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Buddhism in Modern Suining (Sichuan): Local Discourses within Chinese and Regional Narratives

ABSTRACT:

Research on Buddhism in modern Sichuan has been limited mostly to a few case studies and places. However, the in-depth research undertaken here reveals a richer picture, involving several rural and urban centers, and overlapping monastic and lay networks. One of these understudied yet crucial places is Suining 遂寧. The development of Buddhism in Republican-era Suining centered on three elements: the local belief that Suining was the home of Guanyin 觀音; the life and practice of the monk Qingfu 清福 (1862–1940); the “invisible” yet growing female communities there. Based on fieldwork encounters and written documents, this article is a micro-history that zooms in on lived religious practices and unique local narratives. At the same time, it shows that Suining Buddhism also reflected key features of Buddhism in modern Sichuan, and it engaged in significant Chinese and regional discourses, such as the call for a new model of sangha education, and the quest for Original Buddhism (*yuanshi Fojiao* 原始佛教).

KEYWORDS:

Republican-era Buddhism, Sichuan Buddhism, Suining, Guanyin, Princess Miaoshan, Monk Qingfu, Chinese Buddhist nuns, yuanshi Fojiao (Original Buddhism)

INTRODUCTION

Religion in modern China has in the past few decades been the object of increasing attention among scholars. Yet their studies have focused mainly on coastal territories, or the Jiangnan 江南 area, or large urban centers; consequently other geographical zones that were quite influential in the historical formation of the Chinese religious landscape have been neglected. Sichuan province is one of such zones that have been only partially investigated. And within Sichuan, research on the modern history of Buddhism has been limited mostly to analyses of the monks Nenghai 能海 (1886–1967) and Fazun 法尊 (1902–1980), the nun Longlian 隆蓮 (1909–2006), and certain Sino-Tibetan practices. Moreover, Chengdu, Chongqing, and Mount Emei (Emeishan 峨眉山) have

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emerged in scholarly work as the key Buddhist sites.¹ It would seem that a relatively deeper and more thorough investigation into the history of Sichuan Buddhism, especially from the late Qing (that is, about 1840–1911) until the end of the Republican era in 1949, will result in a richer picture, one that takes in rural and urban centers, overlapping monastic and lay networks, a varied range of religious activities, and cross-regional connections. These less-known religious dynamics and sites have become (in)visible, in the sense that they have been – and still are – visible and authoritative on a local level, but become invisible outside of that.²

The present article will contribute to scholarship concerning the modern history of Sichuan Buddhism with the study of a few so-called (in)visible communities and centers within the little-studied city of Suining 遂寧, in eastern Sichuan. My research focuses on the late Qing and the Republican Period, and analyzes Suining local Buddhism in its interrelation with the overarching character of Buddhism in mod-

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¹ The best known Chinese monograph about Longlian is Qiu Shanshan 裘山山, *Longlian fashi zhuan: dangdai diyi biqiuni* 隆蓮法師傳, 當代第一比丘尼 (Fuzhou: Fujian meishu chubanshe, 1997); among Western publications, see esp. Ester Bianchi, *The Iron Statue Monastery “Tiexiangsi”: A Buddhist Nunnery of Tibetan Tradition in Contemporary China* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2001); idem, “Subtle Erudition and Compassionate Devotion: Longlian, ‘The Most Outstanding Bhiksuni’ in Modern China,” in David Ownby, Vincent Goossaert, and Ji Zhe, eds., *Making Saints in Modern China* (New York: Oxford U.P., 2017), pp. 272–311. Ester Bianchi also authored studies about Nenghai, see “Sino-Tibetan Buddhism: Continuities and Discontinuities. The Case of Nenghai’s Legacy in the Contemporary Era,” in Y. Bendor and M. Shahar, eds., *Chinese and Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 300–18. Recent works about the Sino-Tibetan Institute include Yang Xiaorong 楊孝榮, “Hanzang jiaoliyuan dui difang Fojiao de yingxiang, yi Chongqing nanchuan ji jinshouan weili” 漢藏教理院對地方佛教的影響—以重慶南川及金佛山為例, *Xinan minzu daxue xuebao* 西南民族大學學報 11 (2015), pp. 58–65; idem, “Lun Minguo shiqi zuowei Zhongguo Fojiao jiaoyu zhongxin de Hanzang jiaoliyuan” 論民國時期作為中國佛教教育中心的漢藏教理院, *Zongjiaoxue yanjiu* 宗教學研究 1 (2018), pp. 113–22; Gray Tuttle, *Tibetan Buddhists in the Making of Modern China* (New York: Columbia U.P., 2005), pp. 194–205; Brenton Sullivan, “Venerable Fazun at the Sino-Tibetan Buddhist Studies Institute (1932–1950) and Tibetan Geluk Buddhism in China,” *Indian International Journal of Buddhist Studies*, no. 9 (2008), pp. 199–241.

² For my definition of the analytical concepts “visibility,” “invisibility,” and “(in)visibility,” and their application to the analysis of Buddhism in modern Sichuan, see Stefania Travagnin, “Monk Changyuan 昌圓 (1879–1945), Nuns in Chengdu, and Reevaluation of Local Heritage: Voicing Local (In)Visible Narratives of Modern Sichuan Buddhism,” *Journal of Chinese Religions* 49.2 (2021), pp. 191–239.

ern China broadly speaking, including in certain respects that of the entire East Asian region.

With a population of more than three million, the prefecture of Suining is known, locally, as the birthplace of Princess Miaoshan 妙善, and, by association, as the hometown of Guanyin 觀音 and the center of a popular devotion to the latter.³ The connection between the city and Guanyin has been also acknowledged on a national level in 2007, when the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles (Zhongguo wenxue yishujie lianhehui 中國文學藝術界聯合會) named Suining the “Hometown of China’s Guanyin Folk Culture” (Zhongguo Guanyin minsu wenhua zhi xiang 中國觀音民俗文化之鄉). Suining Buddhists contend that this link with Guanyin was already in existence in the Song-dynasty period, when, they claim, emperor Zhenzong 真宗 (r. 997–1022) presented Guangde Monastery (Guangde si 廣德寺) with a jade seal that asserted an association of the monastery with the bodhisattva in question.⁴ Popular stories about “Suining Guanyin” have been added to this hagiographic evidence – legends that, however, do not find correspondence in the records of official historiography. In the Republican era, Suining is where the monk Qingfu 清福 (1862–1940) was institutionally based for most of his life. Qingfu, who has been labeled the *nirmāṇa-kāya* (*huashen* 化身) of the young Sudhana (*Shancai tongzi* 善財童子) and the return of the Tang-era monk Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664), was active in Guangde Monastery.⁵ To further stress Qingfu’s connection to Xuanzang, Chinese scholars even call Qingfu’s travel diaries “A Journey to the West” (*Xiyouji* 西遊記, a verbatim borrowing of the original title of Xuanzang’s famous writing). Finally, Suining also is the site of a major public nunnery (*shifang nizhong conglin* 十方尼眾叢林) called the Jingye

³ The Chinese legend of the Princess Miaoshan, daughter of the King Miaozhuang, became inseparable from the Chinese story and belief in the Bodhisattva Guanyin, especially since the Tang period (618–906). Miaoshan represented the embodiment of filial piety, he was a merciful and compassionate daughter, ready to utmost sacrifices for saving the life of her father; she also refused to marry and was dedicated to Buddhist practice. Episodes and events in her legendary life, as well as values that she embedded, merged with the Chinese understanding of Guanyin, at the point that Miaoshan was said to be Guanyin.

⁴ The jade seal, which was donated in 1011, is now displayed inside the Jade Buddha Hall (Yufo dian 玉佛殿) at Guangde Monastery; for a detailed description of the seal see Shi Haishan 釋海山, Yang Guopin 楊國品, Li Xiaohua 李小華, Shi Puzheng 釋普正, Shi Nenggan 釋能干 et al., eds., *Guangde si zhi* 廣德寺志 (Chengdu: Chengdu muwu wenhua chuanbo youxian gongsi, 2010; hereafter cited as GSZ 2010), p. 248. The seal is also reproduced on the back cover of the temple records, to confirm its importance for the monastery; its nine characters read: “Guangli Chansi Guanyin zhubao yin 廣利禪寺觀音珠寶印.” Locals referred to the inscription to label the monastery as a “Guanyin site” (*Guanyin daochang* 觀音道場), and from there came the local assumption that Suining was Guanyin’s hometown (*Guanyin guli* 觀音故里).

⁵ *Nirmāṇa-kāya* means the temporary transformation of the body of the Buddha into the form of a sentient being.

Chan Nunnery (Jingye Chanyuan 淨業禪院), which was established and expanded during the Republican Period. The nunnery has more than one hundred years of history; it once hosted almost a hundred nuns in 1949 and is still a religious and cultural reference point within the province. The development of Buddhism in Republican-era Suining was centered on the interface of these three elements: Guanyin devotion, Qingfu's travels abroad and his projects at Guangde, and a growing community of nuns.

My research will uncover aspects of a unique local culture throughout eastern Sichuan province and furthermore contextualize the Suining scene within wider Sichuan and China. This attention to the local dimension of Buddhism takes a micro-history approach, which zooms in on living religious practices and local narratives.⁶ At the same time, such local developments engage more widely, namely with the overarching discourses at a macro-level. This article will illustrate that Suining Buddhism reflects, on a macro level, key features of Buddhism in modern Sichuan generally, for example networks of circulation and cooperation among monastics and sites, and the impact of Sino-Tibetan teachings and practices. Furthermore, at the macro level, it shares significant overarching patterns with modern Chinese Buddhism, such as the call for a new model of sangha training and education, and the quest for Original Buddhism (*yuanshi Fojiao* 原始佛教). The macro-narrative expands outside China as well, and reflects regional dynamics present, for instance, in Japan. Finally, these micro and macro dimensions of Suining Buddhism appear to be in continuous dialogue and thereby influence each other.

The research given here relies on archival documents, epigraphic material, Buddhist journals, city gazetteers and unpublished temple records. It will address the micro and macro dimensions through a study of the three key elements of modern Suining Buddhism that were mentioned above. The article will start with a brief overview of the history of Buddhism and Buddhists in Suining, looking at institutional Buddhism, the community of practitioners, popular practices, and the legends around Miaoshan (and Guanyin). This first part, which will focus mostly on the late Qing and the Republican Period, will serve to better contextualize the figure of Qingfu, the revival of people's devotion to Guanyin, and the formation of local nunneries in the modern era. In fact, Buddhism in Republican Suining was still rooted in pre-

⁶ For a definition of microhistory see for instance Mario Ginzburg (John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi trans.), "Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know about It," *Critical Inquiry* 20 (1993), pp. 10–35.

modern styles of worship and in local legends of Miaoshan, which has informed both Qingfu's commitments and the formation of nuns' communities. Modern Buddhist women in Suining are usually seen as part of Guanyin's legacy, and so have been related to the local and popular worship of Princess Miaoshan as Guanyin. The second part of the article explores and assesses the life and career of the monk Qingfu, his travels to South and Southeast Asia, and his contribution to the growth of Buddhism in Suining. Qingfu will clearly emerge as a protagonist in the revival of attention that is bending towards early-Indian Buddhism and the Theravāda tradition that characterized modern China, a mission in which other monastics in Suining, based in Guangde, also joined. The third part of the article will unpack the history of local female communities and nunneries, and present a picture of the women who have been neglected in the larger historical narrative of Buddhism, yet have been key actors in the local Buddhist sphere of Suining.

BUDDHISM IN SUINING: HISTORY AND CONTEXT

There are two versions of the history of Buddhism in Suining: the records found in local gazetteers and official documents; and the reading of events as proposed in local (and unverified) stories that identify a district within Suining as the birthplace of Princess Miaoshan. These two accounts are both relevant since they both inform the current Buddhist identity of the place, and are equally authoritative within the local community. According to local legends, Buddhist temples were built in Suining already towards the end of Eastern Zhou, in the third century BC. However, relatively more official historiography reports the presence of Buddhist temples in the territory only since the Eastern Han, around the first century AD; the number of Buddhist believers and temple sites continued to grow and become prominent a few centuries later, that is, from the Sui (581–618 AD) and Tang (618–907 AD) dynasties.⁷

Premodern History: Lingquan and Guangde Monasteries

Two Buddhist temples appear as protagonists of both the popular and the official history, and still remain major sites today: Lingquan Monastery (Lingquan si 靈泉寺) and Guangde Monastery. Their popu-

⁷ See Sichuansheng Suiningshi difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 四川省遂寧市地方誌編纂委員會, ed., *Suining xian zhi* 遂寧縣誌 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1992; hereafter SXZ), pp. 896–97; Xiong Xin 熊欣 and Chen Yaling 陳亞玲, eds., *Suining xianzhi (Kangxi ershijiunian ben) xiaozhu* 遂寧縣誌 (康熙二十九年本) 校注 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2017), pp. 209–14, 259–61.

larity reaches beyond Suining; in fact they have been declared key Buddhist sites for all of southwestern China. Their acclaim is also due to the connection with the local legend of Guanyin that following sections of the present article will explore in detail.

According to the better documented of the narratives, Lingquan was built in the end of the sixth century and was named Shengfo Monastery (Shengfo si 聖佛寺). It was renovated during the Song dynasty and then called Zisheng Monastery (Zisheng yuan 資聖院), a name conferred by the emperor Zhenzong (at the beginning of the eleventh century); it was rebuilt again in 1490 and eventually became named Lingquan Monastery.⁸

Guangde Monastery is one of the major Buddhist temples in southwestern China. Today it hosts more than seventy monks, including the students of the Guangde Institute of Buddhist Studies (Guangde Foxueyuan 廣德佛學院); in the premodern era it counted an even higher number of resident monastics.⁹ Already in existence during the Han under the name Shi Fo Monastery (Shifosi 石佛寺), it was rebuilt and renamed several times during the Tang: it was called Baotang Monastery (Baotang si 保唐寺) in the late 760s, Chanlin Monastery (Chanlin si 禪林寺) in 778, Shanji Monastery (Shanji si 善濟寺) since 780, and Zaixing Chanlin Monastery (Zaixing Chanlin si 再興禪林寺) in 903. The monastery was renamed Guangli Chan Monastery (Guangli Chansi 廣利禪寺) by the Song emperor Zhenzong (1011), and only during the Ming (specifically in 1513) it adopted the name Guangde Chan Monastery (Guangde Chansi 廣德禪寺).¹⁰ The Chan master Keyou Wuzhu 克幽無住 (727–787) was the most eminent monk at Guangde in the premodern period.¹¹

⁸ See SXZ, p. 896; Changnian 長念, “Suining Lingquansi zhulu jungong” 遂寧靈泉寺築路竣工, *Fayin* 法音 10 (1988), p. 30; Zhuang Wenbin 庄文彬, “Suining Lingquan si” 遂寧靈泉寺, *Sichuan wenwu* 四川文物 3 (1992), p. 73.

⁹ Two works compiled recently present the most extensive details of the history of the temple: Changnian 長念, *Guangde si zhi (618–1988)* 廣德寺誌 (618–1988) (Suining: Sichuansheng Suiningshi *Guangde si zhi* bianzuan weiyuanhui, 1988; hereafter cited as GSZ 1988); and GSZ 2010. Recent articles include Wang Hongpo 王洪波, “Sichuan Suining Guangdesi lishi yange” 四川遂寧廣德寺歷史沿革, *Shanxi jianzhu* 山西建築 35.9 (2009), pp. 28–29; Peng Gaoquan 彭高泉, “Suining Guangde si” 遂寧廣德寺, *Sichuan wenwu* 6 (1989), pp. 63–65; Zhang Jing 長靜, “Xilai di yi chanlin: Suining Guangde si” 西來第一禪林: 遂寧廣德寺, *Liang'an guanxi* 兩岸關係 1 (2007), pp. 61–63; Chen Shu 陳澍, Yu Yongqing 余永清, Zhan Wanlu 詹萬祿, “Suining Guangde si” 遂寧廣德寺, *Sichuan wenwu* 4 (1993), pp. 74–76. Concerning specifically the intersection between the local legend of Guanyin and the history of Guangde Monastery, see e.g. Wang Dawei 王大偉, “Lun simiao yu minsu de xingcheng: yi Sichuan Suining Guangde si yu bendi Guanyin Xinyang wei li” 論寺廟與民俗的形成, 以四川遂寧廣德寺與本地觀音信仰為例, *Zongjiaoxue yanjiu* 宗教學研究 2 (2015), pp. 122–25.

¹⁰ For the changes in name, see GSZ 2010, p. 25.

¹¹ For more about Keyou, see Zheng Zhencheng 鄭禎誠, “Guangde si kaishan zushi Keyou

Development in the Late Qing and the Republican Period

Suining Buddhism in late-Qing and Republican times reflected – and contributed to – the wider religious and socio-political milieu. It was the time of China’s Hundred Days’ Reform (*wuxu bianfa* 戊戌變法), as well as the advancement of education via temple properties (*miaochan xingxue* 廟產興學), and also the moment when first nationwide Chinese Buddhist group was founded, namely, the Chinese Buddhist General Association (Zhonghua Fojiao zonghui 中華佛教總會), which issued regulations for sangha administration, education, and lands.

At the more local level in Sichuan, it was the time of the Railway Protection Movement (*baolu yundong* 保路運動),¹² when, as well, national government offices, military academies, and several Buddhist academies relocated to Sichuan and Chongqing in 1937 due to the Sino-Japanese conflict.¹³ Finally, we note then the spread of Sino-Tibetan Buddhist practices that centered especially on the figure of the monk Nenghai. Despite some attacks upon superstitious – some called them “folk” – beliefs that characterized the first decades of the Republican Period in particular, the local devotion to Princess Miaoshan and the popularity of Guanyin worship in Suining did not fall into oblivion; on the contrary, in the early-twentieth century they confirmed again their relevance in the local religious context.

In line with what was happening elsewhere in Sichuan and other provinces, Suining founded its own local branch of the Chinese Buddhist Association (Zhongguo Fojiaohui Suiningxian huifenbu 中國佛教會遂寧縣會分部) in 1912. The office was restructured and assumed a different name (Suining xian Fojiao hui 遂寧縣佛教會) after only a few years (1924). Since the 1920s, the local association devoted time and resources to two major projects: the creation of new education and

chanshi faming kao” 廣德寺開山祖師克幽禪師法名考, *Sichuan zhiye jishu xueyuan xuebao* 四川職業技術學院學報 1 (2003), pp. 15–17; GSZ 2010, pp. 37–44. The same Keyou has often been interpreted as another manifestation of Guanyin, e.g., “Guangde si Puji ta de chuan-shuo” 廣德寺普濟塔的傳說, included in GSZ 1988, pp. 350–51, where Keyou is defined as a *nirmāṇa-kāya* of Guanyin.

¹² For a detailed analysis of this movement, see Zheng Guanglu 鄭光路, *Sichuan baolu yundong lishi zhenxiang* 四川保路運動歷史真相 (Chengdu: Sichuan minzu chubanshe, 2011).

¹³ For the Sichuan involvement in the Sino-Japanese conflict, see Zheng Guanglu, *Bei yiwang de kangzhan shi, Sichuan da kangzhan* 被遺忘的抗戰史, 四川大抗戰 (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 2015); Ding Chengming 丁成明 and Hu Jinyu 胡金玉, eds., *Kangzhan shiqi de Sichuan: dang’an shiliao huibian* 抗戰时期的四川, 檔案史料彙編 (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 2014); Duan Yu 段渝, *Kangzhan shiqi de Sichuan* 抗戰时期的四川 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2005).

training opportunities for the sangha; the promotion of charity activities that could offer food and medical aid to the poor.¹⁴

Qingfu was the protagonist of these Sangha education reforms at Guangde, and he participated in the nation-wide movement at the beginning of the twentieth century that tried to change and improve the sangha's study programs.¹⁵ Within Sichuan, Qingfu had peers such as the monks Changyuan 昌圓 (1879–1945),¹⁶ Shengqin 聖欽 (1869–1964),¹⁷ Foyuan 佛源 (1853–1926),¹⁸ and Guanyi 貫一 (1878–1954),¹⁹ who were all active in the formation of various levels of training curricula. Qingfu's major achievement in this context was the Hongfa Institute of Buddhist Studies (Hongfa Foxueyuan 宏法佛學院),²⁰ which he

¹⁴ SXZ, p. 896; GSZ 2010, p. 324.

¹⁵ Recent studies on Buddhist education in modern China include Rongdao Lai, "Praying for the Republic: Buddhist Education, Student Monks, and Citizenship in Modern China (1911–1949)," Ph.D. diss. (McGill University, 2013); Stefania Travagnin, "From *xue* 學 to *jiaoyu* 教育: Conceptual Understandings of 'Education' in Modern Chinese Buddhism," in Stefania Travagnin and Gregory Adam Scott, eds., *Concepts and Methods for the Study of Chinese Religions II: Intellectual History of Key Concepts* (Boston and Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), pp. 95–120; and Huang Xianian 黃夏年, "Jindai Zhongguo Fojiao jiaoyu" 近代中國佛教教育, *Fayin* 法音 4 (2007), pp. 30–37.

¹⁶ For more on Changyuan, see Pixian zhengxie 郫縣政協, ed., *Qiannian gu Shudu: Pixian renwen juan* 千年古蜀都: 郫縣人文卷 (Beijing: Zhongguo sanxia chubanshe, 2006), pp. 113–15 ("Quanguo Fojiaohui fuhuzhang: Changyuan" 全國佛教會副會長, 昌圓); Huikong 慧空, "Changyuan fashi" 昌圓法師, in *Shaocheng wenshi ziliao-dibaji* 少城文史資料—第八輯 (Chengdu: Zhengxie Chengdushi Qingyangqu weiyuanhui wenshi yu xuexi weiyuanhui, 1996), pp. 117–20; Zeng Xianglin 曾祥麟, "Sichuansheng Fojiaohui zhuxi Changyuan fashi" 四川省佛教會主席昌圓法師, in *Pixian gujin renwu* 郫縣古今人物 (Chengdu: Dianzi keji daxue chubanshe, 2016), pp. 123–25; Tian Jizhang 田繼章, "Changyuan" 昌圓, in Ren Yimin 任一民, ed., *Sichuan jinxianandai renwu zhuan: di'erji* 四川近現代人物傳, 第二輯 (Chengdu: Sichuan sheng shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 1986), pp. 310–13; Wang Enyang 王恩洋, "Changyuan laofashi xingzhuang" 昌圓老法師行狀, *Wenjiao congkan* 文教叢刊 5.6 (1946), pp. 107–9; Feng Xiuqi 馮修齊, "Jiqing jiaoyu shiye de Changyuan fashi" 寄情教育事業的昌圓法師, *Difang wenhua yanjiu jikan* 地方文化研究輯刊 5.5 (2012), pp. 113–17.

¹⁷ Zongxing 宗性, ed., "Shengqin heshang zishu" 聖欽和尚自述, *Foxue yanjiu* 佛學研究 20 (2011), pp. 368–78.

¹⁸ Peng Zongmin 彭宗民, "Foyuan fashi zhuanlue" 佛源法師傳略, *Fayin* 3 (1991), p. 36.

¹⁹ Guanyi was a native of Deyang 德陽. At the age of 9 (1887), he became a novice under the monk Qinghui 清慧 at Erlang Temple (Erlang miao 二郎廟), in Xindu 新都, where in 1900 he was also fully ordained at Baoguang Monastery (Baoguang si 寶光寺). He furthered his Buddhist education and training under the monks Shichang 世昌 and Foyuan 佛源. In 1915 he returned to Baoguang, and served as receptionist and accountant, until he was appointed nineteenth abbot (1921–1927). In 1934 he made pilgrimages to the four sacred Buddhist mountains and in Suzhou he met the famous Pure Land master Yinguang 印光. For more biographical details, see Feng Xiuqi 馮修齊, *Baoguang si* 寶光寺 (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 2004), pp. 24–25; and Shi Shunling 釋順靈, Li Xiaohua 李小華, Liu Hui 劉輝 et al., eds., *Jingye Chanyuan zhi* 淨業禪院志 (Chengdu: Chengdu muwu wenhua chuanbo youxian gongsi, 2011; hereafter cited as JCZ), pp. 96–97.

²⁰ For details about the institute, see GSZ 2010, pp. 275–78; "Suining Foxueyuan kaixue" 遂寧佛學院開學, *Haichao yin* 海潮音 10.4 (1929), pp. 26–27; "Suining xian Hongfa Foxueyuan qingyu zhidao chengwen" 遂寧縣宏法佛學院請予指導呈文, *Zhongguo Fojiao huibao* 中國佛教會報 22 (1931), pp. 4–5; "Benhui zhi Suining xian Hongfa Foxueyuan lai shu" 本會致遂寧縣

founded in 1924 in cooperation with Zhenliang 真量 (1905–1953), another scholar-monk and educator who had graduated from Taixu's 太虛 (1890–1947) Wuchang Institute of Buddhist Studies (Wuchang Foxueyuan 武昌佛學院).²¹ The Hongfa institute was hosted within Guangde, and remained operative until 1945. It was opened primarily to the monks who were residing at the monastery, although a few from other sites were admitted; the student-monks had to purchase monastic robes, while Guangde covered accommodation and meals. The Chinese Buddhist Association praised the institute for its “brilliant achievements” (*feiran chengji* 斐然成績).²² Initially, the institute appointed Taixu as Honorary Dean, Qingfu as Dean, and Zhenliang as Director of Teaching. Zhenliang became Dean after Qingfu's passing in 1940. Among the teachers there were the monks Zhenliang, Foyu 佛焜, Changnian 長念, Zhaoben 照本, Zhenyan 真嚴, Changhui 常輝, and Guangfa 廣法. The curriculum of the two-year program included courses about Buddhism, Buddhist history, foundational doctrines, and elementary education like the study of Confucian classics.²³ The same Taixu, former teacher of Zhenliang, gave a speech at the Institute in August 1930, and in the following years he corresponded often with Zhenliang about programs and conditions at the school.²⁴ Hongfa can be seen as a modern-style institute, where monks learned both secular subjects and Buddhism; however the educational reforms in force at Hongfa did not include some innovations that were found in the early curricula adopted at the Wuchang and Minnan Institutes of Buddhist Studies.²⁵ As such, the

宏法佛學院來書, *Zhongguo Fojiao huibao* 22 (1931), pp. 3–4; “Suining senglu xunlianban jun-cheng biye dianli” 遂寧僧侶訓練班舉行畢業典禮, *Haichao yin* 3–6 (1939), p. 60.

²¹ Zhenliang, a native of Suining, was born Luo Wenquan 羅文全. He became a monk in 1918 at Guangde Monastery, with Wukai 悟凱 as master. He graduated from Taixu's Wuchang Institute of Buddhist Studies in 1924, and Taixu remembered him as an excellent pupil, with outstanding achievements in both the study of Buddhism (*Fojiao* 佛學) and cultivation (*xuefo* 學佛). Zhenliang also studied at Huayan University (Huayan daxue 華嚴大學), in Jiangsu, from which he graduated in the late 1920s, and on Mt. Putuo for six months. He served president, board member and standing committee member of the Suining branch of the Chinese Buddhist Association, and was also abbot of Guangde Monastery (1942–1943). His book *Foxue changzhi* 佛學常識, became very popular in Sichuan. In 1951, due to the land reform movement and the new political atmosphere, Zhenliang left Guangde for Zhenjiang Monastery (Zhenjiang si 鎮江寺) in the eastern part of the city, where he lived his final years as a layman and sustained himself selling matchboxes and paper. For biographical details, see GSZ 1988, pp. 74–75; GSZ 2010, p. 63; Zhenliang 真量, “Zhenliang fashi laishu” 真量法師來書, *Haichao yin* 18.11 (1937), pp. 49–50.

²² “Benhui (Zhongguo Fojiao hui) wei Sichuan sheng Suining xian Hongfa Foxueyuan chengji feiran teci xunling jiajiangwen” 本會(中國佛教會)為四川省遂寧縣宏法佛學院成績斐然特此訓令嘉獎文, *Zhongguo Fojiao huibao* 15–21 (1931), p. 1.

²³ Namely the Five Classics (*wujing* 五經) and the Four Books (*sishu* 四書).

²⁴ Zhenliang 真量, “Zhenliang fashi laishu.”

²⁵ About the Wuchang Institute of Buddhist Studies, see Rongdao Lai, “The Wuchang

sangha education offered at Hongfa was closer to the education programs found in the same years at other schools in Chengdu, like the Sichuan Institute of Buddhist Studies (Sichuan Foxueyuan 四川佛學院) also established in the 1920s.²⁶

There occurred considerable changes in organization and mission of the Buddhist Association in Suining in 1942. In a meeting on December 9 it was decided, in accordance with a general restructuring at the provincial level of the association, to commence new rules and system of registration for the sangha, and the involvement of local government officials in the general committee; this decision was officialized on December 10. A second meeting for the election of the new leadership of the association was held on December 13: the monk Zhenliang was selected as chairman, and Runze 潤澤, a graduate from the Cansang School (Cansang xuexiao 蠶桑學校) as deputy-chairman; the local association changed name again, to Zhongguo Fojiao xiehui Sichuansheng Suiningxian fenhui 中國佛教協會四川省遂寧縣分會. The same *Foxueyuan* and the charity activities were confirmed.²⁷

Local gazetteers report that in 1929 the number of registered monks and nuns in Suining had reached 287. This rose to 833 (654 monks and 179 nuns) in 1937, and 843 (589 monks and 254 nuns) in 1945; in 1945, Suining had a total of 143 temples, eighty-eight administered and inhabited by monastics. In 1947, there was a total of 444 monastics (321 monks and 123 nuns), and 5,310 lay followers. In these years, most temples occupied and owned 1,800 *mu* of land (297 acres), and the majority of monks and nuns, who belonged mostly to the Linji 臨濟 and Caodong 曹洞 schools of Chan, based their sustenance on farming.²⁸ The revitalized presence of ordained nuns was also connected to Qingfu and the foundation of the Aidao Buddhist Society (Aidao Fo-

Ideal: Buddhist Education and Identity Production in Republican China,” *Studies in Chinese Religions* 3.1 (2017), pp. 55–70; about the Minnan Institute of Buddhist Studies, see Stefania Travagnin, “The Impact of Politics on the Minnan Buddhist Institute: *Sanmin zhuyi* 三民主義 and *aiguo aijiao* 愛國愛教 in the Context of Sangha Education,” *Review of Religion and Chinese Society* 2.1 (2015), pp. 21–50.

²⁶ For a brief overview of Sangha education in Republican Sichuan, see Guangwen 廣文, “Ershinian lai zhi Sichuan Fojiao” 二十年來之四川佛教, *Haichao yin* 20.1 (1939), pp. 26–32. For the Sichuan Foxueyuan, see Wu Hua 吳華, “Zhengzhi, shehui, conglin de difang hudong: yi Sichuan Foxueyuan wei li (1923–1939)” 政治、社會、叢林的地方互動, 以四川佛學院為例 (1923–1939), *Putuo xuekan* 普陀學刊 1 (2016), pp. 88–101; Wu Hua 吳華, “Jindai Fojiao jiaoyu de faqi yu xingsheng: yi minguo shi Chengdu shi wei li” 近代佛教教育的發起與興盛, 以民國時成都市為例, *Zhongguo Foxue* 中國佛學 39 (2016), pp. 35–53.

²⁷ See GSZ 1988, pp. 147–51.

²⁸ For the discussion in these several paragraphs of farming and of numbers of nuns and monks, see SXZ, p. 896–97; JCZ, pp. 96–97; and GSZ 2010, pp. 279–88.

xueshe 愛道佛學社) in 1933, which in 1947 was reorganized by the monk Guanyi and renamed Jingye Chan Nunnery; the latter hosted more than ninety nuns at the end of Republican Period; it was one of the major nunneries in China in the first half of the twentieth century.

The number of lay followers increased greatly from the early-Republican Period, a phenomenon linked, again, to the charisma of Qingfu. For instance, it is reported that in 1919, under his energy and guidance, more than 3,600 lay people decided to start the study and practice of Buddhism.

After 1949, the major political ideology and its resultant policies under the People's Republic of China affected monastic populations and Buddhist activities. A quantitative decrease in the Buddhist sangha and lay followers was registered as soon as March 1951; and later, by February 1953, there was a total of just ninety-four temples, with thirty-nine of them being administered by sangha, and a total of only 151 monastics and 162 lay followers. In 1962 there were only 61 monastics (22 monks and 39 nuns), and of these, 11 monks and 9 nuns did not reside in temples.

Improvements coming after the suppressions of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) were evident by the end of the 1980s. The first temples to function again as religious sites then were the famous Lingquan and Guangde, and the female Jingye Chan Nunnery; at that time Suining counted a total of 25 monks, 25 nuns, 30 male novices, 8 female novices, and 189 lay people (132 male and 57 female). Guangde began hosting a new seminary, the Guangde Institute of Buddhist Studies, since 1989, thanks to the commitment of the monk and abbot Changnian 長念 (1908–1990). If Qingfu is remembered as playing a leading role in the innovations at Guangde during the Republican Period, Changnian is identified as the key figure in the survival of Guangde during the Cultural Revolution, and the one who guided it to a reopening in 1986 and renewed life as a functioning temple.²⁹

The Legend of Princess Miaoshan: The “Suining Version”

Suining Buddhism is characterized by folk legends about Guanyin and a Guanyin culture that permeates the local Buddhist liturgy and (purported) history. The most important Western studies of Chinese Guanyin devotion have focused on gender transformation and various aspects of the process of sinification and domestication of the

²⁹ Shi Haishan 釋海山, Yang Guopin 楊國品, Li Xiaohua 李小華, Shi Puzheng 釋普正, Shi Nenggan 釋能干 et al., *Changnian da heshang* 長念大和尚 (Suining: Muwu wenhua chuanbo, 2007).

Bodhisattva; in addition, Mount Putuo (Putuoshan 普陀山) has been researched as a main pilgrimage site, and the merging of the Chinese interpretation of Guanyin with the legend of Princess Miaoshan has often been raised.³⁰ Textual and canonical sources used in the study of Guanyin do not locate Miaoshan's hometown in the area of Suining, neither do they include reference to Suining-area worship of Guanyin. Yet, Sichuan seems to have a particular affinity with the story involving Princess Miaoshan and Guanyin: for instance, Chün-fang Yü has noted that several Song-dynasty-era female donors in Sichuan were named Miaoshan,³¹ and Angela Howard pointed out that the earliest Thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara created in China is found, indeed, in Sichuan.³²

Leaders of Buddhist activities in Suining are labeled or remembered in connection with Guanyin. In imperial times, for instance, the Chan master Keyou Wuzhu was defined as a *nirmāṇa-kāya* of Guanyin (*Guanyin pusa de huashen* 觀音菩薩的化身).³³ And more recently, Guanyin has become a recurrent figure in the life of Qingfu. This occurred in 1878 when Qingfu made a pilgrimage to Guangde Monastery to worship Guanyin, and while at Guangde, praying Guanyin, he made his final and firm commitment to become a monk; later, in 1924, the vision of a weeping Guanyin in Miaoshan's birthplace inspired him to rebuild a Buddhist site for women's practice there.³⁴

Local songs and poems also recount the legendary presence of Miaoshan (and Guanyin) in Suining;³⁵ these local stories generated a local devotion to Guanyin that has been documented since the Tang and Song periods: it is then that Suining Buddhism started to revolve around the worship of Guanyin, with celebrations held especially at Lingquan and Guangde monasteries. The jade seal that Song Zhenzong

³⁰ Chün-fang Yü's *Kuan-Yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara* (New York: Columbia U.P., 2001) is the most comprehensive, multi-disciplinary study of Guanyin; Glen Dudbridge's *The Legend of Miaoshan* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2004 [1978]) is the most referenced work about Miaoshan; for the study of Guanyin and the pilgrimage history of Mt. Putuo see Marcus Bingenheimer, *Island of Guanyin: Mount Putuo and its Gazetteers* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2016); Claire Vidal, "Administering Bodhisattva Guanyin's Island," in Zhe Ji, Gareth Fisher, and André Laliberté, eds., *Buddhism After Mao: Negotiations, Continuities, and Reinventions* (Honolulu: U. Hawai'i Press, 2019), pp. 45-76.

³¹ Yü, *Kuan-Yin*, p. 310.

³² Personal communication between Angela Howard and Chün-fang Yü, mentioned in Yü, *Kuan-Yin*, p. 521, n. 22.

³³ See "Guangde si Puji ta de chuanshuo," included in GSZ 1988, pp. 350-51.

³⁴ For more on this topic, see the following section on Qingfu.

³⁵ The most popular stanzas are: "觀音菩薩在遂寧，二月十九子時生。六月十九得道行，九月十九蓮台登..."; see, e.g., Liu Hui 劉輝, "Cong Suining dang'an shiliao kan Guanyin guli" 從遂寧檔案史料看觀音故里, included in J CZ, p. 465.

is said to have donated to Guangde is seen as a further affirmation of the close connection between Suining and Guanyin, and also as a confirmation that this particular Buddhist devotion was even circulating broadly in the eleventh century. Local gazetteers and temple records confirm the popular notion that Miaoshan was born in Suining.³⁶ Certainly, pilgrimages to Suining as “Guanyin’s hometown” affected the local economy for centuries.³⁷

This imbrication of the Miaoshan Princess and Guanyin has become more than just a local popular story, in fact it seems that it has been accepted on the national level as well. Above, I mentioned the recognition of Suining by the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles; in 2012, on the nineteenth day of the second month of the lunar calendar, which is believed to be Miaoshan’s 2,216th birthday, the Guanyin culture of Suining was declared officially a real treasure of Chinese folk culture.³⁸

According to a Suining folk story, the Eastern Zhou era is recorded as witnessing a wave of immigration into northwestern China in the 300s BC. The immigrants belonged to different ethnic groups, mostly the Di 氐 people, and they formed what was known as the Jie kingdom (Jieguo 劫國) in what is the Changji 昌吉 area of present-day Xinjiang. The king of Jie, Miaozhuang (Miaozhuang wang 妙庄王), to escape local hardship decided to move with his people into the Shu 蜀 area (a core part of modern Sichuan); he settled there and established a realm that was so-called Kingdom of the Western Valley (Xiyuguo 西峪國),

³⁶ These accounts are always referred to as popular legends; several are summarized in GSZ 1988, pp. 351–52; and JCZ, pp. 443–49, 465–72.

³⁷ See Wu Anbang 吳安邦, “Guanyin xianghui yu difang jingji” 觀音香會與地方經濟, included in JCZ, pp. 493–514.

³⁸ Publications on Suining’s Guanyin culture include Duan Yuming 段玉明, *Bashu Fojiao wenshi luncong* 巴蜀佛教文史論叢 (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2015), pp. 222–49; Liu Hui 劉輝, *Zhongguo Guanyin yu renwen Suining* 中國觀音與人文遂寧 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2011); Liu Zhangjiu 劉長久, “Cong Guanyin xinyang shuoqi: jianji Suining shi dui Guanyin minsu wenhua ziyuan de kaifa” 從觀音信仰說起, 兼及遂寧市對觀音民俗文化資源的開發, *Zhonghua wenhua luntan* 中華文化論壇 2 (2004), pp. 44–49; Puzheng 普正, ed., *Guanyin daochang qiannian fudi: Zhongguo Suining Guanyin wenhua yanjiu* 觀音道場 千年福地, 中國遂寧觀音文化研究 (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2010); Wu Hua 吳華, “Shannian, shansheng, shanxing tianxia: Suining Guanyin wenhua shi yanjiu” 善念、善生、善行天下, 遂寧觀音文化史研究, *Shijie zongjiao wenhua* 世界宗教文化 6 (2016), pp. 86–92. See also “Guanyin pusa minjian de chuanshuo” 觀音菩薩民間的傳說, included in GSZ 1988, pp. 351–52. Li Xiaohua divides the story of the “Chinese Guanyin Miaoshan” (*Zhongguo Guanyin Miaoshan* 中國觀音妙善) into 17 episodes; see “Zhongguo Guanyin Miaoshan de danshengdi” 中國觀音妙善的誕生地, in Li Xiaohua, ed., *Dushi zhong de jingtu: zoujin Zhongguo Guanyin guli, Jingye Chanyuan* 都市中的淨土, 走進中國觀音故里, 淨業禪院 (Beijing: Zhongguo wenhua chubanshe, 2012; hereafter cited as *Li Jingtu*), pp. 10–53. Li also compiled a chronological table of all life-events of the “Chinese Guanyin Miaoshan”; see “Zhongguo Guanyin Miaoshan shengping nianbiao” 中國觀音妙善生平年表, in *ibid.*, pp. 54–57.

in a territorial area that now contains the current city of Suining.³⁹ The first Buddhist site of this time, namely, Shiku Temple (Shiku si 石窟寺), which contained a Buddha statue and became used for worship, was said to have been built in the area around 250 BC. Shiku was one of the several caves used for religious practice by the new inhabitants of Sichuan, and could mean that Buddhist devotion and worship sites in China were already present in the third century BC.

In 230 BC, once he had occupied the Suining area, Miao Zhuang commissioned the building of Beihu Garden (Beihu yuan 北胡苑).⁴⁰ In 210 BC, he married Baoying 寶應, who bore him three daughters (Miaoyin 妙音, Miaoyuan 妙元,⁴¹ and finally Miaoshan) and one son (Miaofu 妙甫). Princess Miaoshan was born in 204 BC in the Beihu Garden, where she also spent good part of her life. Miaoshan's younger brother, Miaofu, was born in 194 BC in the same place. The eldest daughter, Miaoyin, married in 193 BC, and the second one, Miaoyuan, married in 191 BC. Miao Zhuang died in 180 BC and was buried on the hill behind the Jiulian Temple (Jiulian si 九蓮寺) in Suining. Miaoshan moved to Beijue Temple (Beijue si 北厥寺) in 179 BC to practice Buddhism, and after escaping its destruction in 178 BC she transferred to Mt. Fragrance (Xiang shan 香山) to continue her religious cultivation, which she did for eight years. Miaoshan died in 171 BC, and the next year her body was moved and buried on Mt. Lingquan (Lingquan shan 靈泉山; becoming known as "Guanyin grave" [Guanyin fen 觀音坟]). The first statue of Miaoshan (as Guanyin) was enshrined there in 169 BC, and on the same site Shengfo Monastery was built during the Sui dynasty. From the Tang period forward, statues of Guanyin Miaoshan started to be discovered in many places in China, and thus Miaoshan became thought of as the Chinese Guanyin.

Another version of the same local story expands on Miaoshan's sisters. In it they are portrayed as Buddhist practitioners who resided in key Buddhist sites of Suining. Thus, after surviving a fire in Beijue Temple, one sister moved to where Guangde Monastery is now located, another to where Lingquan Monastery is, and Miaoshan moved south to Mt. Putuo.⁴² This version, as well as other details that developed from

³⁹ For my discussion in this and the following two paragraphs, see JCZ, pp. 436–56, 461–64. See also Li Xiaohua, "Shiku si de chuxian he Shifo si de fazhan" 石窟寺的出現和石佛寺的發展," in GSZ 2010, pp. 675–79.

⁴⁰ The same place has been known later with other names of similar pronunciation, like Baifu yuan 百福院, Baifo yuan 百佛院, Baihu yuan 白狐院.

⁴¹ Her name is reported sometime as Miaoyu 妙欲, see GSZ 1988, pp. 351–52; according to this version of the story Miao Zhuang did not father any male child.

⁴² See GSZ 1988, pp. 351–52.

the folk legend, served to build a strong connection between Guanyin (Miaoshan) and the larger Suining area through references to many local Buddhist sites. For instance, as these legends claim, the place where Miao Zhuang settled coincides with present-day Longfeng village (Longfeng zhen 龍鳳鎮) on the periphery of Suining; the first temple built in 250 BC, Shiku Temple, was located where Guangde Monastery now is; Beihu Garden is in the same area where Jingye Chan Nunnery is today; Beijue Temple, commissioned and built in 210 BC so that Miao Zhuang could have a site to make offerings to the Buddha near his residence, was on the same site of today's Baique Monastery (Baique si 白雀寺); and the Sanfeng Temple (Sanfeng si 三鳳寺), near Baique, was built to honor the three sisters. Baoying's grave is probably close by the present Fengge Monastery (Fengge si 鳳閣寺), and Miao Zhuang's grave was probably on the site of the present *Tianzi mu* 天子墓. Mount Fragrance is in today's Xiangshan village (Xiangshan zhen 香山鎮), in a town named Shehong 射洪 north of Suining and still part of Suining prefecture. Shengfo Monastery was renamed Lingquan Monastery also in relation to Miaoshan. The stories purport that worshippers of Miaoshan noticed a spring flowing just behind the Miaoshan statue; they called it "the spring of Guanyin's spirit" (Guanyin ling quan 觀音靈泉), and centuries later Shengfo was officially renamed Lingquan. All the major Buddhist temples and several districts within the area of Suining are, then, linked to Guanyin. At the same time, the revised version of the story connects Suining to Mount Putuo, hence it engages Suining with other Guanyin stories, and position this Sichuan city within the larger Chinese map of Guanyin sites.

Li Xiaohua 李小華, an important contemporary writer of temple gazetteers in Suining and also a local journalist, tried to base the story of the immigrations from the far northwest into China, and especially the later foundation of Miao Zhuang's kingdom in the Suining area, on the historical reconstruction of waves and stages of immigrations reported in *Han Shu* 漢書 (compiled in the ten to fourteen years up to 92 AD), especially the chapter "Xicheng zhuan" 西城傳. However, there is no direct or explicit mention of Suining as hometown of Guanyin in the documents it cites.⁴³ Such folk stories are rather more carefully regarded in the world of gazetteers and compilers involved with Suining Buddhism; in fact they are even collected and reported as a separate chapter titled "Legends" (*chuanshuo* 傳說) in the major temple gazet-

⁴³ For Li's arguments and references to historical documents see JCZ, pp. 434-70, esp. pp. 443-49.

teers.⁴⁴ These stories represent local memories, curation of identity, and a certain kind of local authoritativeness.

Certainly the Suining story is not the only folk legend about Guanyin to be found in China, and Suining is not the only place that claims to be Guanyin's hometown: we also have Changji 昌吉 (Xinjiang) and Zhouqu 舟曲 (Gansu), among others. Yet, Li Xiaohua has argued that the claim of Suining is special and prominent for a series of factors: the claim already existed during the Song (see the emperor's seal), it became developed in numerous stories, pervaded a high number of Buddhist temples, and has survived until the present time despite the continuous and severe destructions of temples and other cultural sites.

Chinese scholars have argued that there are three forms of Guanyin culture, namely: the Chinese Buddhist tradition, the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, and the Chinese folk tradition. According to Li Li'an 李利安, Guanyin worship as expressed in Suining merged Chinese traditional and textual memory with local popular legends;⁴⁵ and, Xing Li 邢莉 added, this has produced a new Miaoshan and Guanyin heritage that is characterized by strong so-called localization 本土化 and feminization 女性化.⁴⁶ The connection between Guanyin's birthplace and the location of Suining's major nunneries, from the Song forward to the present, can confirm the latter point; and so does the continuous reference to a certain Guanyin practice that the nuns in Suining have discussed with me during my fieldtrips in 2019. Certainly, Guanyin is not the only Bodhisattva who has been endorsed with local legends and personal lives in China; the same phenomenon applies to Mañjuśrī, Samanthabhadra, and Kṣitigarbha.⁴⁷ And similarly to what happened to other bodhisattvas, the popular legends on Guanyin also depict a female figure that embodies Confucian virtues and presents Daoist features.⁴⁸ Specifically about the Suining Guanyin, Daoists have renamed the site of Guanyin's grave, which is located near Lingquan Monastery,

⁴⁴ See, e.g., the "chuanshuo" chapters in JCZ, pp. 515-33; GSZ 1988, pp. 350-59; GSZ 2010, pp. 656-66.

⁴⁵ Li Li'an 李利安, "Xu san: Guanyin yinyuan qihongzhu, fudi chengxiang chang fanyin" 序三, 觀音因緣啓宏著, 福地呈祥唱梵音, in Puzheng, ed., *Guanyin daochang qiannian fudi*.

⁴⁶ Xing Li 邢莉, "Guanyin Xinyang zai Sichuan Suining diqu de chuanbo: jiantan Guanyin xinyang zai Sichuan Suining diqu de bentuhua ji nuxinghua tese" 觀音信仰在四川遂寧地區的傳播, 兼談觀音信仰在四川遂寧地區的本土化及女性化特色, *Zongjiao yu minsu* 宗教與民俗 4 (2016), pp. 141-61.

⁴⁷ Li Li'an 李利安, Zhang Zikai 張子開, Zhang Zong 張總, Li Haipo 李海波, *Si da pusa yu minjian xinyang* 四大菩薩與民間信仰 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2011); for Guanyin, see pp. 301-436.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 420-36.

as Yinyang grave (Yinyang fen 阴阳坟); this was partly because of the specific geographical location of the site, but also because Daoists had listed Guanyin as an immortal 仙, and gave her the titles *Cihang zhenren* 慈航真人 and *Guanyin dashi* 觀音大士.⁴⁹

THE MONK QINGFU 清福 (1862–1940): MODERN
XUANZANG OR NIRMĀṆA-KĀYA OF THE YOUNG SUDHANA?

During the late Qing dynasty and the Republican Period, Suining Buddhism experienced an important phase of development that contained remarkable transformations, and the monk Qingfu was initiator and leader for most of these. (See his portrait, figure 1, appended to the article.) Through his travels and encounters, Qingfu was able to position Suining on the Buddhist map of China, and to create connections especially with the rest of South China and other Asian Buddhist sites. This is when and how Suining started its long-term participation in cross-region and cross-tradition Buddhist networks involving intellectual and cultural patterns. Qingfu thus becomes an interesting case of a modern monk, given the historical period in which he lived, and also evidence of how the periphery – in this case Suining – was becoming central in the development of Chinese religions and cross-regional networks.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ JCZ, p. 464.

⁵⁰ Important biographies of Qingfu include: Wang Enyang, *Qingfu heshang zhuan* 清福和尚傳 (Suining: Suining yiguan shiyin sheyin, 1949), rpt. in *Qingfu* 清福 (ed. Puzheng 普正), *Yuanyin lueji* 源因略記 (Chengdu: Sichuan meishu chubanshe, 2014; hereafter cited as YL), pp. 262–92; Changxing 常惺, “Qingfu shangren shilue” 清福上人事略, *Fohua xinwen* 佛化新聞 167 (1940), p. 2; GSZ 1988, pp. 67–74; GSZ 2010, pp. 65–62; JCZ, pp. 70–96; Li Jingtu, pp. 95–208; Puzheng 普正, ed., *Qingfu heshang* 清福和尚 (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2008); Li Yuchuan 李豫川, “Xingyun liushui yigu seng: Qingfu heshang xiaozhuan” 行雲流水一孤僧, 清福和尚小傳, *Lingshan haihui* 靈山海會 32 (2009). See also such short encomia as Wang Enyang, “Qingfu heshang lunzan” 清福和尚論贊, rpt. in GSZ 2010, p. 525; Shi Changnian 釋長念, “Qingfu heshang zhuan xu” 清福和尚傳序, in GSZ 2010, p. 526; Shi Changxing 釋常惺, “Qingfu heshang zhuan ba” 清福和尚傳跋, rpt. GSZ 2010, p. 527; Li Jichen 李跡塵, “Qingfu heshang zhuan xu” 清福和尚傳序, GSZ 2010, pp. 527–28; Shi Puzheng, “Qingfu heshang xu” 清福和尚序, GSZ 2010, pp. 528–29; Zhenliang’s 真量 verses “Qingfu lao heshang xiangzan 清福老和尚像贊, rpt. GSZ 1988, pp. 320–21; Shi Miaoguang’s 釋妙光 verses “Gaozu Qingfu laoheshang wangsheng sishi qi zhounian jiwen” 高祖清福老和尚往生四十七週年祭文, GSZ 2010, p. 579; Guanyi 貫一, “Zeng Qingfu” 贈清福, rpt. GSZ 1988, p. 321; Changxing 常惺, “Huainian Qingfu” 懷念清福, rpt. in YL, pp. 301–2 [composed originally in 1949]; Wang Enyang, “Pingshu Qingfu: xuqi weiren” 評述清福, 敘其為人, rpt. YL, pp. 300–1 [composed originally in 1944]. Qingfu’s autobiography (discussing mostly his travels and encounters) is titled *Yuanyin lueji*. See also Zongxing’s 宗性 overview “Youguan Qingfu heshang shiliao buyi” 有關清福和尚史料補遺, published first in 2012, rpt. in YL, pp. 304–15. Special issues of *Fohua xinwen* 156 and 167 (both from 1940) were dedicated to Qingfu – no. 156 right after his death, and the other subsequently as commemoration.

Probably native to Chengdu, but institutionally based mostly in Suining, Qingfu was not merely the passive recipient of the surrounding *zeitgeist*, he was an active collaborator of ongoing processes, and, as I have highlighted earlier, also initiator of unique local projects. Via his institutional role and local authority Qingfu participated zealously in the rising new Buddhism; besides the renovation of historic temples, he was attentive to the conditions of Buddhist women and revived the local female sangha,⁵¹ and he contributed to the establishment and structuring of the only local male *Foxueyuan*.

Like other Buddhist clerics of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, Qingfu was also involved in fostering or creating collaborations and cross-border networks involving Chinese Buddhism and traditions from neighboring Asian countries. In this regard, his travels to South and Southeast Asia contributed much to the quantity and quality of sacred materials that could facilitate the Chinese understanding of other Buddhist traditions found in Asia. His travels and his diaries position him within the contemporary East Asian revival of interest in the Buddha's birthplace and the contemporary society then, the Indian and Pali traditions, and the related quest for an Original Buddhism.

Such dynamics were found elsewhere in China, but it is in their specific features that the historical and religious identity of Suining and Qingfu's ideals emerge. The following sections explore Qingfu's participation in national and cross-regional Buddhist discourses and his unique intervention in these macro narratives and programs.

Qingfu's Biography: Life, Practice, Ideals

Qingfu was born August 14, 1862, as Qu Xiaotang 瞿孝堂, the only son in a Buddhist family.⁵² He was probably a native of Chengdu.⁵³ Xiaotang lost his father when he was seven years old, and his mother, despite their financial difficulties, sent him to study in a good, private

⁵¹ Another monk from Chengdu who helped improve life conditions of local nuns, esp. their education and training, was Changyuan. See Wang, "Changyuan laofashi xingzhuang," pp. 107-9; Travagnin, "Monk Changyuan 昌圓."

⁵² Li Xiaohua writes that Qingfu's parents, unhappy that they had so far had no offspring, devoted themselves to Guanyin, praying for years until Qingfu was born. They had even gone to Suining, which they believed to be Guanyin's hometown, to request a statue of "Guanyin with the child" from Guangde Monastery for use in their practice. See Li *Jingtu*, pp. 99-101. This story created a strong connection between Qingfu's birth and Guanyin.

⁵³ Qingfu's disciples and various Chinese scholars have disagreed over his native place. According to Wang Enyang it was Chengdu, and Li Yuchuan stated the street in Chengdu where he was born. On the other hand, Qingfu's disciple, the monk Changxing 常惺, stated that Qingfu was native to Bishan 璧山, in Chongqing, the home place of his parents, and that he moved with his parents to Chengdu only later.

Study Hall 學堂. Xiaotang was a child who did not like to play with his peers, but preferred a solitary life fully devoted to learning; he became exposed to Buddhism since his early youth both at school and at home: his mother was in fact a devoted Buddhist, while his school teacher used to include Buddhist stories in his classes. At the age of thirteen, Qu visited Wenshu Monastery, and on his way back home he saw a corpse; he realized the suffering caused by aging, illness and death, and thus decided to go forth.⁵⁴ His mother, old and ill, opposed his decision and forced him to continue his education; nonetheless the young man abandoned school and started working to support her. Eventually, in 1878, on his way back from Hanzhong 漢中 to Sichuan, he stopped at Suining and visited Guangde Monastery, where he made offerings to Guanyin and met the monk Liaoxin 了心. This is when his resolution to become a monk came back even more resolutely, and his mother eventually accepted his decision to embark on a monastic life.⁵⁵ Qu returned to Guangde Monastery, and Wuqin 悟勤, a disciple of Liaoxin, became his master; the tonsure ceremony took place in April 1878, wherein Xiaotang received the *faming* Zhenxiu 真修, and the *fahao* Qingfu.⁵⁶ And spring of 1879, Qingfu was fully ordained at Baoguang Monastery (Baoguang si 寶光寺), in Xindu 新都 (now a district of metropolitan Chengdu), with the monk Zixin 自信 (1808–1879)⁵⁷ as ordination master. After Zixin's death in October of the same year, Qingfu started his intensive journey within China and in other parts of Asia to learn about the dharma, different Buddhist practices, and Buddhism's birthplace.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ There are conflicting reports on why and how Qingfu decided to enter monastic life. The version presented in the text is the most accepted and coincides with that discussed by Wang Enyang in his 1949 *Qingfu heshang zhuan*; Qingfu's disciple Changxing stated differently that during his visit to Wenshu Monastery at the age of 13, Qingfu decided to become a monk after reading this Buddhist epigram on the temple wall: "If I see others die my heart burns as fire; it is not just burning for them, because the same will also happen to me, 我見他人死, 我心熱如火, 不是熱他人, 看看轉到我", a passage from *Tian ru wei ze Chanshi weilu* 天如惟則禪師語錄, X7on1403; see YL, p. 1. There are contrasting reports on conversations between Wang Enyang and Changxing, e.g., whether the former looked for the latter, whether the latter invited Wang to write about Qingfu, and about their sources.

⁵⁵ Liaoxin explained the suffering caused by the cycles of rebirth, and how a monastic practice could facilitate the end of both the cycle and human suffering; this conversation convinced Xiaotang to go forth that same year; see *Li Jingtu*, p. 105.

⁵⁶ Wuqin explained that the name Qingfu indicated the joint cultivation of reward (*fubao* 福報) and wisdom (*zhizhi* 智慧) – the bases of practice towards Enlightenment; see *Li Jingtu*, p. 120.

⁵⁷ For a short biography of Zixin see Feng, *Baoguang si*, pp. 23–24; YL, p. 5.

⁵⁸ Qingfu's passion for traveling had developed during his school years, when he studied the usual Confucian texts (the Four Books 四書 and Five Classics 五經) and the traditional novels such as *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義), *Water Margin* (*Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳), and *Journey to the West* (*Xiyou ji* 西遊記) and *Xu Xitai's Travels* (*Xu Xia-*

His trips occurred all during the late Qing, in a few phases, from 1879 to 1910, a total of thirty years of travel with a significant time spent in other Asian countries. He visited many provinces and municipalities of China (mainly Sichuan and Chongqing, but also nearly every Chinese province) and other Asian countries as well (for example, Korea, Japan, Mongolia, Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet, India, Myanmar, Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore, Sri Lanka).⁵⁹ Qingfu spent considerable time also in Beijing, Shanghai, and Nanjing. He visited historical temples, interviewed some of the so-called eminent monks, and completed pilgrimages to all the Chinese Buddhist sacred mountains, namely Wutai, Emei, Putuo, and Jiuhua. These trips served several purposes: one was to improve his own learning and practice of the dharma; secondly, he wanted to visit Buddha's and Buddhism's birthplace; finally, like other East Asian monastics in those decades, Qingfu wanted to retrieve ancient texts and sacred objects. The next section will analyze Qingfu's "journey to the West" in more detail, with attention mainly paid to his travels outside China, and in the context of the renewed attention to India, Southeast Asia and the Theravāda tradition that permeated China and the rest of East Asia at that time.

Qingfu represented the Sichuan branch of the Chinese Buddhist Association (Zhongguo Fo jiao hui Sichuansheng zhibu 中國佛教會四川省支部) from 1914 to 1916, years in which he also contributed to the reorganization of their Chongqing branch, attended meetings in Shanghai, and addressed the central government in Nanjing, calling for the protection of Buddhism and a revision of the way in which monastic properties were being administered. In 1929 he was part of the group of monks, which included the eminent Sichuan monks Shengqin and Changyuan, that presented a petition to amend the government's regulations on temple administration ("Guanli simiao tiaoli 管理寺廟條例"); their mission was successful. And in 1939, with the Sino-Japanese war in full swing, he led a state-protection liturgy (*huguo fahui* 護國法會) that involved nuns of the Aidao Buddhist Society (Aidao Foxueshe).⁶⁰

Renovation of Buddhist sites and temple abbacies was another of Qingfu's accomplishments, and they were not limited to the area of Suining. Similar achievements were realized during his almost thirty

ke youji 徐霞客遊記), the latter two having exerted a strong influence on the motivation to travel; see *Li Jingtu*, p. 105.

⁵⁹ In this article I adopt the present-day names of cities and countries, i.e. Myanmar rather than Burma, Ho Chi Minh rather than Saigon.

⁶⁰ "Suining Aidao she jian huguo fahui junzheng zhangguan rexin huchi" 遂寧愛道社建護國法會軍政長官熱心護持, *Fohua xinwen* 95 (1939), p. 1; and "Suining Aidao Fo jiaoshe fahui yuanman" 遂寧愛道佛學社法會圓滿, *Fohua xinwen* 97 (1939), p. 1.

years of travel; for instance, when he visited Jiangsu in 1888 he contributed to the rebuilding of the Yunju Temple (Yunju si 雲居寺),⁶¹ in collaboration with the monk Huitong 慧通. Qingfu's position in Suining, and his contribution to Guangde Monastery, are reported in the temple's official records and detailed in Buddhist periodicals; his main operations started in the 1910s, when he rebuilt the Jade Buddha Hall and Relic Pagoda. In addition, having received traditional private instruction in his childhood, this stalwart Buddhist leader advocated the importance of a systematized education for the sangha; and in 1924 he became founder and dean of the Hongfa Institute of Buddhist Studies. Outside of Suining, Qingfu contributed to the foundation of many Buddhist Societies (Foxueshe 佛學社) for the laity, where he delivered several lecture series.

Qingfu was also instrumental in the advancement of women and nuns' condition and education. In 1933, he founded the Aidao Buddhist Society, which in 1947 became the Jingye Chan Nunnery; in the same years he opened the small – but historically crucial – site that later became the Qingfu Nunnery (Qingfu si 清福寺). (The third part of this article assesses Qingfu's contribution to local nuns.)

In collaboration with the monk Changyuan from Chengdu, he contributed to the building of several *nian Fo* halls at various sites in Sichuan: they were in line with the emphasis on Pure Land practice that characterized the two monks. The monk Puzheng 普正 (b. 1973), current abbot of Guangde Monastery, has written about Qingfu's practice, and how it was affected by his travels and especially the encounters with specific masters at various times in his life.⁶²

Qingfu was a prolific writer and editor, although mainly in the second part of his life. His autobiography is titled *Yuanyin lueji* 源因略記;⁶³ it was compiled between 1923 and 1932. Between 1917 and 1923, he edited the Huayan School's *Wujiao yikezhu* 五教儀科注 and the Chan compilation *Zongtong biannian* 宗統編年.

Qingfu died during the Sino-Japanese conflict. He was commemorated with liturgies, recitations, and eulogies published in local Buddhist journals – some authored by distinguished intellectuals like Wang Enyang 王恩洋 (1897–1964), and all highlighting Qingfu's practice,

⁶¹ A famous temple from the Song period wherein the Chan monk Foyin 佛印 resided.

⁶² Puzheng, "Qingfu heshang de canfang xinlu licheng" 清福和尚的參訪心路歷程, in J CZ, pp. 477–80.

⁶³ See in it a number of short notes and verses, like "Da ke wen" 答客問, YL, pp. 293–95; "Lun Fo shi" 論佛事, in YL, pp. 295–97; and the verses "Qishi shouchen nianxiang ci" 七十壽辰拈香辭 that he wrote for his own 70th birthday and included in YL, pp. 298–99.

travels, and his opening of Buddhist societies. After his passing, the journal *Fojiao xinwen* 佛教新聞 dedicated half of issues 156 and 167 to his memory.⁶⁴ A recent commemorative stele, built in 2006 (see figure 2, appended) is located behind Guangde Monastery, not far from the pagoda of another late abbot of the monastery, the monk Haishan 海山 (1928–2013). Qingfu's stele is simple, with only a few biographical details inscribed and an incense burner placed in front. Among his disciples, the most prominent was the monk Changxing 常惺.

Qingfu's Journey to the West and the Quest for Original Buddhism

Qingfu started his travels towards the end of 1879, after the death of his own master. He visited major monasteries and sacred sites in China, and to India and other Buddhist areas in Southeast Asia as well. The current section focuses mostly on these travels “to the West,” as they were termed.⁶⁵ Detailed travel notes, with reports on individuals and groups that he met, were published in his autobiography *Yuanyin lueji*.

He first traveled through Tibet (1879), where he visited Potala Palace in Lhasa;⁶⁶ from there he entered Nepal (1880), where he also met and observed the community of the Gurkhas. Shortly after he went to Bhutan and Assam, and then via Yunnan he returned to Sichuan (1881), making numerous visits to temples in the Chongqing area.⁶⁷ He also visited Shanghai and several temples in South China, and in 1881–1887 made pilgrimages to Mount Jiuhua, Emei, Putuo,⁶⁸ and Wutai. In 1887, Qingfu traveled to South Korea, specifically its

⁶⁴ “Suining Guangde si xitang Qingfu lao heshang yuanji: ba yue shi'er choushi xishi xiangnian bashi yusui” 遂寧廣德寺西堂清福老和尚圓寂，八月十二丑時西逝享年八十歲，*Fohua xinwen* 156 (1940), p. 1; “Suining xian Fojiaohui ji quanxian zhushan sengjia yu Aidao she gongtong faqi Qingfu shangren zhuidiao dahui” 遂寧縣佛教會暨全縣諸山僧伽與愛道社共同發起清福上人追悼大會，*Fohua xinwen* 156 (1940), p. 1; “Qingfu shangren linzhong jiyu” 清福上人臨終偈語，*Fohua xinwen* 167 (1940), p. 2; “Qingfu shangren dabo niepan jinian” 清福上人大般涅槃紀念，*Fohua xinwen* 167 (1940), p. 2; and Zhang Xinruo 張心若， “Diao Qingfu shangren” 吊清福上人，*Fohua xinwen* 167 (1940), p. 2.

⁶⁵ Wang Rongyi 王榮益 divided Qingfu's travels into fifteen distinctive periods: 1879–1880; 1881; 1882; 1884–1885; 1887; 1888–1890; 1893; 1895; 1896; 1897; 1899; 1902–1905; 1906–1908; 1909–1910; 1940. The last referred to Qingfu's last trips to Chengdu, Baoguang Monastery in Xindu, Mt. Emei (for a pilgrimage to the sacred site of Samantabhadra), and finally back to Suining, and then Guangde Monastery, where he passed away. See Wang, “Qingfu shangren shi Shancai tongzi de huashen” 清福和尚是善財童子的化身, in JCZ, pp. 481–85.

⁶⁶ For data concerning these travels and activities in this and the next six paragraphs, see generally YL, pp. 9–13, 50–57, 134–82, 190–96, 201–21.

⁶⁷ There he visited major late-Qing sites, such as Luohan Monastery (Luohan si 羅漢寺), Bao'en Monastery (Bao'en si 報恩寺), Huayan Monastery (Huayan si 華嚴寺) and Shuanggui Hall (Shuanggui tang 雙桂堂).

⁶⁸ On Mt. Putuo, he visited especially Puji Monastery (Puji si 普濟寺), Bantuo Rock (Bantuo shi 礮陀石), Fayu Monastery (Fayu si 法雨寺), Fanyin Cave (Fanyin dong 梵音洞), Huiji Monastery (Huiji si 慧濟寺), Zizhulin (Zizhulin 紫竹林).

Gyeonggi province, the territory surrounding Seoul and Incheon, and also Mount Kumgang in the area that today is North Korea. In October of the same year he returned to China via Shanghai, and from there he went back to Putuo. While in Shanghai, he strengthened his friendship with the monk Huitong 慧通.

Qingfu reported that in 1890, while in Shanghai, he encountered Anagārika Dharmapāla (1864–1933), the famous monk from Sri Lanka who preached in North America and Europe.⁶⁹ Anagārika Dharmapāla arrived in China from Tibet on the way back from a conference in France, and in Shanghai he resided at the Japanese consulate. He met Qingfu at Longhua Monastery (Longhua si 龍華寺), in Shanghai; however, due to the language difference, they were not able to have an effective conversation. Later Qingfu invited Yang Wenhui 楊文會 (1837–1911) to visit Shanghai and meet Anagārika Dharmapāla. The three Buddhists discussed the recent history of Buddhism in India, including its past decline but also the recent revival. This is when Qingfu decided to visit India in order to see Buddhism's home.

After a few years in China, including other stays on Mt. Wutai, and travels through Tianjin, Hunan, Hubei, Jiangxi, Guangdong, Shanghai, Suzhou and again Mt. Putuo, Qingfu visited Japan in the company of the monk Juechan 覺禪 (1899). He spent six months, traveling to Nagasaki, Kobe, Osaka, Yokohama, and Tokyo, and deepening his knowledge of Pure Land practice. He also visited the Hongan-ji 本願寺 headquarters of Jōdo Shinshū, or, the New Pure Land Buddhism, where he conversed with the well-known Matsumoto Gōji 松本義成 about the problematic situation of Buddhism in East Asia. In response to Matsumoto's statement that Buddhism had declined in China, Qingfu argued that the lack of respect for monastic discipline and serious dharma practice was an issue present in many countries, not just in China.

At the turn of the century, Qingfu concretized his India plans. For him, according to Wang Enyang's biography, it was important to follow the missions that the famous monks Faxian 法顯 (337–422), Xuanzang (602–664), and Yijing 義淨 (635–713) had undertaken long ago. In Qingfu's mind, India was more than just Buddhism's birthplace: it was where, in Qingfu's day, texts and other materials relative to formative Buddhism could still be found.⁷⁰ Eventually, in April 1902, Qingfu

⁶⁹ Recent studies on Anagārika Dharmapāla include Steven Kemper, *Rescued from the Nation: Anagarika Dharmapala and the Buddhist World* (Chicago: U. Chicago P., 2015); Sarath Amunugama, *The Lion's Roar: Anagarika Dharmapala and the Making of Modern Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2019).

⁷⁰ See Wang Enyang, *Qingfu heshang zhuan*, included in YL, p. 280.

started his long journey through Southeast Asia and India. In Vietnam he visited Ho Chi Minh, and then in Thailand he visited Wat Mangkon Kamalawat (in Bangkok) and the Wat Golden Stupa in Chennai. In Thailand he received a palm-leaf sūtra and a Buddha image from the king, who asked him to bring them back to China and to be worshiped (they are now preserved at Baoguang Monastery in Chengdu).

From Thailand he went to Singapore; and then to Penang (Malaysia), where he resided at the Kek Lok Si Temple (Bingcheng jile si 檳城極樂寺). In 1903 he turned northward, reaching Myanmar. Qingfu admired the large quantity of Buddha's relics in both Thailand and Myanmar, how local monks lived and practiced according to the customs of the earliest Buddhist communities, and how they were respected by their surrounding societies. In Myanmar he visited the golden pagoda in Mawlamyine, Mandalay and resided in Bagan.

In 1904, Qingfu went to Bangladesh, and finally reached India, where he undertook numerous pilgrimages to sacred sites. From there he moved on to Sri Lanka, where he resided at Colombo and worshipped Buddha's tooth, then visited what was known as Laṅkā Mountain.⁷¹ In Sri Lanka he met again with Anagārika Dharmapāla, who helped Qingfu with his audience with the Sri Lankan king. He also acted as guarantor in order to help Qingfu gain fifteen relics and three palm-leaf sūtras from the royal family.⁷² In Qingfu's notes we read that the king was moved by Qingfu's devotion and his twelve days of worship at the temple.⁷³ And in 1905, in Myanmar, with the help of the Chinese monk Xinghui 性慧,⁷⁴ Qingfu was able to receive three jade Buddhas that he later distributed among Buddhist temples in South China. He returned to China at the end of 1905, and so ended his first long mission in Southeast and South Asia.

In February 1906, he traveled again from Chongqing to Nanjing, where he told Yang Wenhui that he wished to travel again to Southeast Asia in order to obtain more Buddha statues to distribute to Chi-

⁷¹ Qingfu wrote much about his stay on Laṅkā Mountain, mentioning Buddha's lectures and the *Laṅkāvatāra sūtra*; see also GSZ 2010, p. 59.

⁷² For more about the request of relics and other sacred objects, see YL, pp. 181–82. The scriptures were between 80 and 160 pages long.

⁷³ Qingfu remembered the episode in his “Shijia rulai zhenshen sheli lai yuan zhi” 釋迦如來真身舍利來源志, a stele text preserved at Baoguang Monastery in Chengdu (Xindu); included in GSZ 1988, pp. 124–26.

⁷⁴ A native of Fujian, Xinghui moved to Myanmar, where he became a contact for Chinese monastics and laity who visited or resided there; YL, p. 188. The presence and role of Chinese monks in Southeast Asia has been analyzed in recent scholarship, e.g., Jack Meng-tat Chia, *Monks in Motion: Buddhism and Modernity across the South China Sea* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2020), which focused on Chinese communities in Singapore.

nese Buddhist sites. His mission may be seen as an episode in a larger narrative about “material diplomacy” that extends to both earlier and later periods of Buddhist history in Asia. The fact that Yang Wenhui and several others, whether Buddhist or not, Chinese and foreigners, were involved in this task tells about the complexity that such circulation entailed, involving passport applications, letters of introduction, multilingual translations of documents, gift exchange, and local contacts as guarantors. For example, Timothy Richard (1845–1919) helped with Qingfu’s travel documents; and the monks U Dhammaloka (1856–1914), whom Qingfu called “the English monk” (*Yingguo heshang* 英國和尚),⁷⁵ and Anagārika Dharmapāla facilitated communication with local Buddhists. Qingfu returned to Myanmar in 1907, and eventually succeeded in collecting six large jade Buddha statues and eighteen small ones; these reached China between 1907 and 1912. Qingfu returned to China in 1908, and was back in Suining and Guangde Monastery, more or less continuously, since 1910. In total, Qingfu collected texts (five palm-leaf sūtras, from Thailand and Sri Lanka),⁷⁶ relics (fifteen pieces, from Sri Lanka), statues (twenty-seven jade Buddhas, of different sizes, from Myanmar), and other objects (like robes and images). Qingfu distributed these ‘Buddha’s relics’ to several temples in China, which built pagodas to host and worship the sacred material.⁷⁷

Guangde Monastery enshrined one of the big jade Buddha statues, together with other sacred objects.⁷⁸ The jade Buddha, which even the intellectual and politician Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892–1968) noticed and appreciated in his visit to the Guangde Monastery in November 1913,⁷⁹

⁷⁵ On U Dhammaloka, see Brian Bocking, “A Man of Work and Few Words? Dhammaloka beyond Burma,” *Contemporary Buddhism* 11.2 (2010), pp. 229–80.

⁷⁶ Relics and palm-leaf sūtras were donated to Bantuo Rock on Mt. Putuo, Pengxi Monastery (Pengxi si 蓬溪寺) in Wuchang, Liuben Monastery, Nanchan Monastery (Nanchan si 南禪寺) in Zhejiang, Guangde Monastery in Suining, and Xianfeng Monastery on Mt. Emei.

⁷⁷ Among the monasteries that received jade Buddhas: Wannian Monastery (Wannian si 萬年寺) and Xianfeng Monastery (Xianfeng si 仙峰寺) on Mt. Emei, Baoguang Monastery in Xindu/Chengdu, Bantuo Rock (Bantuo shi 礮陀石) on Mt. Putuo, Nanchan Monastery in Zhejiang, and Yunju Monastery in Nanjing, Longguang Monastery (Longguang si 龍光寺) in Pengxian 彭縣, and Zhoushang Old Monastery (Zhoushang gusi 州上古寺) in Chongqing 崇慶. Lianxi Monastery (Wuchang) received Buddha images; and Wannian Monastery also received a robe.

⁷⁸ Guangde also displayed palm-leaf sūtras at the beginning of the Republican Period. Each had from 20 to 160 pages, and each page 40 cm long and 8.4 cm wide. The sūtras and the relics were moved to Suining Cultural Museum (Suiningxian wenhuaguan 遂寧縣文化館) in 1952, and in 1956 transferred to the Sichuan Provincial Museum (Sichuan sheng bowuguan 四川省博物館). Various information differs on what happened to the texts and relics during the Cultural Revolution. In around the mid-1980s, everything but the relics was returned to Guangde Monastery.

⁷⁹ See Guo Moruo, “Guangde si yu Fo” 廣德寺玉佛, part of his *Yinghua shujian* 櫻花書簡 (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1981; originally compiled 1913–1923), and also includ-

reached China and Suining in 1907. The Jade Buddha Hall (Yufo dian 玉佛殿) was built in 1911 (see figure 3), at the same time of the pagoda that then hosted Buddha's relics (Sheli ta 舍利塔). The jade statue had head, neck and arm severely damaged quite soon. In 1951, the statue was moved to and preserved in the Suining Cultural Museum (Suining-xian wenhuaguan 遂寧縣文化館), later it moved to the newly built Suining Cultural Hall (Suining wenguansuo 遂寧文館所), where it remained between 1952 and 1982, and finally, around the mid 1980s, it was returned to Guangde Monastery. A stele, engraved in 1912, presents a text titled "Records of the Jade Buddha from the West" ("Xilai yufo ji" 西來玉佛記) and composed by the monk Yuanxing 源性;⁸⁰ a year later, the "Records of the body-relics of Śākyamuni Buddha" ("Shijia rulai zhen-shen sheli lai yizhi" 釋迦如來真身舍利來儀誌), authored by Qingfu, was added to the other side of the stone.⁸¹

Because of his travels to Asian countries, and the Buddhist treasures that he collected and later distributed among several Chinese sites, Chinese scholars have explicitly referred to Qingfu as the modern Xuanzang, highlighting both strong similarities but also differences between the two figures. For instance, summaries of his travel notes and memories have been titled *Journey to the West' (Xiyou ji)*, in reference to the Ming novel that so much inspired Qingfu when he was still a young child, but also to allude, somehow, to Xuanzang's *Xiyu ji* 西域記.⁸² In addition, Wang Enyang wrote explicitly that Qingfu followed the route previously completed by Xuanzang,⁸³ and so did Qingfu's peer Zhenliang⁸⁴ and his disciple Changxing.⁸⁵

The monk Puzheng, present abbot of Guangde Monastery, went further and positioned Qingfu in a longer historical narrative, and the sphere of pilgrims and 'transmitters of the Dharma' from the time of

ed in GSZ 1988, p. 147; GSZ 2010, p. 351. Guo wrote about a jade Guanyin (not a Buddha) statue, and about the belief that Guanyin was actually present in the statue.

⁸⁰ The text can be found in GSZ 1988, pp. 115–17. It was composed in 1911 and engraved in 1912. Yuanxing traced the history of transmission of Buddhism from India to China, and the role played by Qingfu in bringing material Buddhism from the West into China in the modern era. The text included the list of temples that received the jade Buddhas.

⁸¹ The text is in GSZ 1988, pp. 117–20. Written in April 1913, Qingfu included quotations from Xuanzang's *Xiyu ji*.

⁸² Li Xiaohua used this expression quite often, see his "Qingfu heshang xiyou ji" 清福和尚西游記, *Fayin* 9 (1988), p. 39. Li expanded this, including Qingfu's life before ordination and travels, in *Li Jingtu*, pp. 95–208.

⁸³ Wang, "Qingfu heshang lunzan," p. 525, which says: 玄奘法師誠導其先路.

⁸⁴ Zhenliang, "Qingfu lao heshang xiangzan," in GSZ 2010, p. 577, which has: 渾似玄奘乘愿來.

⁸⁵ Changxing, "Qingfu shangren shilue," p. 2, which has: 今日復見玄奘再世.

the Three Kingdoms to the modern era. Puzheng's short overview of the previous traveling monks includes the so-called 'Dunhuang Bodhisattva', namely the translator Dharmarakṣa, from the third century; the translator monks Baoyun 寶雲 and Zhiyan 智嚴 from the Eastern Jin (317-420); and also the famous pilgrims to Central Asia and India from the fifth century and during the Tang, like the monk Zhimeng 智猛 (?-453), Faxian, Yijing, and Xuanzang. Within this context, Qingfu appears to be a rare case of monk-pilgrim in modern China.⁸⁶

Discussing the parallel between Xuanzang and Qingfu, historian Liu Baijun 劉百鈞 has highlighted some differences between them: Xuanzang traveled to collect scriptures from India (*xitian qujing* 西天取經), and to translate Indian Buddhism into Chinese, while Qingfu made expeditions to Southeast and South Asia to retrieve different forms of Buddha's relics and Buddhist teachings (*haiwai qing fo* 海外請佛), in order to distribute them to numerous Chinese sites. Yet, Liu Baijun argues, they both built a travel history and conceived of traveling as a mode of practice. Certainly, Xuanzang reached a level of fame and popularity that Qingfu has not.⁸⁷

Because of the travels and encounters, Wang Rongyi also suggested that Qingfu might resemble the figure of the young Sudhana, whose meetings with fifty-three teachers are narrated in the *Gaṇḍavyūha* chapter ("Ru fajie pin" 入法界品) of the *Avatamsaka-sūtra* (*Huayan jing* 華嚴經; T100295). Similarly, Wang Rongyi argued, Qingfu completed fifteen different trips, some in China and others in South Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia, where he met inspiring practitioners, and learned about Buddhist history and practice.⁸⁸

Qingfu's routes can be grouped under two networks: one within China, which he developed through his stays at monasteries in different provinces; and one within Southeast Asia. In China, besides his close collaboration with other Sichuanese monks, Qingfu also met many of the so-called eminent monks, who are often enshrined only as protagonists of the modern history of Chinese Buddhism; the list includes Yuanying 圓瑛 (1878-1953), the Tiantai master Dixian 諦閑 (1858-1932), the Chan leader Yuexia 月霞 (1858-1917), and the lay intellectual Yang Wenhui. Within China, he also received support and help from the Baptist Missionary Timothy Richard, better known locally as Li Timotai 李提摩太. Abroad, he met leading actors in the East

⁸⁶ Puzheng, "Qingfu heshang xu," pp. 528-29.

⁸⁷ Liu Baijun 劉百鈞, "Xuanzang 'Xitian qujing' yu Qingfu 'haiwai qing fo' de bijiao yan-jiu" 玄奘“西天取經”與清福“海外請佛”的比較研究, in JCZ, pp. 486-92.

⁸⁸ See JCZ, pp. 481-85.

and Southeast Asian Buddhist scene, like Anagārika Dharmapāla from Sri Lanka, U Dhammaloka in Myanmar, and Matsumoto Gōji in Japan. Qingfu was a Chinese monk who connected several networks, learned about non-Chinese Buddhist experiences, and helped other Buddhist traditions become familiar with Chinese practices; his travels served the completion of two projects, but also merged them and contributed to the contemporary pan-Asian discourse of Buddhism.

Qingfu was not the only monk at Guangde Monastery or Suining who showed interest in Southeast Asian Buddhism and the Theravāda tradition; in the same decades the monk Chengyuan 成元 (1889-?),⁸⁹ also from Guangde Monastery, followed a similar path, and became later known as Chengyuan Kāśyapa (Chengyuan Jiashebo 成元迦舍波).⁹⁰ Chengyuan committed to expand his understanding of doctrine, texts, and practice, and like Qingfu, he also traveled to encounter senior monks in China already in the early stages of his monastic career, right after being fully ordained at Baoguang Monastery. Chengyuan showed strong determination to study sūtras as well as vinaya texts of different traditions, and he mastered Sanskrit, Pali, and even English. Like Qingfu, Chengyuan also traveled in Southeast Asia: in 1929 he moved to Thailand and Myanmar to investigate the earliest development of Buddhism, with the intention to use that information to reform contemporary Chinese Buddhism. In the early 1930s, during his stay in Malaysia, he was invited to teach at the Malaysia Penang Institute of Buddhist Studies (Malaixiya Bingcheng Foxueyuan 馬來西亞檳城佛學院); on that occasion he translated a number of passages and verses from Pali scriptures into both Chinese and English and used them as teaching material.⁹¹ Unlike Qingfu, after attending the World

⁸⁹ Chengyuan was born Lai Dasheng 賴大勝, a native of Suining. He became a novice at a very young age, was tonsured at Guangde Monastery under the monk Zhuding 住頂 (1915), and fully ordained at Baoguang Monastery (1919). In the 1930s he was very active in Hangzhou, as abbot of the Haihui Monastery (Haihui si 海會寺) and founder and dean in the Chinese Buddhist Vinaya Institute (Zhongguo Fojiao liuxueyuan 中國佛教律學院). Chengyuan was also founder and chief editor of *Fojiao shijian* 佛教世間 (1955), which he soon transferred to Singapore. Examples of his articles are “Fojiao zhi zhenli hezai” 佛教之真理何在, “Shijie Fojiao gailun” 世界佛教概論, and “Yi Dizang pusa zhi yuanli tui Fofa” 以地藏菩薩之愿力推佛法. He also translated Pali verses, mostly from the *Dhammapada*; they were published in the collections “Baliwen shi jing” 巴利文詩經, “Xinzan sanbao jie” 新贊三寶偈 (rpt. GSZ 2010, p. 486), “Nian sanbao jie” 念三寶偈; and “Bu Rongxi laoyou yuanyun” 步融熙老友原韻, rpt. GSZ 2010, pp. 486–87. For biographical details, see GSZ 1988, pp. 75–77; GSZ 2010, pp. 64–65.

⁹⁰ Temple records list Qingfu and Chengyuan as the only figures from late-Qing and Republican times at the monastery, adding that they both traveled to India, Sri Lanka, and several other countries in Southeast Asia to study the dharma and its origins; see GSZ 2010, p. 9.

⁹¹ Some are included in GSZ 1988, pp. 320–24. See also his *Baliwen san jing* 巴利文三經 (Penang: The Penang Buddhist Association, 1953), which included Chinese and English translations; it was compiled in collaboration with Gunaratana Thera and printed for free distribution.

Sangha's Sixth Meeting (*shijie sengqie diliujie dahui* 世界僧伽第六屆大會), Chengyuan asked to be fully ordained in the Pali Theravāda vinaya; he received Theravāda monastic robes, bowl and ordination certificate, and officially became a monk in the southern tradition. Two years later, in 1956 (on October 4), he attended the World Buddhist Friendship Meeting (*shijie Fojiao youyihui* 世界佛教友誼會) in Nepal, with the editorial board of the journal *Buddhist World* (*Fojiao shijian* 佛教世間). In the same year he also visited India, for the celebration of Buddha's 2,500th birthday, a historic event for which he delivered a speech about the importance of uniting all Buddhists in order to achieve and maintain world peace.⁹² That paper, titled "Fojiao zhi tuanjie yu zhengli ji tuixing gangyao" 佛教之團結與整理及推行綱要, was translated later into several languages.⁹³ Chengyuan was also one of the three monks who led the peace liturgy at that event.⁹⁴

Chengyuan wrote several articles opposing Mahāyāna and Theravāda (which he called Hīnayāna, *xiaosheng* 小乘), but at the same time highlighting connections between them and asserting the relevance of Pali scriptures;⁹⁵ he addressed these subjects in his correspondence with other monks and Buddhist intellectuals.⁹⁶ Chengyuan explained how the Sanskrit-based Mahāyāna tradition was transmitted to and spread in China, and why the Indian Pali tradition of Buddhism was not. In addition, Chengyuan observed that the two traditions took discriminatory stances toward each other: Mahāyāna schools and texts did not hold Hīnayāna teachings in equal consideration, and vice versa, Pali doctrine did not reckon Mahāyāna practice as correct and in line with Buddha's teaching. Yet, Chengyuan argued that, at the time of the Buddha, the Discipline of the Sangha (*biqu [jie] fa* 比丘 [戒] 法) was the "real dharma" (*zhenfa* 真法), the core essence of Buddhism; consequently,

⁹² "Chengyuan fashi lütuan canjia 'Shijie Fojiao youyihui' bing zai Yindu Xuanzang liuxue wajian ta" 成元法師率團參加 "世界佛教友誼會" 並在印度玄奘留學外建塔, *Fojiao shijian* 1.2 (1956) (rpt. in GSZ 1988, p. 186). During this visit to India, Chengyuan built a Chinese style pagoda and a stele in Bodhgaya, the site of Buddha's enlightenment and where Xuanzang also studied. *Fojiao shijian* published a special issue in Hindi, Chinese and English on the international meeting and the building of the pagoda; thousands of copies were distributed in various countries.

⁹³ Chengyuan 成元, "Foli erqian wubainian zhi gainian" 佛歷二千五百年之概念, *Taiwan Fojiao* 台灣佛教 10.5 (1956).

⁹⁴ The other two were an American monk and a monk from Thailand.

⁹⁵ See, e.g., Chengyuan 成元, "Da xiao sheng Fojiao de chabie" 大小乘佛教的差別, *Taiwan Fojiao* 12.1 (1958); idem, "Zhongguo wu biqu" 中國無比丘, *Jue youqing* 覺有情 145-146 (1945), pp. 1-2.

⁹⁶ See "Chengyuan gei Ge Benjie dashi de xin" 成元給戈本捷大士的信, *Fojiao shijian* 1.2 (1955) (in GSZ 2010, pp. 428-30); "Runzhi fashi gei Chengyuan fashi de xin" 潤智法師給成元法師的信, *Fojiao shijian* 1.2 (1955) (GSZ 2010, pp. 430-31); "Chengyuan gei Huirui fashi de xin" 成元給慧叡法師的信, *Fojiao shijian* 1.2 (1955) (GSZ 2010, pp. 431-33).

the sangha precepts in Pali (*baliwen biqu jie* 巴利文比丘戒) should have been taken as model and standard for all Buddhists. These arguments were in line with writings of other monks from those decades, where the respect of the precepts was seen as condition for reviving Buddhism in China. Chengyuan, who was also ordained in the southern tradition, claimed it was important to be ordained in both the traditions so to merge all the teachings, and develop one only legacy of the Buddha.⁹⁷ Chengyuan specified that the so-called ‘Hīnayāna’ precepts and the dharma were more than just the rule concerning not eating after noon, so as Mahāyāna precepts were more than the possibility to eat after noon. Chengyuan enquired of the monk Yinshun 印順 (1906–2005) about these themes; in his reply, Yinshun confirmed that the distinction between Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna did not exist at the time of the Buddha, when there was one only Buddhadharmā, but it developed later. Other two topics discussed in the correspondence with Yinshun was the disappearance of Buddhism in India, which they agreed was due to a lack of discrimination between correct and corrupted dharma; and the importance of a sangha based on a higher respect for the rules, deeper cultivation, and social commitment; this was a sangha that the laity would have valued and respected more.⁹⁸

Qingfu and Chengyuan are two special cases regarding Suining, but they were not an isolated phenomenon in China at that time. The interest in Southeast Asian Buddhism locates Suining within a larger atmosphere, and the fascination for Pali Buddhism shown by several monks and lay scholars in East Asia. Within China, the monk Fafang 法舫 (1904–1951), from the cohort of Taixu, spent time in Sri Lanka for studying Pali language and completing several translations from the Pali Canon.⁹⁹ This was all tied to the question of Original Buddhism, the larger debate about the reconceptualization of Hīnayāna as something other than the “lesser vehicle.”¹⁰⁰ It also relates to a renewed re-

⁹⁷ Chengyuan 成元, “Chengyuan fashi tan ‘yi bo nan lai’” 成元法師談“衣鉢南來”, in GSZ 1988, pp. 180–81. Other statements on the complementarity between Mahāyāna and Theravāda, the need to study and respect both traditions, and the discrimination that he was subject to after being ordained in the Southern tradition can be found in “Chengyuan fashi zai *Fojiao shijian* diyi juan di'er qi shang xuanxie de *Kan qianyu*” 成元法師在佛教世間第一卷第二期上撰寫的“刊前語”, in GSZ 1988, pp. 187–89.

⁹⁸ See “Yinshun daoshi da Chengyuan fashi wen” 印順導師答成元法師問, in Yinshun 印順, *Huayu ji* 華雨集 (Taipei: Zhengwen), vol. 5. The exchange also defined “suffering” (*ku* 苦) with citations from the *Āgama*, and expanded on the figure and teachings of Nāgārjuna.

⁹⁹ See Fafang 法舫, “Yuanshi Fojiao zhi niaokan” 原始佛教之鳥瞰, *Fojiao pinglun* 佛教評論 1.3 (1931), pp. 1–15; Justin R. Ritzinger, “Original Buddhism and Its Discontents: The Chinese Buddhist Exchange Monks and the Search for the Pure Dharma in Ceylon,” *Journal of Chinese Religions* 44.2 (2016), pp. 149–73.

¹⁰⁰ See Stefania Travagnin and Bhikkhu Anālayo, “Assessing the Field of *Āgama* Studies

spect for the Theravāda model in the context of the vinaya revival in the Republican Period,¹⁰¹ and generated a deeper attention to the *Āgama* scriptures as well.¹⁰² As for the latter, Liang Qichao 梁啓超 (1873–1929) even argued that China witnessed a revival (*faxing* 復興) of the study of the *Āgamas* (*Ahan xue* 阿含學) in early-twentieth century, while scholars like Zhang Mantao 張曼濤 noticed that the study of the *Āgamas* and Pali texts represented the main difference between traditional Chinese Buddhism and the modern new Chinese Buddhism that started during the Republican period.¹⁰³ In addition, Liang Qichao felt that the study of Indian Buddhism also aimed at knowing more about the social and religious conditions of India at the time of the Buddha.¹⁰⁴

The quest for Original Buddhism and the interest in visiting both Buddha's and Buddhism's birthplace were also shared by contemporary Japanese Buddhists, and certainly were paralleled (or even inspired) by missions and translations produced by Westerners. It was a milieu that went beyond China – a pan-Asian or even global pattern of Buddhist modernism. As Richard Jaffe explained, several Japanese monks organized travels to India and Southeast Asia; those travels were often compared to Xuanzang's and Faxian's earlier missions, and travelogues recorded by Japanese monks became a popular genre. Like Qingfu and Chengyuan in Suining, Japanese Buddhists also collected Buddha images and relics, enshrined them in Japanese temples, and contributed to the erection and rebuilding of steles in India.¹⁰⁵

in Twentieth-century China: With a Focus on Master Yinshun's 印順 Three-*āṅga* Theory," in Dhammadinnā, ed., *Research on the Saṃyukta-āgama* (Taipei: Dharma Drum Publishing Corporation, 2020), pp. 933–1008; and Ritzinger, "Original Buddhism and Its Discontents."

¹⁰¹ For the vinaya revival in modern China, see Han Min 韓敏, *Minguo Fojiao jielü yanjiu* 民國佛教戒律研究 (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2016); and Ester Bianchi, "Yi jie wei shi 以戒爲師: Theory and Practice of Monastic Discipline in Modern and Contemporary Chinese Buddhism," *Studies in Chinese Religions* 3.2 (2017), pp. 111–41. For the role played by Theravāda in modern Chinese discipline, see idem, "Understanding Jielü 戒律: The Resurgence and Reconfiguration of Vinaya-Related Concepts in Modern China," in Travagnin and Scott, eds., *Concepts and Methods for the Study of Chinese Religions II*, pp. 55–80.

¹⁰² See Travagnin and Anālayo, "Assessing the Field of *Āgama* Studies," pp. 933–83.

¹⁰³ Zhang Mantao 張曼濤, "Bianji zhiqu" 編輯旨趣, in Zhang Mantao 張曼濤, ed., *Jingdian yanjiu lunji* 經典研究論集 (Taipei: Dacheng wenhua chubanshe 1978), pp. 1–2.

¹⁰⁴ See Liang Qichao 梁啓超, "Shuo si ahan" 說四阿含 (1920), in Zhang, ed., *Jingdian yanjiu lunji*, pp. 1–20; and idem, *Foxue yanjiu shiba pian* 佛學研究十八篇 (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1935).

¹⁰⁵ On the case of Japan, see Richard M. Jaffe, *Seeking Sakyamuni: South Asia in the Formation of Modern Japanese Buddhism* (Chicago: U. Chicago P., 2019); idem, "Seeking Sakyamuni: Travel and the Reconstruction of Japanese Buddhism," *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 30.1 (2004), pp. 65–96; and idem, "Buddhist Material Culture, 'Indianism,' and the Construction of Pan-Asian Buddhism in Prewar Japan," *Material Religion* 2.3 (2006), pp. 266–92.

BUDDHIST WOMEN AND NUNS:
MIAOSHAN'S LEGACY IN REPUBLICAN SUINING

On my research trips in August 2019, nuns welcomed me to Jingye Chan Nunnery; they kindly showed me the precise site where princess Miaoshan was born, just outside the premises of the nunnery. They also reminded that more than ninety nuns had resided there in the late 1940s. When I asked about history and identity of the nunnery, one of the nuns wrote “Huiming yuan 慧明院” on my notebook but also gave me a journal article about Suining’s being *the* center of Guanyin culture and of the values embedded by the Bodhisattva.¹⁰⁶

Today, Jingye Chan Nunnery, which counts just twenty resident nuns, is the main female monastery in Suining that holds liturgies and large religious activities; minor temples host other small groups of nuns, who continue their practice with the support of the lay community. Much as Qingfu had built ties with temples and monastic leaders outside Suining, and positioned the latter within a larger, cross-regional Buddhist sphere, the Suining network of nuns has been connected to other communities, especially the nunneries in Chengdu that centered around the nun Longlian.

This section will focus on the history of Jingye Chan Nunnery, as an important site for women’s and nuns’ practices that developed in the Republican Period. It will also contextualize this site within the larger network of nuns and nunneries in the area, and other Buddhist female communities based in other parts of Sichuan. If the heritage of the Jingye Chan Nunnery speaks of the local legend of the princess Miaoshan, which I have presented in a previous part of this article, the monk Qingfu was protagonist of its modern history.

Song-Dynasty Nuns of Suining: Huiming Nunnery (Huiming yuan 慧明院)

As we have seen, the local folk story of Miaoshan encompassed several sacred sites that are still extant in Suining; among them is the original location of Beihu Garden, where Miaoshan was born and spent most of her life: this site became extremely significant for the local community. This site appeared in the dreams of Buddhist leaders (like Qingfu); also it became the location of several apparitions of Guanyin (for example, those involving the nun Huiming 慧明 and Qingfu), and later hosted a succession of Buddhist nunneries.

¹⁰⁶ Shi Shunling 釋順靈, “Cong Fojiao zhong de ‘shi xin shi Fo shi xin zuo Fo’ quanshi Suining Guanyin Miaoshan de zhenshi xing” 從佛教中的“是心是佛是心作佛”詮釋遂寧觀音妙善的真實性, *Zongjiao luntan* 宗教論壇 1 (2019), pp. 55-59.

It was during the Song that Suining was recognized as Guanyin's hometown, and the original birthplace of Miaoshan was revived as a Buddhist site. At the end of the eleventh century, the local nun Huiming built a nunnery near the Buddha Hall (Fotang 佛堂) of the previous Beihu Garden, and called it Huiming Nunnery (Huiming yuan 慧明院). Huiming's project started in 1056, when the nun visited the birthplace of Miaoshan and noticed the image of a weeping Guanyin on a broken wall. This phantom of a suffering Guanyin left a deep impression on Huiming; and after several days of prayers and fasting, she vowed to build a new temple *in* Guanyin (Miaoshan)'s birthplace and *for* Guanyin; the construction received financial contributions from the local community and it was completed.¹⁰⁷

Local legends confer special authority on the nun Huiming and the site through their references to the Song emperor Huizong 徽宗 (r. 1100–1135) and his stay in Suining. Huizong was indeed given the title of prince of Suining commandery (*Suining junwang* 遂寧郡王), however the stories of his presence in the Buddhist scene of Suining do not find confirmation in historical documents. According to local knowledge, in 1098, at the age of sixteen, Zhao Ji 趙佶 (birth name of Huizong), visited Suining for the first time and resided near Huiming Nunnery. Furthermore, in 1099, as he left Suining to start his reign, Huizong left several of his artistic pieces and calligraphies to the nunnery, in the hands of the above-mentioned Huiming. According to similar stories, in 1099, on some early morning, Huiming was conducting the usual morning liturgy when she saw a Buddha image appear three times; this mysterious phenomenon was deemed auspicious for Huizong's soon-to-commence reign.¹⁰⁸

Local stories mention that Huizong's famous courtesan, Li Shishi 李師師 (1062–1127), whose life appears in novels like *Water Margin*, had been in Suining too. Her whereabouts after Huizong's death are left uncertain in official documents; but in Suining's folk stories it is told that she moved to Suining because Huizong had praised the place, and then she went to Huiming Nunnery, which Huizong had discussed. Li Shishi is said to have met Huiming, and eventually decided to reside in the nunnery as a nun and to practice Buddhism with Huiming. A few years later, when Li Shishi began a romantic relationship with her

¹⁰⁷ For details about the nun Huiming, Huiming Nunnery, Buddhist women in Suining during the Song, and the relations with the imperial family, see Li *Jingtu*, pp. 3–4, 25, 57, 60–75.

¹⁰⁸ This episode is reported in the local gazetteer *Suining xian zhi* 遂寧縣誌, compiled by General Li Jiayu 李家鈺 and published in 1929 (rpt. Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 2016).

former client, the local businessman Zhou Bangyuan 周邦元, Huiming commissioned the building of another small abode, far from the center of Suining, so that Li Shishi could continue her practice there, as it was not convenient, given her new relationship, that the former courtesan resided at the more central Huiming Nunnery. This small temple was called Qingjing (Qingjing si 清淨寺), and it now names a district within Suining. Eventually Li Shishi agreed to marry Zhou Bangyuan, on the condition that she could continue spending extensive time in Qingjing for her dharma practice. Li Shishi brought Huizong's art works from Huiming Nunnery to her new abode.¹⁰⁹

During the Ming dynasty, the Buddha Hall of Beihu Garden was moved to another area of Suining, while Huiming Nunnery remained in its original place but eventually was destroyed between the late Ming and the early Qing. Jingye Chan Nunnery is now situated in the same area where Huiming Nunnery was built during the Song.¹¹⁰

Revival in the Republican Period: Qingfu and the Aido Buddhist Society

In the early Republican period, the alleged birthplace of Miaoshan was revived again as an active Buddhist site. In 1921, three local male Buddhist followers committed to establish Cuiying Hall (Cuiying zhai 翠英齋), which was constituted mainly by a *nianfo* hall; Cuiying was meant to be a place for lay Buddhists to conduct regular Pure Land recitations, and also to organize charity initiatives and material support to the poor. In the same year, the monks Qingfu and Cailing 彩靈 were invited to serve as supervisors of the newly established Buddhist lay group,¹¹¹ and guide the laity in the *nianfo* practice. The location of Cuiying changed four times in the early years, though never leaving the area of Suining; nonetheless, or perhaps because of the several relocations, the number of highly devoted female practitioners increased considerably in less than ten years.¹¹²

Qingfu's biographies report that, one evening in 1924, Amitābha Buddha appeared to him while he was meditating at Guangde Monastery. Amitābha took Qingfu to a place in Suining where they saw a Guanyin weeping heavily; and Amitābha asked the monk to build a merit field (*futian* 福田) in that precise location. Once awake, Qingfu

¹⁰⁹ For local stories about the crossed fate of Huizong, Li Shishi, and Huiming Nunnery, see Li *Jingtu*, pp. 62–73.

¹¹⁰ Li *Jingtu*, pp. 3–4.

¹¹¹ Cailing was another monk active in Chengdu, especially at Wenshu Monastery, also Suining.

¹¹² JCZ, pp. 2–3, 422.

visited the place indicated by Amitābha, and, after being told that it was the location of the past Huiming Nunnery, he decided to relocate Cuiying Hall there. Furthermore, to honor Guanyin, Qingfu decided to turn Cuiying into a place for practice only for virtuous women (*shan nü* 善女).¹¹³ And in 1933, thanks to Qingfu's fundraising and that of the lay Buddhists founders of Cuiying, the latter was eventually transformed into the Aidao Buddhist Society (Aidao Foxueshe). The new site was built around the previous Amitābha Hall (Mituo yuan 彌陀院), renovated in 1933, and in fact Aidao became also known as Amitābha Buddhist Society (Mi Foxueshe 彌佛學社). The management of the Society was assigned to the lay Buddhists Chen Wenyuan 陳文垣, Luo Hengru 羅恆如 and Li Jichen 李績塵, who had been important in the previous Cuiying Hall.

This is why and how a Buddhist institute dedicated mostly to charity and *nianfo* retreats became an official Buddhist site for women. Qingfu's decision to change the structure and purpose of the previous hall was encouraged by the large presence of women at Cuiying; eight of them showed extreme dedication to practice and even the intention to go forth, and these eight women became the first eight ordained nuns at the Buddhist Society just a few years later. Probably because of its affiliation with Qingfu, the Buddhist Society (and later the Jingye Chan Nunnery) claimed to belong to the Chan Caodong 禪曹洞 School; yet, their residents, also in line with Qingfu's cultivation, have been following the joint practice of Chan and Pure Land.¹¹⁴

By 1934, a Main Shrine Hall (Da xiongbao dian 大雄寶殿) and a Guanyin Hall (Guanyin dian 觀音殿) were added to the first building of the Aidao Buddhist Society. In the same year, the number of female residents increased to more than eighty, a fact that encouraged a further expansion of the site in the following two years (1934–1936), when the main gate and walls were renovated, and Maitreya Hall (Mile dian 彌勒殿), Skanda Hall (Weituo dian 韋馱殿), Great Mercy Hall (Dabei dian 大悲殿), Sūtra Reading Hall (Yuejing tang 閱經堂), Patriarch Hall (Zu tang 租堂), Chan Hall (Chan tang 禪堂), residential rooms (*liaofang* 寮房), reception (*ke tang* 客堂), dining hall (*wuguan tang* 五觀堂), and a storehouse (*ku fang* 庫房) were added.¹¹⁵ Qingfu also donated one of

¹¹³ Li *Jingtu*, pp. 4–5.

¹¹⁴ JCZ, pp. 2–3, 7–8, 55–59, 422.

¹¹⁵ Information about the foundation and early history of the Aidao Buddhist Society is in JCZ, pp. 7–9, 422–23; and Li *Jingtu*, pp. 4–6. See also “Suinjing Aidao Foxueshe xinxia luocheng” 遂寧愛道佛學社新夏落成, *Fohua xinwen* 78 (1938), p. 1.

the small jade Buddhas that he had obtained in Myanmar to the women's site.¹¹⁶

I would group the ordained nuns of the Buddhist Society into three clusters, which also marked three stages of development of the nunnery. The class of female residents of the Buddhist Society since its foundation (most of them had been already practicing at Cuiying Hall in the late 1920s), who decided to practice because of Qingfu's presence, were tonsured under him between 1936 and 1939, and later ordained between 1938 and 1940. This first cluster of nuns could be divided further into two groups, on the basis of their connection to the previous Cuiying Hall, the relationship with Qingfu, and time and place of ordination. In 1936, six female residents of the Buddhist Society, all natives of Suining, were tonsured under Qingfu, and in 1938 they were fully ordained at Baoguang Monastery in Xindu: Changduan 常端, born as Chen Zhanqing 陳湛清 (1904-1962); Changgui 常貴, born as Li Jianqing 李鑒清 (1893-1982); Changde 常德, born as Li Difan 李涤凡 (1904-1964); Changchong 常冲, born as Chen Ruoxin 陳若心 (1909-1953, also known as Changcong 常聰); Changjie 常洁, born as Yang Jing'an 楊靜安 (1908-1978); Changyan 常嚴, born as Yang Wenguang 楊文光 (1912-1956). A second group of two women chose Qingfu as tonsure master but were ordained only in 1940: Changjian 常建, born as Sun Guangtai 孫光太 (1882-1961, sometimes written as Changjian 常鑒); and Changci 常慈, born as Wang Heqing 王和清 (1915-1986). The former, native of Suining, was ordained at Baoguang, while the latter, who was from Chengdu, was ordained at Jinlong Monastery (Jinlong si 金龍寺).

A second cluster of two nuns practiced and was ordained under a different master in Suining, and, attracted by the bigger female community and the figure of Qingfu, moved to the Buddhist Society only in 1934; being ordained already in 1917, these women were the very first nuns in Republican Suining. They were natives of the village Yufeng 玉豐 (Suining county), and part of the same family: Longying 隆應, born as Gan Hairu 甘海如 (1901-1990); Longxue 隆學, born as Gan Haicheng 甘海成 (1902-1962). These two women had been abandoned in 1906 at the local small Guanyin Temple (Guanyin si 觀音寺), where they practiced with the master Changhui 昌慧; they were later ordained at Jinlong Monastery (1917), and continued practicing at Guanyin Temple until their move to the Buddhist Society (1934).

¹¹⁶ JCZ, p. 422. For the complete biographies of all nuns and disciples mentioned in this and the following three paragraphs, see generally, JCZ, pp. 98-108.

A third cluster of women was ordained in the late Republican period (1940–1943), after Qingfu's passing; these post-Qingfu nuns formed a second generation of nuns since they became disciples, between 1938 and 1941, of nuns from the first cluster. They include six nuns disciples of Changduan, namely Huiling 慧靈, who was born as Wang Yuanjun 王遠均 (1915–1990), Yingling 應靈, who was born as Tang Yunqing 唐雲清 (1912–1997), Hailing 海靈, who was born as Xie Bixian 謝必賢 (1918–2005), Zhiling 智靈, Kongling 空靈, and Yuanling 圓靈; Changgui's disciples, namely Xiuling 秀靈, who was born as Yang Yuanzhi 楊元誌 (1911–1992), and Yuling 毓靈, who was born as She Zongzhen 社宗貞 (1918–2003). These nuns were all native of Suining, with Xiuling coming from the peripheral county of Pengxi 蓬溪, and were all ordained at Baoguang Monastery. To them we can also add Changde's disciples, namely the nuns Cuiling 翠靈 and Faling 法靈; Changjie's disciples, who are the nuns Benling 本靈 and Xinling 信靈; Changjian's disciples, like the nuns Shuling 殊靈, Xinling 心靈 and Mingling 明靈; Changci's disciples include the nuns Qingling 清靈, Jingling 靜靈, Fuling 福靈, Shunling 順靈; Changyan had a disciple, the nun Yongling 永靈.

Nuns from the second cluster also accepted disciples;¹¹⁷ and later on, the new generation from the third cluster continued to attract women who have followed them and become ordained as nuns; and it goes on in this way.¹¹⁸

Nuns assumed gradually more responsibility within the Buddhist society; if they had been supervised by Qingfu and Buddhist laymen at first, they eventually took on the full leadership and administration of the place with the opening of Jingye Chan Nunnery in 1947.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Longying had one disciple, the nun Nengzhi 能智 (JCZ, p. 104). Longxue's disciples included the nuns Nengjin 能近, Nengliang 能亮, and Nengchao 能超 (JCZ, p. 104).

¹¹⁸ E.g., Huiling gained three disciples: the nuns Tongyuan 通永, Tongguang 通光, and Tonghong 通弘 (JCZ, p. 105). Yinling had three: Tongming 通明, Tongquan 通全 and Tongzheng 通證 (JCZ, p. 108). Hailing had a disciple, the nun Tonglü 通律 (JCZ, p. 108); Xiuling had Tongwen 通文 (JCZ, p. 106); and Yuling had Tongyuan 通遠 (JCZ, p. 107). See below, main text, for details on the fourth cluster of nuns ordained after the 1980s.

¹¹⁹ Since the late 1930s, some of these first nuns assumed a degree of leadership in the Buddhist Society, although the layman Chen Wenyuan, father of the nun Changduan, acted as president (*shezhang* 社長); among early nuns, Changduan was manager of the household affairs (*dangjia* 當家), Changde was accountant (*guanzhang* 管帳), Changjian was treasurer (*kutou* 庫頭), Longxue was master of the liturgy (*weina* 維那), and Changjie was in charge of visitors (*zhike* 知客). Since 1947, the management of the Jingye Chan Nunnery was distributed as follows: Changduan was abbess and general supervisor (*dujian* 都監), Changde was in charge of receiving visitors, Huiling was responsible for the liturgies, Changjian treasurer, Changyan deputy abbess, Changgui secretary (*shuji* 書記), and Longying was responsible for discipline and order (*seng zhi* 僧值).

An analysis of the biographies of these first nuns shed light on their different education and social background, the reasons that led them to choose a monastic life, and the career possibilities that nuns had in those years. Changduan, Changgui, Changjie, and Yingling had a wealthy background, and attended private schools where they also achieved excellent results. On the other hand, Huiling, Xiuling, and Yuling came from poor families, and found in Buddhism a refuge from the suffering they were experiencing. Changyan and Changjie renounced a family life and opted for a monastic career instead; if Changyan simply broke her engagement, Changjie had been married for five years before deciding to divorce, become a disciple of Qingfu (1927), then a novice (1936), and finally a fully ordained nun (1938). This first generation of nuns came mostly from Buddhist families, and their own families had been involved with the creation of this Buddhist site: Changduan's father, Chen Wenhuan, was one of the founders and first presidents of Cuiying Hall and the Buddhist Society; Changde's paternal grandmother was also among the founders and first members of Cuiying Hall.

Nuns in Republican Period Suining did not choose to be secluded from society and to devote their time only to prayer and meditation; they excelled in the administration and renovation of temples, were initiators of education programs, and authors of poems and cultivation manuals.

At the end of 1930s, Changgui founded the Buddhadharma School (Fofa xuexiao 佛法學校) within the Aidao Buddhist Society, and invited monks from Guangde Monastery, like the already mentioned Zhenliang, to lecture nuns and lay women. Changgui also wrote several poems, becoming one of the very few Republican nuns to author texts.¹²⁰ In the difficult final years of the Republican Period, concurrently the time of the protracted Sino-Japanese military conflict, the Buddhist Society was still organizing some classes, to confirm the importance that learning Buddhism had for the nuns and local laity. This is how, in February 1945, the well-known Wang Enyang was invited to deliver a seven-day lecture series on the *Heart Sūtra* (*Xinjing tongshi* 心經通釋).¹²¹ More recently, in the 1980s, Huiling, Hailing, and Yuling also argued that a good knowledge of Buddhism and a general education were crucial for nuns. Hailing and Yuling sent their disciples, the nuns Tonglü and Tongyuan, to a new, local Buddhist school named Fojiao jinxiu xuexiao

¹²⁰ For a selection of her poems (“*Shi Changgui shiwen xuanji*” 釋常貴詩文選集), see Li Jingtu, pp. 241–44; and JCZ, pp. 343–44.

¹²¹ JCZ, p. 423.

佛教進修學校。And Huiling, besides initiating some courses within the Jingye Chan Nunnery, sent two disciples to Tiexiang Nunnery (Tiexiang si 鐵像寺) in Chengdu to study at Longlian's newly opened Sichuan Institute of Buddhist Studies for Nuns (Sichuan nizhong Foxueyuan 四川尼眾佛學院).

In the context of restoring and administering temples, Changduan stands as a key example: she was among the first practitioners in residence, and together with Li Difan (who was later ordained as Changde) was responsible of administration matters at Cuiying Hall before the transformation of the site into the Aidao Buddhist Society (1933). When Guanyi transformed the Buddhist Society into the Jingye Chan Nunnery, he made Changduan abbess and general supervisor of the nunnery. Other nuns contributed to the renovation of other nunneries, and among them Changgui deserves again special mention. In July 1939, to guarantee their safety during the Sino-Japanese war and with the support of the local branch of the Chinese Buddhist Association, Changgui headed a few nuns from the Buddhist Society to Taiping Temple (Taiping si 太平寺), also located in Suining but in a less central zone, and resided there until the end of the 1940s. This was a modest temple already in ruins, and placed in a very poor area. From 1943 to 1949, Changgui collected enough funds to renovate the temple, and Taiping was transformed into a new nunnery, where she resided with the nuns Changde, Xiuling, Cailing, Faling, and Zhongling. In 1947, as the Buddhist Society turned into a public monastery, some of the residents at Taiping (including Xiuling, Yuling, Cailing, and Faling) returned to the new Jingye Chan Nunnery; Changgui, however, remained at the Taiping Nunnery, improving the farming work in the surrounding fields, rebuilding the Main Hall, Arahat Hall, and Patriarch Hall, and leading a number of Buddhist activities like a seven-day *nianfo* retreat. She returned to Jingye Chan Nunnery only in 1949, once the renovation at Taiping Nunnery had been completed.

Nuns were also recognized as eminent leaders and charismatic guides by the local laity, traits evidenced by the number of young women who followed them and became nuns in the late-Republican years and from the 1980s. Most of these nuns were natives of Suining, but two were from Chengdu and one from the peripheral area of Pengxi, a fact that suggests that the fame of the Aidao Buddhist Society went beyond central Suining. This was probably due to Qingfu's reputation and the reality that in Sichuan of the mid 1930s, there were not many well-structured places for nuns to reside and practice. The nun Changduan is prominent as *the* charismatic protagonist in the his-

tory of the Buddhist Society first and the Jingye Chan Nunnery later. Besides her administration posts in both the Buddhist Society and the nunnery, it was her Buddhist devotion to bring the early Cuiying Hall into existence. Her biography tells us that since her childhood she had conversed about Buddhist texts and practice with her female friends, and even dreamed of the foundation of a *nianfo* hall. Her father, moved by her Buddhist commitment, participated in the foundation of Cuiying Hall. Then, in cooperation with other lay Buddhists like Luo Hengru 羅恆如, he built a *nianfo* hall just behind the residence and invited the local, well-known monks Qingfu and Cailing to guide Buddhists in their Pure Land practice (1921).

From the late 1940s, some of the above nuns showed interest in the contemporary Sino-Tibetan Buddhist practice. This is another example of how Suining Buddhism participated in overarching Sichuan (and Chinese) discourses. At that time, the monk Nenghai was still lecturing, and the nun Longlian had already become an authoritative figure for nuns living in Chengdu; and it was to Nenghai and Longlian (and their temples) that some Suining nuns turned to, although only temporarily. Changduan was one of these nuns. In 1948, she visited Jinci Monastery (Jinci si 近慈寺) and started the Sino-Tibetan practice under the monk Nenghai. In 1956, she returned to Chengdu, to continue her practice in Tiexiang Nunnery, but soon had to be hospitalized in Shanghai. She passed away on December 23, 1962, at the Aidao Nunnery (Aidao tang 愛道堂), in Chengdu. Her body was cremated at Jinci Monastery and her ashes returned to the Jingye Chan Nunnery in Suining. In that same period, Changci also spent her monastic years between Suining (1942–1947, 1949–1957, 1958–1960) and Chengdu (1940–1942, 1947–1949, 1957–1958, 1960–1986). In Chengdu, she spent time at Tiexiang Nunnery (1957–1958) and later Aidao Nunnery, where she took care of her elder dharma sister Changduan. While in Chengdu, she attended several Buddhist lectures and, her biography says, she excelled in her understanding and explanation of Mahāyāna scriptures; even Longlian remembered Changci as a unique monastic from Suining.¹²² She was praised for respecting the vinaya and her devotion to Pure Land practice. Her body was cremated at Baoguang Monastery and her ashes are kept at the Putong Pagoda (Putong ta 普通塔) in Tiexiang Nunnery, an indication the recognition given her within Longlian's network. Changgui also spent a few months in Chengdu at Tiexiang (1953). And in the 1980s, to continue this tradition, Huiling

¹²² According to Changci's biography, Longlian stated that Changci was "Suining sanbao zhong zhe shi yiwei nande de sengbao" 遂寧三寶中這是一位難得的僧寶 (JCZ, p. 103).

sent her own disciples to Longlian's institute of Buddhist studies; most of the nuns in the recent history of the nunnery, between the 1980s and today, have studied at the institute founded by Longlian.

Important large events, such as the Sino-Japanese war, heavily impacted the lives and practices of Republican Period nuns in Suining. As with other monasteries then, the nuns from the Buddhist Society in 1939 led liturgies for the protection of the nation (*huguo* 護國) and the consolidation of peace.¹²³ In addition, by request of the Suining chapter of the Buddhist association and the local government, nuns were requested to evacuate the Buddhist Society and were scattered to different temples and areas within Suining; some found refuge, temporarily, at the little hut built by Qingfu next to Guangde Monastery, others at the Taiping Temple. This dislocation put them in the position to be more effective in a wider area and build a stronger and larger network of affiliates. The final years of the war affected the financial condition of the Society, which by then was fully managed by nuns; this is why in 1942 the Buddhist Society organized a factory to weave cotton, and sold cloth at the local market.¹²⁴

From Qingfu to Guanyi: The Development of a Shifang conglin 十方叢林 for Nuns

The Aidao Buddhist Society returned to regular Buddhist activities after the end of the Sino-Japanese war in 1945.

In the 1940s, the monk Guanyi, previous abbot of Baoguang, had visited Suining and the nuns of the Buddhist Society. Noticing the large number of nuns and knowing the historical importance of the site as Princess Miaoshan's birthplace, Guanyi decided to transform the Buddhist Society into a "public monastery" (*shifang conglin*), and changed the name into Jingye Chan Nunnery (1947).¹²⁵ This made Guanyi the only other monk, besides Qingfu, to be remembered in the temple records as crucial in the creation, development and success of the nunnery. From a different perspective, Guanyi's intervention can be seen as part of the continuous relation between Suining and Baoguang Monastery, an association that had been previously centered on the figure of Qingfu.

¹²³ "Suining Aidao she jian huguo fahui junzheng zhangguan rexin huchi" 遂寧愛道社建護國法會軍政長官熱心護持, *Fohua xinwen* 95 (1939), p. 1; "Suining Aidao Foxueshe fahui yuanman" 遂寧愛道佛學社法會圓滿, *Fohua xinwen* 97 (1939), p. 1.

¹²⁴ JCZ, p. 423.

¹²⁵ The name suggests a place for Dharma propagation (*hong fa* 弘法), and also a monastery for the cultivation and purification of the mind (*jinghua xinling* 淨化心靈); see Li *Jingtu*, p. 51.

Since 1947, the nunnery became administered completely by senior resident nuns. In 1949, the resident nuns were more than ninety, and the site was then enlarged further, in order to host the increasing number of practitioners and the new activities that involved the laity. By 1949, the nunnery had already become a major female monastery in Sichuan, and also in China.¹²⁶

This article explores major discourses in Suining Buddhism in the late Qing and the Republican Period, however, I conclude with a few notes on the shifts in role and meaning of the nunnery in two more recent and important stages: the 1950s and 1960s, that is, after the foundation of the People's Republic of China and during the Cultural Revolution; and then in 1980s, with the reopening of religious spaces.

Buddhist activities and public liturgies were interrupted on November 16, 1950. That same year part of the site was converted into a department store. By mid-1951, more than sixty nuns had left the premises, and the remaining thirty retained little residential space. In 1952, they started a small factory for the production and sale of cotton products that they themselves knitted; the previously mentioned Changjie, Changde, Changgui, Changyan, Changjian Longxue, Longying, and Xiuling were all part of this venture, and worked part-time at the newly built department store.¹²⁷ Some assumed posts in local government as well; for instance, Changgui was a member of the Political Consultative Conference of Suining county (Suining xian zhengxie weiyuan 遂寧縣政協委員) from 1956 to 1980.¹²⁸ In 1958, the government of Sichuan committed itself to protect Jingye Chan Nunnery as one of three key Buddhist sites in the entire province; this was done because of the large number of nuns and thus their positive impact on the surrounding society. The other key sites were Lingquan and Guangde monasteries.¹²⁹ Nonetheless, Jingye ceased to function as a religious place during the Cultural Revolution, and the spaces and buildings passed over to the department store.¹³⁰ (The architecture and areas of the nunnery are shown in figures 4 and 5.)

¹²⁶ Sources of this new development guided by Guanyi are found in Li *Jingtu*, pp. 6, 206–14; JCZ, pp. 8–9, 422.

¹²⁷ JCZ, pp. 423–25.

¹²⁸ JCZ, p. 100.

¹²⁹ Guangde Monastery was considered influential: it was a large site with a large number of resident monks, and Lingquan was regarded a popular pilgrimage site that made an impact on the province. The official paper of the Sichuan Committee of the CCP (“Zhongguo gongchandang Sichuan sheng weiyuanhui” 中國共產黨四川省委員會), document 58, article no. 212 (decreed August 10, 1958), is reported in JCZ, p. 152.

¹³⁰ JCZ, p. 424.

The nunnery reopened in 1983 –reconfirmed as a public monastery and fully renovated between 1987 and 1988;¹³¹ the site became well known for a lawsuit (1983–1986) brought by twelve Jingye nuns in order to regain the previously owned spaces. They eventually won the suit.¹³²

A fourth cluster of nuns was ordained after the Cultural Revolution; some were ordained in temples in Chengdu including Zhaojue Monastery (Zhaojue si 昭覺寺), and others under Sichuan’s twentieth-century Buddhist leaders like the monk Bianneng 遍能 (1906–1997).¹³³ The fourth cluster list includes Shunling 順靈 (b. 1966),¹³⁴ Tongwu 通悟 (b. 1969),¹³⁵ Wansong 万嵩 (b. 1967),¹³⁶ Renjing 仁靜 (b. 1954),¹³⁷ Zhaokong 照空 (b. 1975),¹³⁸ and Changci 昌慈 (b. 1954).¹³⁹ As mentioned earlier, some studied at the Sichuan Institute of Buddhist Studies for Nuns that Longlian had established; in doing so, they continued a pattern started in the 1940s, thus confirming the importance assigned to education.

¹³¹ Contemporary history of the nunnery is summarized by the Suining branch of the Buddhist Association, see the statement included in JCZ, p. 243.

¹³² Li Xiaohua, “Shi’er nizhong da guansi” 十二尼眾打官司, in *Li Jingtu*, pp. 214–29.

¹³³ For more about Bianneng, see Liu Xuewen 劉學文, *Bianneng fashi zhuan* 遍能法師傳 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2001).

¹³⁴ Shunling was born Zhang Sujun 張素君, in Chongqing. In 1984, she became a novice at Jingye Chan Nunnery with Changci as master, and was ordained in 1989 at Wenshu Monastery in Chengdu. She studied at the Sichuan Institute of Buddhist Studies for Nuns (1987–1996); after graduation she revived the nuns’ branch of the Guangde Institute of Buddhist Studies (Guangde si Foxueyuan nizhongban 廣德寺佛學院尼眾班) and later became responsible of its study program (1996–1998). She attracted several young disciples in 2009, helping the revival of the nunnery in the 21st century; complete biog. in JCZ, pp. 108–10.

¹³⁵ Tongwu was born Chen Zeqiong 陳澤琼; she became a novice at the Jingye Chan Nunnery in 1988 with Fuling as master, and in 1991 received full ordination at Zhaojue Monastery in Chengdu, under the monk Qingding. After studying at the Buddhist institute in Chengdu (1993–1996), she served as teacher at the nuns’ branch of the Guangde Institute of Buddhist Studies (1996–1998); complete biog. in JCZ, p. 110.

¹³⁶ Wansong was born Chen Xiurong 陳秀容, became a novice at the Jingye Chan Nunnery under Tongming (1985), was ordained at Baoguang Monastery under Bianneng (1990), and later studied at the Guangde Institute of Buddhist Studies (1994–1996); complete biog. in JCZ, p. 111.

¹³⁷ Renjing was born as Liu Bihua 劉碧華, in Suining. She became a novice at the Jingye Chan Nunnery under Nengming (1984), was ordained at Baoguang Monastery in Chengdu under Minggao 明高 (1987), and later studied at the Guangde Institute of Buddhist Studies (1989–1991). For her complete biography see JCZ, pp. 111–12.

¹³⁸ Zhaokong was born Zhong Yumei 钟玉梅, in Suining. She became a novice on Mt. Wutai in 1996 and studied in sangha institutes in Fujian; she moved to Jingye Chan Nunnery in 2007; complete biog. in JCZ, p. 112.

¹³⁹ Changci was born Luo Huihua 羅會華, in Suining. She moved to Chengdu, where she became a novice (1988), studied at the Sichuan Institute of Buddhist Studies for Nuns (1983–1993), was ordained at Baoguang Monastery under Bianneng (1990), and moved to Jingye Chan Nunnery in 2000; complete biog. in JCZ, pp. 112–13.

Some of these contemporary nuns contributed to the renovation of major Buddhist sites like Guangde and Lingquan after the 1980s.¹⁴⁰ Others were recognized by the local government for their contribution to society, outside a purely Buddhist domain.¹⁴¹

Within a Local Network: The History of Qingfu Nunnery (Qingfu si 清福寺)

The small Qingfu Nunnery (Qingfu si 清福寺), which is still located just behind the Guangde Monastery, hosts less than ten nuns. This is a small, private, hereditary temple (*zisun miao* 子孫廟), thus different from Jingye Chan Nunnery – a public monastery (*shifang conglin*) since 1947. Today, resident Qingfu nuns are dedicated to Pure Land practice, with the young ones devoting time to work in the field just outside the temple. The latter is an important field, the resident nuns claim, because it is where the body of Qingfu was cremated. During my visit in August 2019, an old nun showed me a portrait of Qingfu on which his name was misspelled as Qingfo 青佛; it is enshrined in the *nianfo* hall. I was also shown the jade Buddha statue that Qingfu brought from Southeast Asia. Moreover, a photo of the monk Nenghai is framed and kept in front of the jade Buddha, probably because some of the nuns had studied in Longlian’s institute of Buddhist studies.

The history of the Qingfu Nunnery intersected first with Qingfu’s life, and with the development of the Jingye Chan Nunnery later on. Its history reflects the history of the territory, and contributes to the expansion of the local nuns’ community.

In 1920s, Qingfu, who was abbot of Guangde Monastery and supervisor at the Cuiying Hall, decided to build a small hut behind the Guangde Monastery as his own residence. In line with the popular joint practice of Chan and Pure Land, Qingfu aimed to live at that site in order to better cultivate *nianfo*, while continuing Chan meditation. The small abode took seven years to complete (1924–1931) and was named Amitābha Hall (Mito yuan 彌陀院) at the inauguration in 1931. It became known as Qingfu Chan Temple (Qingfu Chanyuan 清福禪院) some time after Qingfu’s passing. Such a small residence and space for practice included only one worship hall with a statue of Guanyin enshrined in the center; in front, Qingfu placed one of the small jade

¹⁴⁰ Since 1992, Yuling has headed fundraising for the refurbishment of these two monasteries (see JCZ, p. 107). Yinling donated dharma instruments and paintings to various temples in Suining (including Lingquan and Guangde monasteries), and to the four sacred mountains of Chinese Buddhism; see JCZ, pp. 107–8.

¹⁴¹ In 1989, the local government of Suining praised Yingling as “an outstanding member of the religious sphere at the service of the four modernizations 宗教界為四化服務的先進個人”; see JCZ, pp. 107–8.

Buddhas from Southeast Asia. There were six more very small buildings, including residential rooms, a dining place, and storage; the various buildings surrounded a courtyard and were surrounded by a bamboo forest; Qingfu remarked about the building of the temple in his autobiography.¹⁴²

After the death of Qingfu, and during the Sino-Japanese war, the abode hosted nuns of the Aidao Buddhist Society for a short period; it was completely emptied in 1951, when the different rooms were transformed into public offices; in 1961 it was rented to farmers for a few years, and then partly demolished with the beginning of the Cultural Revolution.

With the reopening of temples and religious activities in the 1980s, the nun Changlong 昌隆 expressed her firm commitment to rebuild the site; by the early 2000s, thanks to her fundraising and the generous contributions of local Buddhist laity, Changlong was able to rebuild the Main Shrine Hall, the Guanyin Hall, the nuns' residence and refectory, and enlarge the site with a Skanda Hall and Earth God Hall. Due to the limited funding, the site remains quite small and humble in comparison with Guangde Monastery and Jingye Chan Nunnery.

Plans for the reopening under the new name Qingfu Nunnery started in the 1990s (its architecture and areas are shown in figures 6 and 7), however the reopening took place only in the early 2000s, and it was decided to be assigned to nuns, as their residence and place of practice; the site was also authorized for organizing religious activities. In 2009, under Changlong's suggestion and with the consensus of the Buddhist laity and local government, the nun Changfa 昌法 was appointed as abbess in residence. Changfa brought a new life to the renewed nunnery: she rebuilt the *nianfo* hall and commissioned the construction of a Prajñā Lecture Hall; the latter hosted regular lectures on Buddhist texts and doctrine. The abbess also succeeded in returning one of the jade Buddha statues that Qingfu had donated to Baoguang Monastery back to the small nunnery, and to start a Master Qingfu Memorial Hall (Qingfu heshang jinianguan 清福和尚紀念館).¹⁴³

Qingfu Nunnery is a landmark in the local history; it is defined as a "Buddhist sacred site" (*Fojiao shengdi* 佛教聖地), and it serves as a shelter for local elderly nuns and a visible and significant reference point for the surrounding community.

¹⁴² For the history of the complex, see YL, pp. 251–52.

¹⁴³ Information about this site can be also found in GSZ 2010, pp. 228–29; similar data are posted just outside the nunnery. I am grateful to a senior resident nun for all the other details (personal communication August 6, 2019).

CONCLUSION

Baoguang Monastery, in Chengdu (Xindu district), was a major Buddhist temple during the Republican Period – a key site for monastic ordination and Sangha education. It also functioned as a military camp during the Sino-Japanese war. Today, it still preserves Buddhist relics and has a rich liturgical calendar. Protagonists of Republican-era Buddhism in Sichuan have all, in different capacities, connected with Baoguang, and the monk Qingfu was no exception. Just inside the gate of Baoguang there are a few panels reporting on the life and travels of what we see was a certain monk named Qingfo 青佛, a misspelling for Qingfu (see figure 1); Qingfu is remembered as a “modern Xuanzang,” and celebrated as well for the jade Buddha that he donated to the temple. These posters also include the drawing of the most popular portrait of Qingfu, who is represented wearing a monastic robe that reminds us of the southern tradition, but also carrying the *jieba* 戒疤, symbols of the Bodhisattva precepts, on his head; he holds a scroll in his hands, and thus evokes the scrolls that are often depicted in the usual iconography associated with Tang-era Xuanzang. Qingfu is memorialized, in the text and portrait of the posters as a pilgrim from Suining, and for being another Xuanzang. A second monk active in Suining was Chengyuan, who also traveled to South and Southeast Asia, not to collect material evidence of Buddhism but to learn the Theravāda model. This interest in Southeast Asian Buddhism, the project to revive the Theravāda – rather than Hīnayāna – tradition in China, and the quest for Original Buddhism all position Qingfu and Chengyuan beyond the local and unique history of Suining Buddhism and bring them into national and regional discourses.

The Suining version of the legend of Princess Miaoshan places her birth in Beihu Garden; later this area hosted nunneries, from Huiming Nunnery (built in the Song period by the nun Huiming) to the Aidao Buddhist Society (established via Qingfu in 1933), which were built in that specific place with the aim to resuscitate Miaoshan’s birthplace as a site of practice for Buddhist women. Huiming and Qingfu built nunneries after they had dreamed of a weeping Guanyin; the suffering that was felt was interpreted as due to her birthplace not anymore being a Buddhist center. The nuns, per se, have become Guanyin’s legacy, and at the same time they serve a mission to preserve and protect local Buddhist heritage. Republican Period nuns also connected with Longlian’s nunneries and practice in Chengdu, continuing a dynamic of interaction

and exchange between Suining and other parts of Sichuan and China that, in different forms, Qingfu had also carried out.

This article has demonstrated that Suining Buddhism has been negotiating its local identity through the participation in overarching and cross-regional patterns that formed the texture of modern Chinese – and in certain respects East Asian – Buddhism. And Suining contributes to this macro-narrative through specific responses. Silencing the local (and popular) quality of this micro-Buddhist sphere would delete an important heritage within the macrohistory of Chinese Buddhism.

My research has followed a microhistory approach. It has suggested the shift of attention to local communities in lesser-known places, while at the same time encouraged analysis of local patterns in their critical engagement with wider narratives. This is how, I argue, unheard stories and histories of religions can also be recollected and remembered, and (in)visible protagonists (for instance, the “non-eminent” monks Qingfu and Chengyuan, and “non-eminent” nuns like Changduan and Changgui) are not invisible any longer but have become visible. Such a research perspective can generate more, and different, historical memories; it can reposition the peripheries to the center of research and revive a lost heritage.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- GSZ 1988 Changnian 長念, *Guangde si zhi* (618–1988) 廣德寺誌 (618–1988)
- GSZ 2010 Shi Haishan 釋海山, Yang Guopin 楊國品, Li Xiaohua 李小華, Shi Puzheng 釋普正, Shi Nenggan 釋能干 et al., eds., *Guangde si zhi* 廣德寺誌
- JCZ Shi Shunling 釋順靈, Li Xiaohua 李小華, Liu Hui 劉輝 et al., eds., *Jingye Chanyuan zhi* 淨業禪院志
- Li *Jingtu* 李小華, ed., *Dushi zhong de jingtu: zoujin Zhongguo Guanyin guli, Jingye chanyuan* 都市中的淨土, 走進中國觀音故里, 淨業禪院
- SXZ Sichuansheng Suiningshi difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 四川省遂寧市地方誌編纂委員會, ed., *Suining xian zhi* 遂寧縣誌
- YL Qingfu 清福, ed. Puzheng 普正, *Yuanyin lueji* 源因略記



Figure 1. Qingfu's Portrait

*From a photograph by Stefania Travagnin, August 2019.
All figures presented here are derived similarly.*



*Figure 2. Qingfu's Gravestone
Located behind Guangde Monastery.*



*Figure 3. Jade Buddha Hall, Guangde Monastery
Shows Jade Buddha (center), and the jade seal from
emperor Zhenzong (right).*



Figure 4. Entrance of Jingye Chan Nunnery



*Figure 5. Jingye Chan Nunnery
Inner courtyard, with Main Shrine Hall and Tripitaka Hall.*



Figure 6. Entrance of Qingfu Nunnery



Figure 7. Inner Courtyard of Qingfu Nunnery