

The Historical Formation and Modern Transformation of Buddhism's Tradition of "Loving the Country and Loving Buddhism": Taking Dao'an's Proposition" Without Reliance on the Secular Ruler, Buddhist Undertakings Can Hardly Be Established" as the Clue

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Abstract: The tradition of "loving the country and loving Buddhism" (aiguo aijiao; i.e., patriotism and devotion to Buddhism) constitutes an important value expression of contemporary Chinese Buddhism, yet its formation cannot be adequately understood as a merely modern political formulation. It is a historical tradition gradually shaped through the sinicization of Buddhism, involving scriptural translation, state-religion accommodation, monastic institutional arrangements, and public social practice. Taking Dao'an's proposition that "without reliance on the secular ruler, Buddhist undertakings can hardly be established" as the central clue, this article examines the historical development of Buddhist national identification from state-protection discourse to social service, and from reliance on political order to service of the people. Through historical-textual analysis and institutional analysis, the study discusses state-protection scriptures such as the Renwang Jing, the Golden Light Sutra, and the Brahmajāla Sūtra; the medieval practice of Dao'an; Master Taixu's modern reconstruction of Humanistic Buddhism; and the organizational embodiment of modern Chinese Buddhism. The paper argues that the internal structure of "loving the country and loving Buddhism" does not dissolve the religious spirit of Buddhism. Rather, it reflects an institutionalized reconciliation in Chinese society between Buddhism's transcendent pursuit of liberation and its ethical commitment to worldly altruism. Its contemporary significance lies in guiding Buddhist communities, while adhering to the direction of Buddhism's sinicization, to properly handle doctrinal inheritance, national identification, social responsibility, monastic education, and rule-of-law development.

Keywords: Loving the Country and Loving Buddhism; Sinicization of Buddhism; State-Protection Thought; Dao'an; Master Taixu; Humanistic Buddhism; Buddhist Education

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Significance

After its introduction into China, Buddhism did not merely undergo linguistic conversion and sectarian formation at the level of doctrinal discourse; it continuously adapted its modes of existence within social institutions, political ethics, and everyday life. One of the key reasons Chinese Buddhism has persisted and developed over more than two millennia is its capacity to

respond proactively to Chinese society's demands concerning state order, ethical instruction, livelihood stability, and cultural identity, while concurrently preserving core Buddhist beliefs, monastic precepts, and soteriological aims. The notion of "loving the country and loving Buddhism" emerged as an integrated expression gradually formed during this prolonged historical process. It encompasses both the protection of Buddhist doctrinal lineage and vinaya tradition and a sense of responsibility toward the state, society, and the people among whom Buddhism is practiced ^[1, 14].

From a contemporary perspective, "loving the country and loving Buddhism" has become a significant consensus within the Chinese Buddhist community. The 2019 revision of the Constitution of the Buddhist Association of China explicitly states that the Association upholds loving the country and loving Buddhism, unity and progress, safeguards national unity, ethnic solidarity, interreligious harmony and social cohesion, and adheres to the Sinicization of Buddhism. While this formulation is clearly responsive to current realities, interpreting it solely as a piece of modern political rhetoric overlooks the traditional resources that Chinese Buddhism has long developed—such as protecting the nation, repaying kindness, loyalty and filial piety, benefiting sentient beings, and ameliorating worldly suffering. Indeed, many important propositions in the history of Chinese Buddhism—such as "protecting the nation and ensuring the people's well-being," "adorning the land," "establishing rites in accordance with the ruler," and "using the Dharma to assist state teachings"—reflect, at different levels, the ways in which Buddhism has negotiated its relationship with the state and society ^[22, 23].

This paper does not seek to reduce "loving the country and loving Buddhism" to a transient political injunction; rather, it aims to demonstrate, within the historical trajectory of the sinicization of Buddhism, how Buddhists' national identification was transformed from the state-protection ideas articulated in canonical texts into a modern sense of social responsibility through the practical activities of eminent monks and institutional arrangements. In other words, loving the country and loving Buddhism was not a label externally imposed on Buddhism, but a practice tradition that, over the long course of Chinese Buddhist development, was progressively internalized, institutionalized, and modernly reconfigured ^[14, 17, 18].

1.2 Research Objectives

This study does not treat "loving the country and loving Buddhism" as an external label imposed on Buddhism. Instead, it seeks to clarify how national identification among Chinese Buddhists was historically formed through canonical interpretation, elite monastic practice, and institutional mediation. Specifically, the study pursues four objectives: (1) to trace the canonical and ethical resources through which state-protection ideas were localized in Chinese Buddhism; (2) to explain the historical meaning of Dao'an's doctrine of relying on the secular ruler; (3) to analyze Master Taixu's modern transformation of Buddhist national ethics through Humanistic Buddhism; and (4) to discuss the implications of this tradition for contemporary Buddhist education, social service, institutional governance, and the rule of law ^[2, 14, 18, 20, 23].

Framing this inquiry around Dao'an's assertion that "without reliance on the secular ruler, Buddhist undertakings can hardly be established (*bu yi guozhu, ze fashi nan li*; 不依国主, 则法事难立)," this article follows a "text-practice-institution" analytical trajectory. First, it examines the localized retranslations of ideas about protecting the state, loyalty and filial piety, and safeguarding the true Dharma as found in canonical texts such as the Humane Kings Sūtra, the Golden Light Sutra, and the Brahmajāla Sūtra. Second, it analyzes how the eminent monks Dao'an and Master Taixu, each situated at a pivotal historical juncture, responded respectively to the tumult of the medieval period and to the modern crisis of the nation-state. Third, it elucidates how institutional transformations—from the monastic official system and temple registries to modern Buddhist organizational forms—have mediated shifts in Buddhists' national identity. Finally, from the perspective of the Sinicization of Buddhism, it discusses the implications of the "loving the country and loving Buddhism" tradition for contemporary Buddhist education, monastic talent cultivation, social services, and rule-of-law development ^[2, 14, 18].

1.3 Research Methodology and Materials

This article adopts a historical-textual and institutional method. Primary textual materials include Chinese Buddhist canonical sources preserved in the Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo, especially the Renwang Jing, the Golden Light Sutra, the Brahmajāla Sūtra, and the Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra. Historical materials include biographies of eminent monks, dynastic histories, and monastic regulations. Modern materials include the writings of Master Taixu, modern scholarship on Chinese Buddhism, and the constitutions of the Buddhist Association of China. Methodologically, the article follows a "text-practice-institution"

framework: it first analyzes scriptural concepts, then examines representative monastic practices, and finally explains how institutional arrangements shaped Buddhist national identification ^[1–23].

It should be noted that the term “reliance on the secular ruler” (yiguo zhu; 依国主) as used in this paper does not denote unconditional subservience to secular power, nor does it imply an abandonment of Buddhist doctrinal principles. Its historical meaning must be situated within concrete contexts such as warfare, sutra translation, monastic organization, and social transmission. Dao'an's proposition stresses that the propagation of the Dharma in society requires a corresponding political order and institutional space; Master Taixu's concept of Humanistic Buddhism further reframes this relationship as Buddhism's proactive service to the state, society, and the people as a modern ethical stance. Although the two positions arise in different historical periods, both address the fundamental issue of constructive interaction between Buddhism and society ^[2, 18, 20].

2. Canonical Foundations: The Localization of Protector-State and Loyalty-Filial Ethics

Buddhist scriptures do contain conceptual resources for protecting the realm, upholding the ruler, and safeguarding the Dharma; however, the prominence of these resources within the Chinese transmission of Buddhism is closely linked to China's longstanding social emphasis on state order, ritual-legal ethics, and political moral instruction. The formation of the state-protection (huguo) discourse in Chinese Buddhism was not a mere transplantation of preexisting Indian Buddhist structures; rather, it was progressively articulated, systematized, and localized through interactions among translation activities, exegetical commentaries, ritual practices, and state institutions ^[1, 8–13].

2.1 The Renwang Jing and the Ritualization of Protector-State Discourse

The Renwang huguo bore jing (Scripture for the Humane Kings Who Protect the State; Renwang huguo bore boluomi jing / Renwang huguo bore boluomiduo jing) systematically presents the integration of Prajñāpāramitā thought with state-protecting politics. Although the translations produced by Kumārajīva of the Later Qin dynasty and Amoghavajra of the Tang dynasty differ in wording, chapter divisions, and ritual procedures, both take “state protection” (huguo) and “Prajñāpāramitā” (bore) as their doctrinal core, linking sovereign governance, the tranquility of the realm, and the propagation of the Buddha Dharma into a single discursive framework. Kumārajīva's translation further gives concrete ritual shape to such items as the seven calamities (qi nan), the dharma assembly (fahui), and scriptural recitation and exposition (jiang song), thereby transforming state protection from an abstract ideal into an operable form of religious practice. Against the backdrop of the flourishing of Esoteric Buddhism (mijiao) during the Tang, Amoghavajra's translation incorporates elements of mantra and ritual procedure (zhenyan yigui), which further ritualized and institutionalized the practice of state protection. ^[9, 13]

The significance of the Renwang Jing in the history of Chinese Buddhism lies not only in its articulation of merits for protecting the state but also in its provision of a scriptural basis for Buddhist participation in state rituals. The intellectual roots of successive practices such as State-Protection Assemblies, state-protection dharma assemblies, and national sacrificial incense ceremonies can be traced to this canonical tradition. Through preaching, recitation, setting up charitable feasts, and inviting monks, the Buddhist Saṅgha was able to perform public religious functions in response to national crises, disasters, and in rites of blessing and averting calamity. State protection thereby ceased to be merely an instrument of state power for utilizing Buddhism; it also became an important means for Buddhism to demonstrate its social value and to secure institutional space ^[8, 9, 13, 16].

However, the concept of protecting the nation should not be construed as a unidimensional service to political authority. The Prajñāpāramitā scriptures themselves emphasize emptiness, non-self, and the equality of all dharmas; the reason the Renwang Jing could be mobilized for national protection lies in its grounding of territorial peace in the dissemination of right Dharma, benevolent governance and moral education, and the accumulation of merit among sentient beings. In other words, national protection is not merely the defense of political power, but an ideal in which religion and politics jointly maintain social order through the integration of orthodox teaching, good government, and the welfare and contentment of the populace ^[1, 8, 9].

2.2 The Golden Light Sutra and the Institutionalization of Protecting the Dharma and the State

Compared with the Renwang Jing, the Golden Light Sutra (Jinguangming jing, Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra) places greater emphasis on the notion of “protecting the state through the orthodox Dharma.” The sutra repeatedly declares that if a sovereign upholds the orthodox Dharma and listens to, recites, and preserves this scripture, the realm will be pacified,

the populace will enjoy welfare, and calamities will be averted. After the Sui and Tang dynasties, this idea exerted broad influence and became an important doctrinal foundation for state Buddhist rites. In his study of Chinese Buddhist repentance practices, Sheng Kai pointed out a close relationship between state-protection sutras and the institutionalization of repentance rites: many nationwide Buddhist assemblies performed public religious functions precisely through sutra recitation, confessional and repentance rituals, and the dedication of merit ^[12, 16].

Scholarly research highlights that one of the core narrative features of the Golden Light Sutra is the integration of state-level protection of the Dharma with the value orientation of propagating the true teaching. The logic articulated in the scripture is that if social governors actively protect the Dharma and promote benevolent intentions, they help bring about a stable and prosperous state and the welfare of sentient beings; conversely, deviation from the Dharma's guidance and neglect of moral cultivation may engender social disorder and harm popular well-being. This narrative framework creates theoretical space for the incorporation of Buddhist culture into traditional governance ethics and demonstrates that Buddhism is not merely a passive recipient of social protection. Rather, centered on the principles of right teaching and moral norms, it communicates a value orientation that encourages good conduct, restrains evil, cares for popular livelihood, and sustains social harmony. Viewed in terms of the sinicization of religion and contemporary scholarship, this conception aligns with the contemporary Chinese governance principle of combining rule of law with rule by virtue and is continuous with the longstanding Buddhist traditions of loving both the country and Buddhism and safeguarding the nation and benefiting the people, offering historical and cultural precedents for modern Buddhism's proactive adaptation to and service of society ^[12, 16].

Historically, in the course of China's social and historical development the state-protecting and people-benefiting ideas embodied in the Golden Light Sutra gradually merged with traditional notions of calamity, ritual norms, and state sacrificial culture, forming a public religious practice that combined Buddhist characteristics with features of Chinese traditional culture. This historical process demonstrates that the connotation of Buddhism's Sinicization is plural and rich: it is manifested not only in the translation and interpretation of canonical doctrine and the intellectual integration with China's outstanding traditional culture, but also in the gradual incorporation of Buddhist canonical concepts into the traditional social ritual system. Through the regularization and institutionalization of ritual practices, these ideas conveyed value orientations of promoting virtue, stabilizing the state, and protecting the livelihood of the people, thereby contributing positively to social order and popular welfare—a salient expression of Buddhism's adaptation to Chinese society and its localized development ^[12, 16].

2.3 The Brahmajāla Sūtra and the Codification of Loyalty-Filial Ethics into Precepts

If the Renwang Jing and the Golden Light Sutra primarily articulate the relationship between Buddhism and the state from the perspectives of national protection and the proper Dharma, the Brahmajāla Sūtra (Fanwang jing) further incorporates filial and loyal ethics into the practical framework of the bodhisattva precepts. The Fanwang Jing's text on the bodhisattva precepts emphasizes that a bodhisattva should cultivate a filial and respectful mind and must not rebel against the sovereign. Such formulations reflect a profound convergence between Buddhist disciplinary codes and Chinese ethical norms ^[10].

"Filial piety" was originally a central concept in Confucian ethics, but in the Chinese reception of the Brahmajāla Sūtra it was broadened into a fundamental virtue of bodhisattva practice. Fazang, in his Commentary on the Bodhisattva Precepts of the Brahmajāla Sūtra (Fanwang jing pusa jie ben shu), further explicated that kings are the enforcers of law and that bodhisattvas should, with a respectful mind, uphold worldly order. This interpretation transformed Buddhists' respect for state authority from a mere pragmatic deference into an integral component of moral cultivation within the bodhisattva precepts ^[7, 10, 15].

From the perspective of Buddhist scholarship, the filial and loyal ideals embedded in Buddhist precepts do not equate to uncritical submission to secular authority. The fundamental spirit of the bodhisattva precepts centers on safeguarding the welfare of sentient beings, preserving the transmission of the true Dharma, and nourishing the growth of wholesome practices. This spirit delineates the internal criteria for the articulation of loyalty and filial piety within a Buddhist context—namely, that ethical conduct must be grounded in compassion, guided by wisdom, and oriented toward selflessness and altruism, thereby unifying moral practice with the original intent of cultivation. It is on the basis of these core criteria that the ancient Buddhist advocacy of protecting the state and loyalty to the ruler and the modern Buddhist practice of loving the country and loving Buddhism form a clear historical continuity: both essentially seek to explore how Buddhist practitioners

can balance the spiritual pursuit of transcendence with worldly responsibilities, and how, while upholding correct faith and conduct, they can actively integrate into and serve society. This continuity is an important manifestation of the transmission and development of ethical thought in the process of Buddhism's sinicization ^[7, 10, 15].

3. Historical Practice: Dao'an's Doctrine of "Relying on the Secular Ruler" and Medieval State-Religion Adjustment

Classical texts provided the intellectual resources, while eminent monastics translated ideas into historical reality through practice. In the history of Chinese Buddhism, Dao'an of the Eastern Jin formulated the proposition "without reliance on the secular ruler, the Dharma cannot be firmly established," which for a long time has been regarded as an important point of departure for Buddhist approaches to church-state relations. This proposition was not an abstract political slogan; it emerged from the concrete historical context of frequent warfare, monastic migration, the translation and transmission of Buddhist scriptures, and the reconstruction of social order ^[2, 14].

According to the *Gaoseng zhuan*, during times of turmoil Dao'an led his followers to seek refuge and, confronted with the practical difficulties of propagating the Dharma and maintaining the sangha, articulated the proposition "in these calamitous years, without reliance on the secular ruler, Buddhist undertakings can hardly be established." This proposition carries at least three implications: first, as a social religious organization, Buddhism requires basic political order and social stability as preconditions for propagation; second, activities such as translation of scriptures, teaching, and monastic administration depend on certain institutional resources; third, although Buddhism's ultimate aim is liberation, its dissemination within the worldly realm cannot be detached from the realities of the state and the populace ^[2].

After being welcomed to Chang'an by Former Qin's ruler Fu Jian, Dao'an was able to supervise translation sessions, compile canonical catalogs, and train monastic talent, exerting a profound influence on the development of Chinese Buddhism. His practice of "relying on the secular ruler" did not imply that Buddhism was wholly subordinated to political authority; rather, by establishing a relatively stable cooperative relationship with the contemporary regime, it secured space for the propagation of the Dharma. When Tang Yongtong discussed the history of Buddhism in the Han, Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern dynasties, he emphasized that the development of Buddhism in medieval China was closely linked to political geography, aristocratic culture, translation enterprises, and monastic organization, and should not be examined in isolation from specific social structures ^[2, 14].

After Dao'an, Buddhism in the north further developed a pronounced form of state-oriented religion. The Northern Wei monk Faguo's designation of the founding sovereign as "the Tathāgata of the present age" is often regarded as an extreme instance of Buddhism sacralizing the ruler's authority. Although this formulation clearly reflects specific historical limitations, it reveals the pragmatic strategy whereby Buddhism in northern regimes sought legitimacy and institutional support. By contrast, Huiyuan of the Eastern Jin, based in the south at Mount Lu, in his *Shamen bu jing wangzhe lun* (A Monk Does Not Bow Before Kings), approaches the issue from the renunciant's transcendental identity, arguing that while monks do not prostrate before kings, they do not thereby subvert the state order but instead delineate boundaries between transcendental practice and secular rites. The north's accommodative dependence and the south's dialogical accommodation constitute two distinct forms of church-state relations in medieval Buddhism ^[2, 3, 14].

Therefore, evaluations of Dao'an's doctrine of "relying on the secular ruler" should adhere to a dialectical and objective stance and must not resort to simplistic or one-sided interpretations. From the historical context of Buddhism's survival and cultural transmission, this proposition reveals the pragmatic wisdom and strategic choices exercised by eminent monks in specific historical circumstances to root Buddhism within Chinese society and to facilitate its orderly dissemination. From the standpoint of Buddhist doctrinal autonomy and internal development, the implementation of this proposition consistently required the regulation provided by monastic disciplinary rules, the construction of sangha institutional frameworks, and the clarification of doctrinal boundaries in order to achieve a balance between Buddhism's own development and social integration. It was through such sustained adaptation and exploration that Chinese Buddhism gradually formed the commendable tradition of proactively integrating into national and social development and fulfilling social responsibilities while steadfastly maintaining a practice-centered orientation and safeguarding the proper transmission of the Dharma.

Later Buddhist advocacies such as “protecting the state and benefiting the people,” “supporting and assisting the ruler’s governance,” and “adorning the land” can all trace their intellectual origins to Dao’an’s proposition of reliance on the secular ruler, thereby demonstrating the historical continuity and developmental character of doctrinal inheritance in the process of Buddhism’s Sinicization ^[2, 14].

4. Modern Transformation: Master Taixu’s Humanistic Buddhism and the Modern Development of Serving the People

Historically, in the modern era Chinese society underwent profound transformation, gradually shifting from the traditional dynastic state to the modern nation-state. The survival and development of Buddhism faced multiple epochal challenges, including the conversion of temple assets to educational use, the New Culture Movement, the rise of scientism, and the introduction of modern educational systems. Against this backdrop, the ancient discourse system of “protecting the state and the ruler” upheld by traditional Buddhism could no longer fully accommodate the demands of the new era or address its emergent problems. It was in this historical context that Master Taixu advanced the idea of Humanistic Buddhism, effecting a significant transformation in Buddhism’s national identification: moving from the traditional posture of defending the ruler and relying on external patronage toward proactively serving society, actively contributing to nation-building, and tangibly benefiting the populace. This shift constitutes an important milestone in the modern sinicization of Buddhism and highlights the religion’s capacity to adapt to the times and progress with changing circumstances ^[17–21].

In “How to Construct Humanistic Buddhism,” Master Taixu proposed that by cultivating a pure mind and practicing the bodhisattva path, one should progressively ennoble the present human realm, thereby transforming a defiled and malevolent world into a pure and benevolent one. This idea does not repudiate the ideal of the Pure Land but rather concretizes the notion of “adornment of the land” (*zhuangyan guotu*) within the framework of contemporary social construction. Unlike ancient state-protection dharma assemblies that stressed the removal of calamities and the pacification of the realm, Master Taixu placed greater emphasis on education, culture, charity, social reform, and the modernization of the sangha, reflecting a modern reorientation of Buddhist national ethics ^[11, 20].

Master Taixu’s modern transformation is manifested primarily in three aspects. First, the modernization of sangha education. Master Taixu founded educational institutions such as the Wuchang Buddhist College and emphasized the cultivation of monastic talent who possess Buddhist erudition, modern knowledge, and social responsibility. Yinshun’s *Chronological Biography of Master Taixu* repeatedly records Master Taixu’s efforts to promote monastic education, found schools, and reform Buddhism; these initiatives laid the groundwork for the training of modern Buddhist personnel. Second, the institutionalization of Buddhist reform. Master Taixu advocated doctrinal reforms, reforms of monastic governance, and reforms of temple property, aiming to rectify entrenched problems in Buddhism through systemic change. Third, the public orientation of social service. Master Taixu interpreted the bodhisattva path as encompassing charity, relief work, education, and cultural construction in contemporary society, thereby endowing Buddhist welfare activities with a modern public character ^[18, 20, 21].

During the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, Master Taixu actively advocated for the participation of the Buddhist community in national salvation and defense, organizing relevant associations, mobilizing resources, and conducting external publicity to deploy Buddhist forces in service of the nation and society imperiled by crisis. Deng Zimei notes that the modernizing reforms represented by Master Taixu constituted an important attempt by Chinese Buddhism to proactively seek transformation in the face of modernity’s pressures. Their significance lies not in a crude politicization of Buddhism, but in translating Buddhist compassion for relieving suffering, the aspiration to adorn the land, and the purification of the human heart into forms of public action that are intelligible, participatory, and organizable within modern society ^[17, 20, 21]. In institutional and doctrinal terms, one of Master Taixu’s principal contributions lies in his reexamination and redefinition of the relationship between Buddhism and social governance as well as historical development within the context of modern societal transformation. He clarified directions for Buddhism’s adaptation to modern social development. In his *My Brief History of the Buddhist Reform Movement*, reviewing the modern reform of Buddhism, he explicitly emphasized that Buddhism should not evade the various issues raised by the epochal changes. Rather, on the basis of upholding the essential

spirit of the Dharma and preserving the proper transmission of the tradition, Buddhism ought to proactively respond to the needs of national development and social progress. This conception prompted a profound refinement and enrichment of the connotation of “loving the country and loving Buddhism”: love of country was no longer confined to the traditional, ritualized expressions of praying for the country’s welfare or social peace, but came to embody an ethical commitment grounded in Buddhist compassion and the promotion of beneficence, entailing active participation in social construction and contributions to the improvement of people’s livelihoods; love of Buddhism was no longer limited to the superficial preservation of temples and the continued existence of the monastic community, but entailed institutional reform of the sangha, the cultivation of qualified clergy, purification of religious belief, and regulation of religious practice to promote Buddhism’s own modernization. Such reforms would enable Buddhism to better meet the demands of modern social development and play a constructive social role. This constitutes an original theoretical and practical achievement in the modern process of Buddhism’s Sinicization ^[17, 20, 21].

Doctrinally, the core idea in the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* (Weimojie suoshuo jing) that “when the mind is pure, the Buddha-field is pure” provides an important theoretical foundation for interpreting Master Taixu’s doctrine of Humanistic Buddhism. Master Taixu’s Humanistic Buddhism, in essence, represents a theoretical innovation and practical exploration that integrates traditional Pure Land thought, the Buddhist bodhisattva ethic, and modern social morality. Within this conceptual framework, “land” (guotu) is not a mere geographical designation but encompasses the totality of people’s welfare, social order and harmony, cultural value transmission, and the construction of public ethics. The Buddhist ideal of “adornment of the land” accordingly centers on purifying minds, cultivating benevolent dispositions, improving social mores, practicing social responsibility, safeguarding sentient beings’ well-being, and transmitting compassion and great love. This doctrinal interpretation and its practice orientation supply contemporary Buddhism with substantial intellectual resources and clear practical guidance for upholding correct faith and conduct, for carrying forward the tradition of loving both the country and Buddhism, and for proactively engaging with social development and serving national construction in the new era; it also constitutes an important manifestation of the ongoing Sinicization of Buddhism in the modern and contemporary periods ^[11, 20].

5. Institutional Frameworks: From Monastic Administration and Temple Registers to Contemporary Buddhist Organizations

Institutionally, the inheritance and perpetuation of the fine tradition of loving both the country and Buddhism cannot rely solely on ideological advocacy and guidance; they also require corresponding institutional frameworks as support and safeguard. A review of the history of Chinese Buddhist development—from the ancient monastic official system (*sengguan zhidu*) and temple registry management to the modern establishment of Buddhist associations since the late imperial and republican periods—shows that a constructive relationship between Buddhism and the state and society has consistently been manifested and regulated through institutional forms. These institutional arrangements have a dual value and significance: on the one hand, through appropriate governance and regulation they steer Buddhism to develop orderly within a rule-of-law framework and uphold orthodox belief and conduct; on the other hand, they provide robust institutional support and protection that enable Buddhism to secure legitimate space for survival and development, to regulate monastic personnel and organizations, and to carry out proselytizing and charitable activities in an orderly manner. This constitutes an important lesson in the Sinicization process of Buddhism for achieving healthy development and for continuing the tradition of loving the country and loving Buddhism ^[3–6, 22, 23].

5.1 The Monastic Administrative System and State Management of Religion

From the Northern and Southern Dynasties through the Sui and Tang periods, the state progressively established a monastic official administration to regulate monks and nuns, temples, and Buddhist affairs. The Northern Wei created the office of the Controller of the Saṅgha (*shamen tong*), the Sui established the Zhaoxuan Office (*Zhaoxuan si*), and the Tang court further incorporated institutions within the state administrative system to oversee Buddhist and Daoist matters. The emergence of the monastic official system indicates that Buddhism had evolved from popular or localized propagation into a significant religious force requiring formal state regulation ^[3, 4, 14].

In institutional terms, the ancient monastic official system functioned as a crucial institutional medium for interactions

between Buddhism and the state-society complex, exhibiting a pronounced dual character. On the one hand, the establishment of the monastic official system embodied the state's regulation and guidance of Buddhist development: monastic communities were required to operate within the legal framework of the state and to submit to corresponding household registration and administrative constraints, thereby providing basic norms for Buddhism's orderly integration into the traditional social order. On the other hand, this system conferred a legitimate institutional identity on Buddhism, furnishing a relatively stable social environment and space for the construction of temples, the translation of scriptures, the conduct of ritual assemblies, and the cultivation of monastic talent. The emergence in the medieval period of large-scale translation bureaus, state-sponsored temple systems, and systematic Buddhist sectarian formations was inseparable from the institutional support provided by the monastic official system; it therefore stands as an important historical testimony to how institutional guarantees promoted the standardization and expansion of Buddhism in the process of its sinicization ^[3-6, 14].

5.2 Temple Registers, Tax Obligations, and the Social Status of Buddhists

Turning to the social and economic dimensions of Buddhism's Sinicization, besides the monastic official system for monastics, the temple registration system and the tax/labor service regime also exerted profound influence on the construction of Buddhists' national identification. Taking the Tang dynasty as an example, there existed complex and intimate interrelations among the equal-field system, temple economy, and household registration system for monks and nuns. Although monastics possessed a distinct identity as renunciants, they did not fully extricate themselves from the regulatory constraints of the state's household registration, land tenure, and tax/labor management systems, and remained embedded in concrete social relations. In his *Sifenlü Xingshichao*, Daoxuan devoted attention to principles for handling practical matters such as corvée duties, filial support of parents, and responses to illness, and this discussion clearly demonstrates that while Buddhist disciplinary codes safeguarded the core spirit of religious practice, they did not deny the monastics' situated social relationships nor detach them from state and societal institutional norms. This both reflects Buddhism's concrete adaptation to traditional social development and further promoted the formation and deepening of Buddhists' national identity, providing important historical evidence for the institutional and ideological integration that characterized Buddhism's Sinicization ^[4, 6, 14]. This historical phenomenon clearly demonstrates that Chinese Buddhists have consistently embodied a dual identity. As monastics or lay practitioners, their core commitment is to uphold the precepts and teachings of the Buddha, to practice the original intent of cultivation, and to safeguard the rightful transmission of the Dharma. As members of society, they are obliged to conscientiously abide by national laws, maintain public order, fulfill social responsibilities, and actively integrate into social development. The commendable tradition of loving both the country and Buddhism has been gradually formed and transmitted precisely through the healthy interaction and organic unity of these two identities. Practice shows that if Buddhism emphasizes withdrawal from the world and cultivation while detaching from social realities, it easily becomes isolated and finds it difficult to play a constructive social role; conversely, if it stresses worldly engagement at the expense of fundamental Buddhist principles, it risks losing its distinctive character and core values. The maturity and wisdom of Chinese Buddhism lie in its long-term exploration of a dynamic balance between transcendental cultivation and worldly responsibility-remaining faithful to the original intent of the Dharma and protecting its proper transmission while proactively integrating into the nation and society and fulfilling social obligations. This balance is a key reason why the Sinicization of Buddhism has been able to continue advancing and be passed down through generations ^[6, 14].

5.3 Modern Buddhist Organizations and the Institutionalization of Loving the Country and Loving Buddhism

The establishment of the Buddhist Association of China in 1953 marked the beginning of a new phase in which modern Chinese Buddhism developed in a more collective, organized, and institutionalized manner. The 1953 Constitution of the Buddhist Association of China explicitly called for the unification of Buddhists nationwide to, under the leadership of the people's government, participate in efforts to cherish the motherland and defend world peace. The Constitution revised in 2019 further affirmed adherence to the Sinicization of Buddhism, the practice of the core socialist values, and the safeguarding of national unity, ethnic solidarity, religious harmony, and social stability ^[22, 23].

In terms of modern development and the scholarly study of Buddhism's Sinicization, contemporary Buddhist associations

differ fundamentally in nature and positioning from the ancient monastic official system. They are not monastic administrative organs subordinate to dynastic state bureaucracy; rather, they function as crucial bridges between the Buddhist community and the state and society in modern contexts, representing the legitimate interests of Buddhists and promoting the healthy and orderly development of Buddhism. Contemporary Buddhist associations bear dual responsibilities and missions: internally, they undertake tasks of uniting adherents, regulating religious affairs, cultivating Buddhist personnel, and facilitating cultural exchange, thereby supporting both the transmission and renewal of Buddhism; externally, they guide the Buddhist community to operate within the rule of law, encourage active participation in social welfare, serve social development, and help maintain social harmony and stability. This shift in organizational positioning has elevated the fine tradition of loving the country and loving Buddhism from individual conscience to collective consensus, and from spontaneous practice to institutionalized norm—love of country and love of Buddhism are no longer expressed solely as the political sagacity and personal commitment of a few eminent monks, nor confined to ritualized national-protective prayers, but have become organizational principles, behavioral norms, and practical orientations collectively observed by the Buddhist community, providing a solid organizational and institutional foundation for the continued advancement of Buddhism's Sinicization in the new era^[22, 23].

Viewed in light of the historical evolution and contemporary development of Buddhism's Sinicization, this institutional-level transformation has elevated the traditional tenet of "relying on the secular ruler" to a more modernized form: it has shifted from the ancient logic of "relying on the secular ruler to protect the Dharma" to a practice-oriented orientation in a rule-of-law society of "conducting religious activities in accordance with the law and proactively serving the state and society." Fundamentally, only by operating orderly within the framework of national laws, religious policies, and public social order can the Buddhist community genuinely safeguard the transmission of authentic teachings, cultivate qualified monastic personnel, regulate ecclesiastical affairs, and effectively meet the needs of the faithful. This shift exemplifies the modern dialectic in which love of country and love of Buddhism mutually reinforce one another: it both upholds the core of correct Buddhist belief and practice and aligns with the demands of national development and social progress in the new era, thereby injecting contemporary vitality into the ongoing Sinicization of Buddhism^[22, 23].

6. Discussion: Contemporary Implications from the Perspective of Buddhism's Sinicization

From the historical review above, it is evident that "loving the country and loving Buddhism" is not an externally imposed slogan on Buddhism, but rather a fundamental praxis tradition formed during Buddhism's prolonged Sinicization; it is the inevitable outcome of Buddhism's deep integration with Chinese society. Its contemporary value is principally manifested in the following four aspects:^[1, 14, 23]

6.1 Strengthening National Identity and Social Responsibility through Canonical Interpretation

First, strengthen education on national identity and social responsibility through canonical interpretation. When Buddhist institutions teach subjects such as Buddhist history, Vinaya, Pure Land studies, and Humanistic Buddhism, instruction should move beyond mere exegesis of names and lineages and instead guide monastics to a profound understanding of Buddhism's established traditions of protecting the nation, benefiting the people, repaying kindness, and aiding the world as they developed within Chinese society. By offering contemporary expositions of scriptures such as the Humane Kings Sutra (Renwang jing), the Golden Light Sutra (Jinguangming jing), the Brahmajāla Sūtra (Fanwang jing), and the Vimalakīrti Sūtra (Weimojie suoshuo jing), trainees should recognize that love of country and love of Buddhism are not extraneous demands detached from Buddhist teaching, but concrete expressions of core Buddhist ideals—compassionate altruism, adornment of the land, and protection of the true Dharma—manifested in the present age and an organic integration of the Dharma's spirit with contemporary societal needs^[8–13, 23].

6.2 Reinforcing Legal Awareness, Public Consciousness, and Cultural Responsibility in Monastic Education

Second, legal awareness, public consciousness, and cultural responsibility should be reinforced in the cultivation of monastic talent. Modern Master Taixu's promotion of sangha education reform was driven by the desire to train Buddhist practitioners who combine religious cultivation with a sense of social responsibility. Today, Buddhist higher-education institutions

should continue this vision and focus on developing interdisciplinary personnel who can clearly articulate the sinicization of Buddhism, skillfully narrate the stories of Chinese Buddhism, and possess the competencies for monastic administration and social engagement. The ideal of loving both the country and Buddhism should not remain at the level of theoretical proclamation; it must be fully integrated into curriculum design, pedagogical practice, and daily administration, permeating every aspect of academic ethos construction so that monks gradually internalize correct attitudes toward the nation and their social responsibilities^[18, 20, 23].

6.3 Translating Buddhist Compassion into Contemporary Social Service

Third, the spirit of Buddhist compassion should be contemporized through social services. Whereas ancient Buddhist state-protection practices were largely conducted through ritual assemblies and sutra recitations, in the present era Buddhist values should be manifested through concrete social services. The Buddhist community ought to actively engage in philanthropy, disaster relief, elderly care, ecological conservation, and other public welfare endeavors, converting the doctrine of “compassion and altruism” into tangible actions. Such engagement both fulfills the bodhisattva-path aspiration and leverages Buddhism’s constructive role in social development, aligning the compassionate ethos with contemporary societal needs^[17, 20, 23].

6.4 Balancing Tradition, Religious Conviction, and Adaptation to Modern Society

Fourth, the dialectical relationship between the preservation of tradition and adaptation to modernity must be properly managed. Devotion to the nation and commitment to the Buddhist faith are not mutually substitutive-national identification should not replace religious conviction-nor should religious affiliation be used as a pretext to evade legal obligations. Rather, on the basis of respecting Buddhist faith traditions and upholding monastic discipline, Buddhists should consciously integrate the development of Buddhism into the broader project of national and social development. Only by maintaining the purity of disciplinary observance, the integrity of monastic conduct, and the coherence of doctrinal teachings, while continuously enhancing their capacity to serve society, can Buddhists both remain true to their foundational beliefs and effectively fulfill their social responsibilities, thereby achieving an organic unity of love of country and love of Buddhism^[1, 14, 23].

In this sense, the contemporary emphasis on “loving the country and loving Buddhism” lies not in abstract declarations but in promoting a substantive integration of Buddhism with socialist society through improvements in institutional frameworks, strengthened talent cultivation, deeper exegesis of the canon, and the practice of social service. Only by doing so can the sinicization of Buddhism both preserve its historical foundations and define concrete contemporary pathways, safeguard the continuity of its religious tradition, and effectively respond to the developmental needs of the state and society, thereby achieving mutual empowerment of religious meaning and social value^[23].

7. Conclusion

This paper takes the maxim “without reliance on the secular ruler, Buddhist undertakings can hardly be established” as its central thread and systematically examines the historical formation and modern transformation pathways of Buddhism’s tradition of “loving the country and loving Buddhism.” A review of Buddhist canonical texts, historical practices, and institutional evolutions reveals that “loving the country and loving Buddhism” is not a modern discourse conjured ex nihilo, but rather a historical tradition gradually accumulated and organically formed during Buddhism’s prolonged localization and Sinicization. It represents the inevitable outcome of Buddhism’s deep integration with Chinese society and state development^[1, 2, 14, 18, 23].

At the level of doctrinal exposition, Buddhist scriptures such as the Renwang Jing, the Golden Light Sutra, and the Brahmajāla Sūtra organically integrate themes of protecting the state and its people, the preservation of the Dharma, filial loyalty and ethical duties, disciplinary norms, and the bodhisattva ideal. These texts thus provide a robust doctrinal basis for Buddhists’ understanding of political order and performance of social responsibilities, and they lay the intellectual groundwork for the development of a tradition that links love of country with devotion to Buddhism. At the level of practical development, Dao’an’s advocacy of the principle of “reliance on the secular ruler” (yiguo-zhu) — proactively adapting to social order — ensured the sangha’s continuity and the orderly translation and transmission of scriptures; in the modern era, Master Taixu’s promotion of Humanistic Buddhism (renjian fojiao) steered Buddhism’s transformation from a traditional protector of the state toward active service to the modern nation and society. These two figures thus represent two pivotal historical inflection points in the development of China’s tradition of loving both the country and Buddhism in the premodern

and modern periods, respectively. At the level of institutional guarantees, from the ancient monastic official system and temple registration to contemporary Buddhist organizational bodies, it is evident that Buddhist identification with the nation has consistently required concrete institutional forms to be embodied and implemented. Such institutionalization is a key safeguard that has allowed the tradition of loving both the country and Buddhism to be transmitted and to evolve across generations^[8–13].

The profound connotation of “loving the country and loving Buddhism” lies in realizing an organic unity between transcendental practice and engaged altruism, and in promoting the transmission of the Dharma in concert with national and social responsibilities. For contemporary Buddhism, love of country is not an extraneous demand detached from the core of the Dharma, but a natural extension of Buddhist compassion, altruistic concern, and the aspiration to adorn the land; love of Buddhism is not a form of self-isolation separate from the state and society, but an active integration into the broader project of national development grounded in fidelity to true right view and right practice. The dialectical unity of loving the country and loving Buddhism requires the Buddhist community, while adhering to the sinicization of Buddhism, to uphold orthodox faith and conduct, safeguard the proper transmission of the Dharma, cultivate qualified monastic talents, vigorously propagate exemplary Buddhist culture, and actively engage in social services. Within the framework of the rule of law, this will promote the healthy and orderly inheritance of Buddhism and enable a bidirectional empowerment of religious values and social value^[11, 18, 20, 23].

Thus, the historical evolution of the Chinese Buddhist tradition of “loving the country and loving Buddhism” clearly manifests a trajectory from “protecting the state and the ruler” to “serving the populace,” from “reliance on the secular ruler” to “governance in accordance with law,” and from traditional state-protection rites to modern social services, continually acquiring new contemporary expressions in different historical periods. The vitality of this tradition lies in its ability both to steadfastly preserve Buddhism’s fundamental spirit of compassion, wisdom, purity, and altruism and to proactively adapt to the conditions of the times, playing a constructive role in national development, social harmony, and the welfare of sentient beings. As such, it has become one of the most representative spiritual signifiers of the sinicization of Buddhism^[14, 18, 23].

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