’s teachings be renewed so that the Buddha’s teachings can be at its core to suit modern thought and culture. This type of neo-Buddhology is built upon the truth of the Buddhadharma but fitted to modern times it includes eastern and Western, modern, and ancient culture and thought. It uses the Buddhist perspective to investigate everything modern, including economics, government, education, arts and sciences, philosophy, and culture, without exception. This is the application of neo-Buddhology. However, if we cannot adapt Buddhadharma to the times in accordance with peoples’ needs, then the newness of neo-Buddhology is lost.³⁰

新，需要佛教中心的新，即是以佛教為中心而適應現代思想文化所成的新的佛教。這佛教的中心的新的，是建立在依佛法真理而契適時代機宜的原則上.....旁及東西古今文化思想，抱定以佛教為中心的觀念，去觀察現代的一切新的經濟、政治、教育、文藝及科學、哲學諸文化，無一不可為佛法所批評的對象或發揚的工具，這就是應用佛法的新。然而，若不能以佛法適應時代、契眾生機，則失掉這裏所謂的新。

Accordingly, the neo-Buddhology proposed by the Master embodies a pragmatic approach for establishing a new form of Buddhism suited to the modern world, which has its foundations in the principles of openness and diversity to meet the challenges of modernity. It is an applied Buddhology that combines the basic principles and core values of the teachings with knowledge of contemporary subjects such as the social sciences, arts, culture, philosophy, and so forth. The Buddhadharma would be used to interpret life events and situations. This applied Buddhology aimed to enable a Buddhist minister to provide scientific, rational, and objective service adhering to “the truth of the Buddhadharma” and yet adapted to events and situations that congregation members from Buddhist communities and people from social institutions may present. Within this framework, the applied Buddhological paradigm proposed by the Master in August 1937 was intended to raise the applicability of Buddhism, specifically to increase its modernity, sociability, and universality.

The applied Buddhological paradigm proposed by the Master was a means of reforming Buddhism in China, which was in decline during his time. These proposals were meant to inject new vitality into Buddhism and adapt it to modern times. Further, they were the reflection of the Master’s continuing attempts to describe Buddhism’s societal role and response to many new and challenging questions. Such questions included: what is religion’s role in promoting social development? What perspectives on modern issues

²⁹ Taixu, “Reform and Engagement” (1980, Vol. 1), 450.

³⁰ Ibid., 450-451.

can religion provide? In addition to reforming Buddhism to save it from precarity in China, the Master also sought to tie Buddhist practice to social efforts, that is, unifying the Buddhist teachings of renunciation with the work of social engagement so as to practice the Bodhisattva Way. He wanted to apply Buddhism constructively and extensively to the needs of modern society and the people living in it in order to benefit beings using spirituality and culture.

The applied Buddhology that the Master developed to establish a new form of Buddhism in modern society is closely related to his ideas of “Buddhism for Life” and “Buddhism for Human Society.” For instance, in October 1933, when the Master gave a lecture on “How to Advance Buddhism for Human Society” at the Hankou Chamber of Commerce in Wuhan City, Hubei province, China, he indicated that Buddhism for life and Buddhism for human society is based on appropriately and effectively employing Buddhadharma to aid individuals in searching for the meaning of life and shaping human society using morality and spirituality. Against the backdrop of his particular time period, the Master developed a new framework for Buddhist social service for the purpose of improving individuals’ quality of life and benefiting society with prosperity and peace.³¹

In November 1935, the Master gave another lecture on the “*Rensheng jinshan zhijieduan* 人生進善之階段 [Developmental Stages of Goodness in Life]” at Danyang Zhengze Girls High School in Danyang City, Zhenjiang Prefecture 鎮江, Jiangsu Province 江蘇省, China. In this lecture, the Master further elaborated on Buddhism’s role in each person’s life and, in general, human society has to have the two aspects of “rationality” and “activity.” The roots of these two aspects lie in the practices of Buddhist morality (*vinaya*), spirituality (*samādhi*), and skillful insight (*prajñā*), which can enrich individual lives with meaning by encouraging the development of mindful reflection and right insight. Applied on a larger scale, these can also enhance the prosperity and peace of human society.³²

In both theory and practice, the application of Master Taixu’s applied Buddhological paradigm reflects his focus on the pragmatic enrichment of humanity and human experience with meaning and peace by establishing a professional Buddhist ministerial system for both monastics and laity in the early 20th century. Master Taixu’s applied Buddhological paradigm proposed in the early 20th century can still offer a practical and valuable template for the professional development of Buddhist chaplaincy in the US today, which has so far been under the influence of Christian theology, especially Professor Osmer’s four tasks of practical theological paradigm. The following sections will further discuss this topic.

THE INFLUENCES OF PRACTICAL THEOLOGY ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF BUDDHIST CHAPLAINCY IN THE US

Buddhist chaplaincy first emerged in the US in the early 1980s as a form of volunteer work. In 1993, Rev. Madeline Koi Bastis (1940-2007) from New York City received her Buddhist training in the Japanese Soto Zen tradition and subsequently ordained as a Soto Zen Buddhist minister and became a board-certified Buddhist chaplain through the Association of Professional Chaplains (formerly known as the Association of Protestant Hospital Chaplains and the Chaplains’ Division of the American Protestant Hospital

³¹ Taixu, “How to Advance Buddhism for Human Society” (1980, Vol. 14), 431-456.

³² Taixu, “Developmental Stages of Goodness in Life” (1980, Vol. 2), 153-158.

Association) which was established by the American Protestant Hospital Association in the middle of the 1940s.³³ Rev. Bastis was then invited to work as a full-time Buddhist chaplain at local hospitals in New York City, where she cared for cancer and AIDS patients. Her work marked the beginning of Buddhist chaplaincy as a social service profession in the US.³⁴

Today, the work of Buddhist chaplaincy in the US has expanded from healthcare systems to the armed forces, prisons, universities, police stations, non-for-profit organizations (such as drug rehabilitation centers and homeless shelters) as well as to private companies. The practitioners of Buddhist chaplaincy in the US are composed of monastics and ordained lay Buddhist ministers from various Buddhist traditions. The existing functions of Buddhist chaplains in the nation are threefold: (1) supporting the "Free Exercise Clause" of the First Amendment for all citizens (especially for Buddhist chaplains who work in federal or state government agencies); (2) providing Buddhist care and consulting services to care seekers as needed; (3) offering high quality religious, cultural, and spiritual support to co-workers.

As far as the US social, religious, and cultural context is concerned, the emergence of Buddhist chaplaincy as a profession and a branch of social services is essentially an extension of professional Christian chaplaincy. On this point, the development of the Buddhist chaplaincy profession since the beginning of the 21st century—its vocational education, board of certification, and practice model—has been deeply influenced by Christian theology, especially by the four tasks of practical theology proposed by Professor Osmer from Princeton Theological Seminary.³⁵

In 2008, Professor Osmer published his book *Practical Theology: An Introduction*. Through years of experience working as an ordained Presbyterian minister for his church, Professor Osmer presented in his book four tasks of practical theological paradigm to organize ordained Christian ministers' interactions with their congregation members and daily work in society. The four theological tasks are *descriptive-empirical*, *interpretive*, *normative*, and *pragmatic*. These tasks, by employing a *metatheoretical paradigm* in practice, have their purpose in helping Christian ministers categorize their daily *episodes*, *situations*, or *contexts*.

These four tasks help to develop paths of effective exploration, rational interpretation, and practical response through in-depth reflections on four issues: (1) what is going on? (Descriptive-empirical paradigm for "gathering information to better understand particular episodes, situations, or contexts"); (2) why is this going on? (Interpretive paradigm for "entering into a dialogue with the social sciences to interpret and explain why certain actions and patterns are taking place"); (3) what ought to be going on? (Normative paradigm for "raising normative questions from the perspectives of theology, ethics, and other fields"); and (4) how might we respond? (Pragmatic paradigm for "forming an action plan and undertaking specific responses that seek to shape the episode, situation, or context in desirable directions").³⁶

³³ Emory University, "Association of Professional Chaplains Records, 1946-1996," accessed on June 26, 2023, available at <https://findingaids.library.emory.edu/documents/P-S053/printable/>

³⁴ Danny Fisher, *Benefit Beings! The Buddhist Guide to Professional Chaplaincy* (CA: Off Cushion Books, 2013), 41-43.

³⁵ Guan Zhen 2022, 44-46.

³⁶ Reichard R. Osmer, "Practical theology: A Current International Perspective," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 67.2 (2011): 2-7.

The purpose of applying these four practical theological tasks in a minister's daily practice has twofold meanings: (1) to train individual ordained Christian ministers to adapt to contemporary times and encourage exploration and interpretation of particular episodes, situations, or contexts in order that they might conform to theological rationale; (2) to develop contemporary theological models of reflection, so as to better explore and interpret issues faced by the larger church and society in an increasingly globalized world, and become better able to provide timely, appropriate, and practical responses.³⁷ In practice, the four tasks of practical theological paradigm proposed by Professor Osmer provide a pragmatic framework in accordance with the *hermeneutical circle* paradigm: (1) to bridge sacred traditional theology (that is, philosophical statements of Christian doctrines and explanations) with secular social affairs (*descriptive-empirical*); (2) to explore particular episodes, situations, or contexts encountered by a minister at church and in society (*interpretive* and *normative*); (3) to provide practical, rational, effective and appropriate responses to particular episodes, situations, or contexts in accordance with practical theological paradigm (*pragmatic*).

These four practical theological tasks form an *action-reflection-action* (ARA) circular theological reflection model of action. In theory, the four tasks combine traditional theology with contemporary knowledge of the social sciences, rationalism, and humanism and adopt ideas from diverse religions and cultures to train ordained Christian ministers in developing *priestly listening*, *sagely wisdom*, *prophetic discernment*, and *servant leadership* as to better embody a ministry of presence to serve congregation members at church and people in society. **Figure 2** (as created by the author) illustrates the functions of the four tasks of the practical theological paradigm as proposed by Professor Osmer:

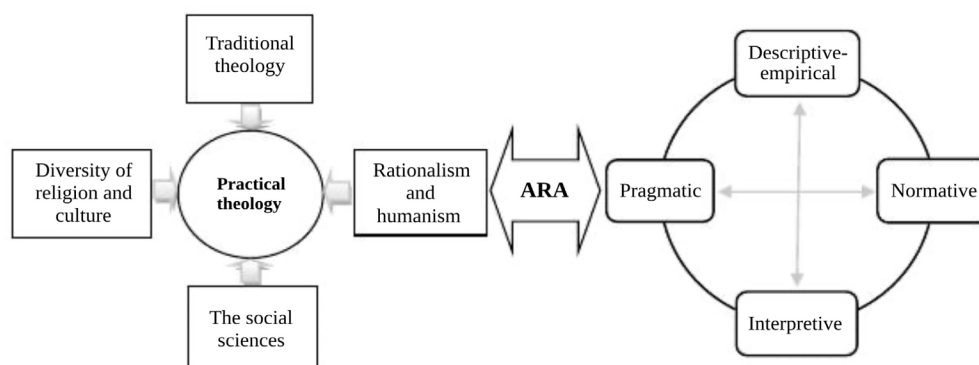


Figure 2: Functions of the four tasks of practical theological paradigm.

As shown in **Figure 2**, the functions of the four tasks of practical theological paradigm embodied in the reflective *hermeneutical circle* of ARA aim to better explore, interpret, and comprehend any particular episode, situation, or context based on *theological truth* (or *God's will*) as revealed in the Bible. Thereby, based on *theological truth*, practical theology has its function in linking the sacred and secular worlds. To a certain extent, the four practical theological tasks proposed by Professor Osmer are extensions of European and 1960s American philosophers' and practical theologians' work—such as Stephen Toulmin, Thomas Kuhn, Father Hans Küng, James Fowler, and Elaine Graham. These thinkers aimed to understand social

³⁷ Reichard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, (MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 1-31.

ethics in light of theology and the social sciences—between Christian faith and secular reasoning. In practice, the four practical theological tasks function as a bridge that connects the significance of sacred and secular worlds.³⁸

In light of social issues and universal application, the four practical theological tasks exhibit four characteristics of “combining”: (1) combining theology with contemporary social sciences to elevate traditional theological discourse; (2) combining theology with rationalism and humanism to foster mutual learning and acceptance of diversity of religion and culture; (3) combining theology with contemporary social ethics to explore and interpret the collaborative relationship between different professions in society, and provide a basis for consistent theological-social services; (4) combining theology with pragmatism to provide practical, meaningful, appropriate and theologically-based responses to particular episodes, situations, or contexts encountered in a minister’s daily work at a congregation or in society. The promotion of the four practical theological tasks in the US today is like a bridge, forming a close connection between the church and society for solving life issues, and has proved useful for the development of the Doctor of Ministry in seminaries and the Clinical Pastoral Education for professional chaplains in healthcare systems across the US.³⁹

The 21st century development of professional Buddhist chaplaincy in the US has been deeply influenced by Christian theology, particularly Professor Osmer’s four tasks of practical theological paradigm. For instance, in 2012, 2013, and 2016, there were three books published with scholarship intended specifically for professional Buddhist chaplains in the US, all of which drew heavily upon practical theology. They were: (1) *The Arts of Contemplative Care: Pioneering Voices in Buddhist Chaplaincy and Pastoral Work*, edited by Professors Giles Cheryl and Miller Willa from Harvard Divinity School; (2) *Benefit Beings!: The Buddhist Guide to Professional Chaplaincy* by Rev. Dr. Danny Fisher; and (3) *A Thousand Hands: A Guidebook for Caring for Your Buddhist Community* edited by Rev. Dr. Nathan Michon and Rev. Dr. Daniel Fisher.

Rev. Dr. Fisher’s book *Benefit Beings* appears particularly influenced by traditional theology, especially with respect to the establishment of Buddhist chaplaincy as a profession. Individual essays collected in *The Arts of Contemplative Care* and *A Thousand Hands* were mainly from Buddhist chaplains who were/are worked/working in Buddhist communities, healthcare systems, the military, prison, and higher education, respectively. The prose format essays collected in these two books describe work experiences and case studies, primarily reflecting on the value and significance of a Buddhist chaplain’s work serving care seekers in Christian contexts.

Despite the rich and varied nature of these essays, a consistent horizontal theme of these essays is the practical theological concept of pastoral formation in line with observing care-seekers as *living human*

³⁸ Reichard R. Osmer, “Practical theology,” 1-7; Stephen Toulmin, *Human understanding*, (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972, vol 1); Thomas Kuhn, 2nd ed., *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (IL: Chicago University Press, 1962); Hans Küng & David Tracy, eds., *Paradigm change in theology: A symposium for the future* (NY: Crossroad Press, 1991); James W. Fowler, *Faith Development and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 13-17; Elaine L. Graham, Heather Walton, and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 14 & 188-9.

³⁹ Reichard R. Osmer, “Practical theology,” 2.

documents, a practice put forward by Rev. Charles Gerkin (1944-1992, an ordained Methodist minister, chaplain, and clinical pastoral educator) in the early 1980s.⁴⁰ These essays adapted Christian theological concepts such as *pastoral work*, *pastoral relationship*, *pastoral identity*, *pastoral care*, and *pastoral authority* to describe and interpret the daily work of Buddhist chaplains in various contexts in the US, where chaplaincy and culture are dominated by Christianity. In the meantime, Professor Osmer's four tasks of practical theological paradigm, that is, *descriptive-empirical*, *interpretive*, *normative*, and *pragmatic*, are vertical themes in this literature, a basis for the development of Buddhist chaplaincy as a profession and type of social service in the US.⁴¹

Apart from describing various work experiences and case studies provided by Buddhist chaplains in *The Arts of Contemplative Care* and *A Thousand Hands*, Rev. Dr. Monica Sanford's *Kalyāṇamitra: A Model for Buddhist Spiritual Care* (2021) adopts a qualitative research method, tactfully focusing on a systematic exploration of the Buddhist chaplaincy profession in the US by taking Professor Osmer's four practical theological tasks as a framework. She further utilizes Buddhist teachings on the Four Noble Truths as guiding principles. Rev. Dr. Sanford observed that the *descriptive-empirical* function of practical theology parallels the truth of knowing suffering (*duḥkha*) in the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism, that the *interpretive* function reflects parallels the truth of knowing the cause of suffering (*samudaya*), that the *normative* function parallels truth of the cessation of suffering (*nirodha*); and, that the *pragmatic* function parallels the truth of the path that leads to the end of suffering (*mārga*). Rev. Dr. Sanford elaborated that, by combining the Four Noble Truths with the four practical theological tasks, there emerges a *practical Buddhist theology* that can enrich the profession of Buddhist chaplaincy as well as assist in adapting Buddhism to local needs.⁴²

Inspired by the idea of *practical Buddhist theology*, Rev. Dr. Sanford collected Buddhist scriptural teachings on attentive listening (*śruta*), mindful reflection (*cetanā*), and skillful practice (*bhāvanā*) from Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana traditions. Based on these teachings, Rev. Dr. Sanford further proposed a framework for Buddhist chaplaincy based on the model of *kalyāṇamitra*, that is, a good/spiritual friend. Rev. Dr. Sanford expressed that Buddhist chaplains can benefit from this model and develop the *three prajñās* in daily practice, that is, the wisdom of listening, the wisdom of reflection, and the wisdom of cultivation. Accordingly, the *three prajñās framework* mirrors the practical theological *action-reflection-action* paradigm and has the following four strengths: (1) it provides foundations for the development of Buddhist chaplaincy in line with the concept of *practical Buddhist theology*; (2) it assists Buddhist chaplains in accomplishing their roles as professional spiritual caregivers even in Christian contexts; (3) it allows the coupling of the Buddhist idea of the *three prajñās framework* with the social sciences to facilitate the provision of professional religious/spiritual care services; (4) it promotes and allows traditional Buddhist teachings to be adapted and integrated into the daily work of a Buddhist chaplain.⁴³

⁴⁰ Charles Gerkin, *Widening the Horizons: Pastoral Responses to a Fragmented Society* (PA: Westminster Press, 1986).

⁴¹ Giles Cheryl and Miller Willa, ed., *The Arts of Contemplative Care: Pioneering Voices in Buddhist Chaplaincy and Pastoral Work* (Wisdom Publication, 2012); Danny Fisher, *Benefit Beings!: The Buddhist Guide to Professional Chaplaincy* (CA: Off the Cushion Books, 2013); Nathan J. Michon and Daniel C. Fisher eds., *A Thousand Hands: A Guidebook for Caring for Your Buddhist Community* (ON: Sumeru Press, 2016).

⁴² Monica Sanford, *Kalyāṇamitra: A Model for Buddhist Spiritual Care* (ON: Sumeru Press, 2021), 11-14.

⁴³ Monica Stanford, *Kalyāṇamitra*, 2021, 39-58 & 81-117.

Rev. Dr. Sanford's perspectives on combining Professor Osmer's four tasks of practical theological paradigm with the Buddha's teachings on the Four Noble Truths, built upon the foundation of a *Kalyāṇamitra* (good spiritual friend relationship) were previously elaborated in her 2016 essay, "Practical Buddhist Theology: Methods for Putting Wisdom into Practice."⁴⁴ In her "Practical Buddhist Theology," Rev. Dr. Sanford drew perspectives from Bhikshuni Lozang Trinlae's 2014 essay "Prospects for a Buddhist Practical Theology." In her essay, Bhikshuni Lozang Trinlae adopted a pragmatic approach in combining Buddhist teachings with the four practical theological tasks in order to develop a vision for *Buddhist practical theology* in the US. Her vision was: (1) to encourage theological seminaries in the US to apply Buddhist studies to contemporary social issues; (2) to strengthen and normalize the role and service of a Buddhist minister; (3) to promote the modernization and localization of Asian Buddhism in the US so that Buddhism can be accepted and practiced by local people and society.⁴⁵

Comparatively speaking, the vision of *Buddhist practical theology* presented by Bhikshuni Lozang Trinlae and Rev. Dr. Sanford's concept of *practical Buddhist theology* constitutes a new framework for the professional development of Buddhist chaplaincy, even in a Christian context. In this regard, the emergence of this new framework reflects the expansion of contemporary Christian practical theology to include the uniquely Buddhist concepts of *Buddhist practical theology* or *practical Buddhist theology*. This represents initial attempts at conceptualizing and contextualizing Buddhist chaplaincy as a social service profession in the US. Nevertheless, there are limitations to this approach, especially with regard to the development of Buddhist chaplaincy in the country based on Buddhist perspectives rather than Christian ones.

USEFUL ASPECTS OF TAIXU'S APPLIED BUDDHOLOGY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF BUDDHIST CHAPLAINCY IN THE US

It can be observed from the above that, whether it be in terms of the foundational theological view, the use of theological terms, or the practical models associated with social work, the profession of Buddhist chaplaincy as a social service profession in the US, was profoundly influenced by practical theology. The question of how to reconcile the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity to promote the development of Buddhist chaplaincy remains. This is an important question that Buddhist ministers in the country need to face directly. The recommendation of employing practical theology to further develop concepts of *Buddhist practical theology* or *practical Buddhist theology* in the US is in line with the current social and cultural climate.

What deserves special attention here is the question of how to avoid losing sight of the basic principles and core values of the Buddha's teachings within the larger process of reconciliation, thus avoiding the fate of becoming another form of practical theology in due course. In addition to that, the use of Christian theological terminology to describe professional Buddhist chaplaincy in the US might be

⁴⁴ Monica Sanford, "Practical Buddhist Theology: Methods for Putting Wisdom into Practice," in *A Thousand Hands: A Guidebook for Caring for Your Buddhist Community*, edited by Nathan Jishin Michon and Daniel Clarkson Fisher, 55-63. ON: Sumeru Press, 2016.

⁴⁵ Bhikshuni Lozang Trinlae, "Prospects for a Buddhist Practical Theology," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 18.1 (2014): 7-22.

meaningful and significant in the short term, but in the long run, it is inevitable that significant questions of identity will arise. Such potential issues include (1) diluting the essential teachings of Buddhism, (2) compromising the value and uniqueness of Buddhist practice, and (3) losing touch with the larger Buddhist mission of benefiting oneself and others in society through excessive professionalization. Consequently, it is necessary for Buddhist chaplaincy in the US to establish itself within the framework of Buddhist teachings on Buddhist terms.

In this respect, Master Taixu's proposal in the 1930s for establishing a professional Buddhist ministerial system may offer meaningful perspectives and inspirations for enriching Buddhist theories of professional chaplaincy and field practice norms in the US. Here are my five specific reasons. First, the Master's proposal for a professional Buddhist ministerial system based on his applied Buddhology is essentially founded on Buddhist morality that is concerned with ethical conduct, doctrinal study that allows for spiritual maturity, contemplation that enhances mindful reflection, and skillful means in practice that allows for self-other-liberation from suffering.

Second, Based on Taixu's applied Buddhological paradigm, the professional training of a Buddhist minister reflects on the development of clarity in Buddhadharma, attention to right understanding, skillfulness in practice, fruition in awakening as well as on the achievements of attentive listening, mindful reflection, appropriate cultivation, and right insight. Engaging in the practice of these eight Dharmas forms a solid foundation for a Buddhist minister to develop professionally based on the Buddha's teachings. This can be further extended to initiating a productive relationship between Buddhism and society, leading to the development of a specific, standardized, and effective working model for professional Buddhist ministers. Third, based on Taixu's applied Buddhological paradigm, the function of a Buddhist minister is to provide services as needed and appropriate and to develop care seeker-centered and Buddhadharma-centered Buddhist spiritual care theories. This paradigm encourages self-reflection and nourishes the virtues of loving-kindness (*maitrī*), compassion (*karuṇā*), empathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekṣā*) in daily work. These can enhance a Buddhist minister's ability to work with diverse religious and cultural populations under the category of Outer Worldly Knowledge.

Fourth, based on Taixu's applied Buddhological paradigm, the quality of social service provided by a Buddhist minister is directly tied to the professional ethical system and principles of Buddhism. These principles allow a Buddhist minister to properly and effectively narrate and interpret particular events in life in accordance with Buddhadharma and to provide appropriate responses to specific challenges. Fifth, based on Taixu's applied Buddhological paradigm, the work of a Buddhist minister is embodied in the model of "utilizing the Buddha's teachings to promote social morality, spirituality and elevate human culture, as well as benefit oneself through serving others in need." The model benefits people as needed and promotes the unity of morality and spirituality in society. In turn, this also advances the profession and deepens what it means to be a professional Buddhist minister.

As described in these five reasons, according to Master Taixu's applied Buddhology, the development of the professional Buddhist ministerial system roots should have its foundation in the practice of Inner Moral and Spiritual Qualities joined with Outer Worldly Knowledge. The application of this system, with

regard to inter-religious and cultural collaboration, promotes the right understanding, attentive listening, mindful reflection, appropriate cultivation, and the right insight in daily practice. The system also applies Buddhist teachings to guide field practice. This field practice, in turn, tests Buddhist theories and forms a cycle of examination and validation. The principle of examination and validation allows for the essence of Buddhadharma to emerge, especially in its observation that “all living beings are interconnected, and that one world intertwines in infinite worlds.”⁴⁶

Based on this viewpoint, the principle of examination and validation, in theory, constitutes a Buddhist minister's work of perpetuating the virtuous circle of unifying Inner Moral and Spiritual Qualities with Outer Worldly Knowledge. In practice, the principle of examination and validation underlies the Buddhist framework for providing social service, which is to develop appropriate and effective responses to particular events and situations in life. It encourages Buddhist ministers to be evidence-based when responding to care seekers using applied Buddhology.

According to Master Taixu's August 1937 public speech “Reform and Engagement” at the World Buddhist Academy, the *newness* of applied Buddhology proposed by the Master was to be found in the cycle of examination and verification of Buddhist teachings using the social services rendered by the Buddhist minister. This involves negotiating the balance between various aspects of inner moral and spiritual development primarily concerned with renunciation and the accumulation of outer-worldly knowledge for social engagement. The function of applied Buddhology is to assist Buddhist ministers in avoiding biases toward either the inner or outer. As the Master observed, if a Buddhist minister tends to emphasize the renunciation of the world, then Buddhism will become “a useless thing in the world and to all living beings in society.” On the other hand, if a Buddhist minister tends to emphasize engagement in the world too much, this can lead to losing the essential meaning and uniqueness of being a Buddhist minister, losing sight of Buddhadharma altogether. Therefore, the balance between renunciation and engagement is essential for a Buddhist minister “to grasp the central teachings of Buddhism appropriately and to adapt to (different) cultures to meet the trends of a new era.”⁴⁷

In both theory and practice, the *newness* of applied Buddhology proposed by Master Taixu in order to establish a professional Buddhist ministerial system lies in the basic principles and core values of Buddhism, particularly with respect to the examination and verification of Buddhist theory through field practice and the achievement of balance between inner and outer priorities as discussed above. This model of applied Buddhology utilizes the practice of Buddhadharma as the initial impetus for acts of social service. In particular, Inner Moral and Spiritual Qualities and Outer Worldly Knowledge must mutually inspire and enhance. In **Figure 3**, the author illustrates applied Buddhology as proposed by Master Taixu with regard to professional Buddhist minister formation:

⁴⁶ Taixu, “Reform and Engagement” (1980, Vol. 1), 447.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 451.

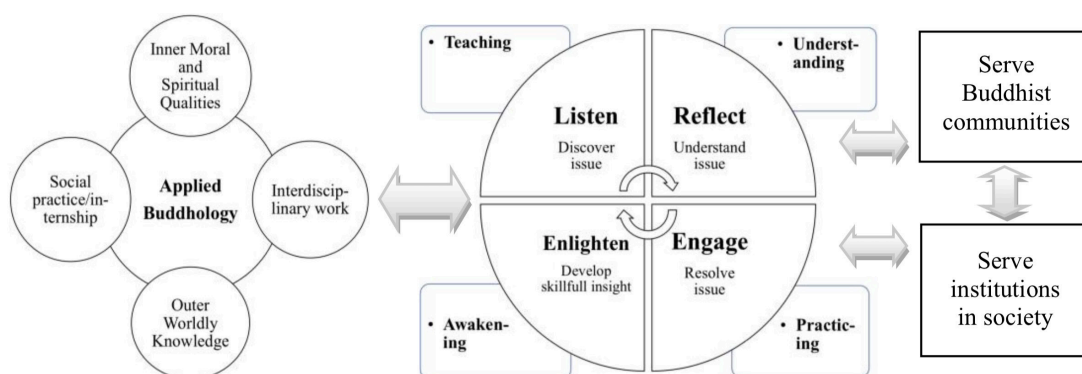


Figure 3: Professional Buddhist minister formation in line with applied Buddhology.

As shown in **Figure 3**, the development of a professional Buddhist ministerial system founded on applied Buddhology requires three core “establishments” that are perhaps instructive for the development of professional Buddhist chaplaincy in the US today: (1) establishing Buddhist ministry based on the basic principles and core values of the Buddhadharma in order to describe and interpret social, religious, and cultural phenomena through the lens of the Buddhadharma; (2) establishing social frameworks for Buddhist ministers to appropriately respond to various events and situations encountered in life and work in light of Buddhadharma; (3) establishing the profession of Buddhist ministry with Buddhist-social engagement model in line with the principles of examination and verification to enhance a Buddhist minister’s ability to provide social services that benefit both care seekers and caregivers.

Regarding US Buddhist chaplaincy today, these three “establishments” on Master Taixu’s applied Buddhology can advance the profession by (1) employing Outer Worldly Knowledge to mobilize the Buddhist teachings for social service in order to provide local, timely, appropriate and effective Buddhist based spiritual care and emotional support to people as needed; (2) developing greater inclusiveness of religious and cultural diversity by using the applied Buddhology to appropriately adapt traditional Buddhist teachings to meet the contemporary needs of people in society in line with the principles of examination and verification as a distinctly Buddhist framework.

These two goals may offer direction for the current development and maturation of professional Buddhist chaplaincy in the US. While adapted to the local religious and social climate, these two goals are fundamentally rooted in the basic principles and core values of Buddhist teaching, allowing Buddhist chaplains to develop uniquely Buddhist terminology and ways of conceptualizing their work—such as using “applied Buddhology” or “Buddhist care” instead of “practical Buddhist theology” or “pastoral care.”

Through coining professional Buddhist chaplaincy terminology, authentic dialogue between differing religious and social views related to the profession of Buddhist chaplaincy can be further developed, enriched and advanced. Under these circumstances, a Buddhist chaplain as a Buddhist minister may build closer relationships with local culture and society based on a clearer understanding of similarities and differences. To a certain degree, this clarity can be helpful for improving the performance of Buddhist chaplains in the US as professional spiritual caregivers and religious social workers.

CONCLUSION

In 1931, the Master subsequently proposed a three-stage training system for professional Buddhist minister-ship involving four levels of learning in his public speeches such as “Suggestions for the Committee of Delegates to the National Assembly,” “Purpose and Procedure for Monastic Education,” “Necessary Training and Education for Buddhist Monastics and Laity,” “A Brief History of My Efforts for Buddhist Reformation” and “Reform and Engagement.” The Buddhist ministerial system that the Master advocated was established upon applied Buddhological theory and modes of practice in order to meet the needs of the people and society of his time.

At its core, the applied Buddhological paradigm proposed by the Master has its roots in the basic principles and core values of the Buddha’s teachings. Through the development of Inner Moral and Spiritual Qualities as well as Outer Worldly Knowledge, a professional Buddhist minister can adaptively serve Buddhist communities or social institutions as needed and appropriate. Further, the Master’s establishment of a professional Buddhist ministerial system based upon applied Buddhology indicated his belief in the significant role Buddhism can play in modern society, as discussed in the Master’s concepts of Buddhism for Life and Buddhism for Human Society. It is also notable that the applied Buddhological paradigm proposed by the Master prepares aspirants to engage in social service as a form of spiritual practice. His model presents a potential way of applying Buddhist teachings to diverse historical and societal contexts. The paradigm may also function as a bridge for Eastern Buddhology and Western theology to meet and establish constructive dialogue in the near future.

Given what has been said, Master Taixu’s proposal for establishing a professional Buddhist ministerial system in the early 20th century based on applied Buddhology was revolutionary for his era. His proposal, while rooted in the basic principles and core values of the Buddhadharma, engages with the modern social sciences, religious studies, social ethics, liberal arts, philosophy, and so forth to serve society in the spirit of the Bodhisattva Way. Its purpose was to serve individual people and uplift the collective human condition through the promotion of morality and spirituality in order to bring about social prosperity and peace. The value of the Master’s proposal, based on an applied Buddhological paradigm, was in its ability to overcome Buddhism’s limitations using a professional Buddhist ministerial system, integrating Buddhadharma into a broader, more diverse, ever-changing contemporary society, allowing Buddhism to play its role in promoting the healthy development of civilization and human society.

Finally, Master Taixu’s proposal for establishing a professional Buddhist ministerial system based on an applied Buddhological paradigm can not only serve as inspiration for the enrichment and advancement of Buddhist chaplaincy in the US but also as a valuable reference point for the professional development of Buddhist Chaplaincy in Asian regions such as Taiwan and Hong Kong. It may also help to facilitate dialogue, cooperation, and connection between East and West in the future.

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