

CHAPTER THREE

THE BAILIN BUDDHIST TEMPLE:
THRIVING UNDER COMMUNISM

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Bailin is a Buddhist temple located about 300 kilometers (186 miles) south of Beijing. Before 1988, only a dilapidated pagoda (stupa) remained standing alone outside the county seat of Zhaoxian in Hebei. It was an abandoned site of ancient relics that only a few overseas pilgrims occasionally came to visit to reflect upon its glorious past. This Buddhist site can be traced to the ninth century C.E., when an eminent monk, dubbed the Zhaozhou Monk because of the temple's location, developed a distinct tradition of Chan Buddhism—the Zhaozhou Chan. The temple might be traced even back to the second century, when a Buddhist temple was first built on this site. In any case, this Buddhist center began to decay in the late Qing Dynasty, if not earlier. At the start of the “Cultural Revolution” (1966–1976), everything but the stupa that housed the Zhaozhou Monk's ashes was destroyed.

The year 1988 was a turning point. A Buddhist monk, the Venerable Master Jing Hui, came with the mission to revitalize Buddhism in Hebei Province. In the decade and a half following, a number of buildings have been constructed one after another, including the Guan Yin Hall, the Bell and Drum Tower, the Meditation Hall, living quarters, and so on. The non-stop construction climaxed with the grandeur of Ten-Thousand Buddha Hall completed in 2003. Now, the Bailin Temple has become a fourteen-acre (80 *mu*) compound of magnificent buildings in the traditional Buddhist style of architecture. Within 15 years, a site of ruins has been transformed into a sublime Buddhist center with a beautiful monastic environment. The number of residential monks has reached around 150, whose outlook and ritual performance have impressed many domestic and international Buddhist believers. Witnesses say that no one has ever seen Buddhist revitalization occur with such speed.

Bailin has functioned as the center of Buddhist revivals in Hebei Province. By the end of 1987, the whole Province of Hebei had only two Buddhist temples open for religious services; their shabby halls and tatty living quarters were in desperate need of renovation, but the small income from devotees and tourism was not enough even to support the daily life of the few ailing monks who tended the temples. In the whole province, no more than 4,000 lay Buddhist believers had taken *guiyi* (Chan 1989–1),¹ a formal rite of conversion comparable to baptism for Christians.² From that point on, however, Buddhist growth in Hebei has been nothing but extraordinary. For example, within two days in May 1988, 461 people in the county of Renxian in Southern Hebei took *guiyi* rite under the Venerable Jing Hui (Chan 1990–4). On 8 January 1995, over a thousand people took the rite at the Bailin Temple (Chan 1995–2). Upon arriving in Hebei, Jing Hui became the president of the Hebei Buddhist Association. Under his leadership, more and more temples were reopened, restored, or rebuilt throughout Hebei Province. By the end of 2003, there were over 580 Buddhist monks and nuns stationed at over 280 Buddhist temples open for religious services.³ Hebei suddenly became one of the provinces with a very active Buddhist Sangha (monks and nuns) and lay believers.

How did the Bailin Temple achieve such expansion within merely 15 years? How could it lead revivals throughout the whole province? How was this change possible in China today, where the ruling Chinese Communist Party continues to maintain a restrictive, even repressive, policy toward religion (Overmyer 2003; Kindopp and Hamrin 2004)? By examining the case of Bailin, this chapter seeks to explore the social and political factors for Buddhist revivals in China today.

¹ *Chan* magazine is the official publication of the Hebei Buddhist Association. The full texts of every issue have been online (<http://www.chancn.com/magazine/index.asp> (downloaded on September 13, 2004). Citations to this magazine will be noted by the year and issue number only.

² *Guiyi* is to “turn to and depend on” the three jewels—the Buddha, the Dharma (Buddhist teachings), and the Sangha (Buddhist clergy). The believer takes vows to follow the three jewels, be loyal to the three jewels, and is given a “Dharma name” by the officiating monk to signify the new Buddhist identity. Jing Hui and other Buddhist leaders in China often state that only those who have taken *guiyi* can be considered true Buddhists. Many Buddhist followers in China are not formal converts.

³ See the official website of the Hebei Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau (<http://www.hebmzt.gov.cn/HBreligion/index.jsp>, downloaded on December 21, 2004). In addition to these temples designated for religious services, there are also former Buddhist temples designated as tourist sites.

The Leadership of the Sangha

Traditional Chinese Buddhism has been a Sangha-centered religion. Following the Mahāyāna tradition, the Sangha is composed of celibate monks and nuns living at the temple-monastery to carry out their own practices, attend to the statues of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and perform rituals for lay worshippers. Some of the lay believers may take the conversion rite of *guiyi*, but they do not belong to, or formally affiliate with, a temple. Lay believers who are attracted by the Sangha, especially by the abbot, may patronize the temple by making donations to the monks or for the construction of temple buildings. Most lay believers go to a temple to make personal requests, and their donations tend to be small and spontaneous. Therefore, a temple's existence and expansion depends less on the number of regular attendees at the temple and more on a few wealthy and generous donors. A charismatic abbot is thus critical for a temple's survival and growth.

Venerable Master Jing Hui is the indispensable magnet in the success story of the Bailin Temple. He is an entrepreneurial monk who has mobilized multiple resources for his endeavors to revitalize Buddhism. Born in 1933 in Hubei Province in South-Central China, he was abandoned by his parents in dire poverty when he was only 18 months old. Reared at a Buddhist nunnery, he became a novice monk at age 15. A few years later, he took refuge as a disciple of the Venerable Master Xu Yun, the most revered Buddhist monk in modern China. In 1956, the Chinese Buddhist Academy was established. Jing Hui entered the first class, and upon graduation he was admitted to its graduate program. His talents and diligence were recognized by his classmates and teachers. However, sharing the fate of most clergymen in the 1950s and 1960s, in due time Jing Hui was persecuted and sent to a camp for reeducation through labor. During the brutal Cultural Revolution period, Jing Hui was even forced to return to a secular life in his hometown in Hubei Province.⁴ Not until 1979, when the CCP's religious policy changed from eradication to limited toleration, was he able to return to the religious life.

⁴ Several people told us that Jing Hui even got married in those years. Jing Hui himself has avoided talking about it, neither confirming or denying it, although the rumor of his marriage has been circulating within some circles of Buddhist believers and scholars. If this is true, it is an embarrassment that would taint his reputation.

Before coming to Hebei Province, Jing Hui worked as the chief editor of the *Fa Yin* (*Voice of Dharma*), the official magazine of Buddhist Association of China. Working at the magazine and being involved in the operation of the Buddhist Association of China for nearly a decade, Jing Hui gained remarkable experiences and unusual access to various resources. First of all, this mannerly monk was able to develop personal relationships with various important people, including major monks, lay activists, foreign Buddhist leaders, and government officials in charge of religious affairs. The political, religious, and financial support of these people was essential for the revitalization of the Bailin Temple. The trust of Mr. Zhao Puchu (1907–2000), the President of the Buddhist Association of China from 1980 till his death, was especially important. Zhao was the unchallenged leader of Chinese Buddhism in the last two decades of the twentieth century. He also held important political positions, including being the Vice Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, which is one level higher in rank in the Chinese political system than the director of the State Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB). The head of the State RAB indeed showed deference to Zhao on certain occasions.

Secondly, the nature of the work editing the magazine made it both necessary and possible for Jing Hui to become a scholar. This diligent monk managed to master an impressive amount of knowledge about Buddhist theories, ideas, and practices of various sects and major monks, and about modern developments of Buddhism in China and other societies. When the opportunity came, he knew what to do to revive Buddhism.

Finally, but most important, working in this important position helped Jing Hui develop a thorough understanding of political dynamics and policy subtleties. The chief editor of the official magazine is the ultimate gatekeeper of the information flow within the Chinese Buddhist community. He was responsible for publishing articles that were both appealing to Buddhist believers and also acceptable to the CCP authorities. Publishing a single politically incorrect article could result in his dismissal, as has happened to many magazines' chief editors in reform-era China. Some magazines were even closed due to one faulty article. At the same time, publishing articles of purely political propaganda may alienate Buddhist believers, or risk losing respect from fellow clergymen. In an interview in November 2004 at the Bailin Temple, Jing Hui told us:

Editing the magazine made me familiar with the state's policies and also made me master the means of propaganda toward the outside. It required a good grasp of policies in order to know what to do to get the best possible achievement. The work experience accumulated in those years is a very important resource for our current work. That resource comes not only from the prestige of the magazine, but through it I gained experience using the propaganda media, handling state policies in organizing religious activities, and coordinating with various departments and bureaus.

Then the opportunity came. In October 1987, he represented the Buddhist Association of China in accompanying a Japanese Buddhist delegation of over 100 people to visit the lonely stupa in Zhaoxian. Since 1980, some Japanese Buddhists had been coming on pilgrimage to the Zhaozhou stupa and other original temple sites of various sects (*zu ting*).⁵ The 1987 pilgrims expressed the wish to restore the Bailin Temple. They had even raised some funds in Japan for the restoration work. Before the trip, Jing Hui evidently had read extensively about the Zhaozhou Chan and its temple. Upon seeing the site with his own eyes, however, he could not help but feeling very sad about the ruined condition of the once glorious temple. A burden arose in his mind to do something for its restoration.

Soon after, coincidentally, representatives of the Hebei Province's CCP's United Front Department (UFD) and the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) went to Beijing to invite Jing Hui to come to establish the Hebei Buddhist Association. Jing Hui said that at first he declined several times, but then was persuaded by Zhao Puchu, the President of the Buddhist Association of China. Zhao commissioned Jing Hui to go and establish the Hebei Buddhist Association and revitalize the Bailin Temple and the Linji Temple, another renowned Buddhist temple in Hebei Province. With Zhao's endorsement and evident support from people with some political clout, Jing Hui accepted the challenge and came to Shijiazhuang, the capital of Hebei Province, on 4 January 1988. On his second day, a meeting of Buddhists representatives was held. Almost all of the monks and nuns in the whole

⁵ Mahāyāna Buddhism in China evolved into eight sects—Tiantai, Huayan, Sanlun, Weishi, Lü, Chan, Jingtu (Pureland), and Mi (esoteric), and various lineages or traditions developed within each sect. In modern times, however, Chinese Buddhists have often blended practices of different traditions (see Welch 1967, 1968). Japanese Buddhists appear to show more attachment to particular lineages or sectarian traditions.

of Hebei came, but the total number of the participants was only just over a dozen. These people elected Jing Hui to lead the steering committee to establish the Hebei Buddhist Association, and later officially elected him to be the President of the association.

Even before coming to Hebei, Jing Hui had attracted some highly educated young people as followers or disciples through the *Fa Yin* magazine. Following the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident, when the student-led pro-democracy movement was crushed by tanks, many college-educated young people began to turn to religion to search for personal salvation and national direction. A number of college graduates went on to become Buddhist monks and nuns. Jing Hui has attracted several such highly educated young people who became his disciple-monks.

Among Jing Hui's disciple-monks, the foremost is the Venerable Master Ming Hai. He majored in philosophy at Beijing University between 1987 and 1991. After the Tiananmen Square incident, he took *guiyi* in 1990, and two years later he had his head shaved and became a monk under Jing Hui. He has made significant contributions to the development of doctrine at Bailin, the construction of several buildings, and the organization of various activities. In 2004, Jing Hui formally passed on the title of Abbot of the Bailin Temple to the 37 year-old Ming Hai. Another important monk is the Venerable Master Ming Zhuang. He graduated from Zhongshan University in Guangzhou and became a monk under Jing Hui in 1995. In the following year, he began to play an active role in the summer camp, the key activity in Bailin's success, which will be described later. Now Ming Zhuang is in charge of running the summer camp and other activities specially targeting college-educated people. Overall, it is said that about a third of the Bailin Sangha have had a college education. These highly-educated, highly-dedicated, and highly-diligent young monks form the leadership core of the Bailin enterprises. Beginning in 1998, the Hebei Buddhist Academy (*foxueyuan*) was established and housed at the Bailin Temple. The more than one hundred novice monks at the Academy are also helping hands at the Bailin Temple. Together with their teachers, they comprise an outstanding Sangha community in China today.

A Marketable Brand of Buddhism

In late dynastic, or pre-modern, China, Buddhism became a religion very much detached from the world. The teachings focused on sufferings in the world and how to become free from these sufferings through chanting, rituals, and secluded meditation or 'sitting still' (*zuo chan* or *da zuo*). Most of the temples were monasteries in the deep mountains. Along with its increasing withdrawal from the world, Buddhism declined in Ming and Qing Dynasties.

However, throughout its long history, many Chinese Buddhists have emphasized helping others to achieve enlightenment and to engage the world. The Chan sect especially underscores gaining enlightenment in daily life. In modern times, some Buddhist laymen and monks hoped to reform traditional Buddhism and make it more relevant in social life. The most influential Buddhist reformer in the first half of the twentieth century was the Venerable Master Tai Xu (1890–1947). He advocated 'Buddhism in the World' (*renjian fojiao*). He also initiated such reforms as establishing Buddhist academies on the model of Christian seminaries and operating charity projects on the model of Christian missionary works. Whereas Tai Xu's experiments were criticized by most of his contemporary monks and nuns, in the second half of the twentieth century Buddhism in the World has influenced waves of revivals in Taiwan and diasporic Chinese communities.

One of the most notable contemporary leaders of reformed Buddhism has been the Venerable Master Hsing Yun (1927–), who developed the Foguangshan sect and led it in establishing many temples in Taiwan, Southeast Asia, and North America. He refers to his brand of Buddhism as 'Buddhism of Life' or 'Humanist Buddhism' (*rensheng fojiao* or *renben fojiao*). In March-April 1989, Hsing Yun made his first visit to mainland China, together with a 70-person delegation. Jing Hui, representing the Buddhist Association of China, was among the few who accompanied Hsing Yun and his delegation in their four-week pilgrimage journey throughout China. Afterwards, Jing Hui published an article to praise Hsing Yun for his strategic efforts in reviving Buddhism in the modern world (*Chan* 1989–2).

In the early 1990s, Jing Hui developed his own distinct brand of Buddhism—the Life Chan (*sheng huo chan*). To promote his ideas of Buddhism, Jing Hui launched a new magazine—the *Chan* magazine—

soon after his arrival in Hebei. Its intended audience is people interested in Chan Buddhism who may or may not be Buddhists. In the “Life Chan Pronouncement” published in the *Chan* magazine in the first issue of 1993, he states that learning Buddhism, practicing cultivation, and living life should be combined into an organic unity:

The so-called Life Chan is to meld the spirit of Chan and the wisdom of Chan into life, to realize the transcendence of Chan in life, and to manifest in life the realm of Chan, the spirit of Chan, and the wonder of Chan. The purpose of promoting Life Chan is to restore the lively nature of the Chan spirit, which is the result of melding Buddhist culture and Chinese culture. It is Buddhism with Chinese cultural characteristics. It is to apply the methods of Chan in the real life of the world in order to remove various problems, frustrations, and psychological obstacles in the life of modern people. It is to make our spiritual life more fulfilled, material life more dignified, moral life more righteous, emotional life more pure, human relations more harmonious, and social life more peaceful, so that we may approach the life of wisdom and life of perfection. (*Chan* 1993–1)

Jing Hui claims that his Life Chan is rooted in the long history of Mahāyāna Buddhism, the Chan Buddhist sect, and the Zhaozhou Chan tradition that was developed at the Bailin Temple in the ninth century. He also acknowledges that it is continuation of the modern trend of ‘Buddhism in the World’ or ‘Buddhism of Life.’ In a 2002 talk in Hong Kong, Jing Hui further explains:

The ultimate goal of Life Chan is ‘a life of enlightenment, a life of dedication’ (*jue wu ren sheng, feng xian ren sheng*). Where does this slogan come from? It is from the Zhaozhou monk’s famous cases of the ‘no-entrance gate’ and the ‘Zhaozhou bridge.’ These eight words are the modern interpretation of the Bodhisattva spirit, are the popular understanding of the dual-path of compassion and wisdom. The spirit of the whole of Mahāyāna Buddhism can be condensed into these words, ‘a life of enlightenment, a life of dedication.’ In order to make it even more applicable in individuals’ spiritual cultivation, in recent years I have further defined ‘a life of enlightenment’ and ‘a life of dedication’ as follows: ‘A life of enlightenment’ is continuous improvement of the quality of oneself . . . and ‘a life of dedication’ is continuous effort to harmonize self-other relations. The ultimate goal of compassion is to make all people in the world live harmoniously, love and care each other, and dedicate or sacrifice for each other. It is the harmonious life, the so-called ‘everyone is for me and I for everyone.’ (*Chan* 2002–6)

In 1993, Jing Hui created the Hebei Institute of Chan Studies and began to dig out and publish historical and scholarly works. In 1998,

he arranged with the highly respectable China Book Corps (zhonghua shu ju) to publish an annual volume of *Chan Studies in China* (*zhong-guo chan xue*), which targets scholars and advanced practitioners of Chan Buddhism. In 2000 he established the Hebei Buddhist Academy and began to recruit novice monks throughout the country. But the signature means of propagating Life Chan has been the Life Chan Summer Camp. Along with the “Life Chan Pronouncement” in the *Chan* magazine in the first issue of 1993 was an announcement that the Bailin Temple would hold the Life Chan Summer Camp for the young people who were interested in learning about Chan.

The first Life Chan Summer Camp was held in July 1993. The week-long camp included traditional Buddhist practices such as morning and evening chanting, sitting-still meditation, and walking meditation. It also had innovative activities appealing to intellectuals, such as lectures and discussion sessions with scholars and the more scholastic monks. In addition, it incorporated the modernized ritual of passing on the candlelight at an evening service, which has been popularized by Hsing Yun and his Foguangshan sect in Taiwan.

The first Life Chan Summer Camp was a great success. It attracted 150 young people from over 20 provinces, and two-thirds of them were college graduates or college students. That was unprecedented in mainland China because the vast majority of Buddhist believers have been less-educated, older people, mostly women. Most of the summer camp participants were readers of the *Chan* magazine who had not formally converted to Buddhism. However, on the fifth day of the week-long summer camp, over a hundred participants took a *guiyi* conversion rite (*Chan* 1993–4).

The Life Chan Summer Camp has become an annual event, with up to 500 participants in recent years, the maximum the temple could accommodate. It has also become known as the signature activity of the Bailin Temple, highly praised by the participants, top leaders of the Buddhist Association of China, overseas and domestic Buddhist clergy, and university scholars of Buddhist studies. The affirmation has come with generous financial support. The summer camp has been free of charge for the participants, and the funding has come from donations by Hong Kong Buddhist businesspeople. In fact, the summer camp has been the most effective means for Bailin Temple in attracting financial support for its physical expansion. Between 1993 and 2003, the Bailin Temple doubled in size by acquiring adjacent land. Several more buildings were erected, and each new one was finer and/or larger than the last. Most of the donors

were Buddhist entrepreneurs in Hong Kong or other overseas places. What inspired these donors, in addition to the charismatic Jing Hui, was the successful Life Chan Summer Camp. It gives them hope for a Buddhist revival in China under Communist rule.

Political Support by the Authorities

Both the Sangha leadership and having a marketable brand of Buddhist ideas and practices have been important for Bailin Temple's revitalization. But the most critical factor for its success has been the political support of government officials. Without the permission of the authorities, there would have been no reconstruction of the Bailin Temple. After all, the old Bailin Temple had been largely destroyed *before* the Communists took power, thus it fell outside of the range of 'implementing the religious policy' after 1979. The post-1979 religious policy has been very much restricted to restoring temples, churches, and mosques to the level immediately before the Cultural Revolution or that of the late 1950s at best. The Bailin Temple was not on the 1983 list of 'major temples' designated for restoration as religious venues, which includes only two Buddhist temples in Hebei—Linji in Zhengding and Puning in Chengde. That list was suggested by the Buddhist Association of China, approved by the State Religious Affairs Bureau, and decreed by the State Council, which is the top cabinet of the Chinese government. In spite of the lack of status, the Bailin Temple nonetheless was granted permission for restoration—indeed, not only permitted, but also actively encouraged and supported by the authorities on all levels.

The Provincial Government

Before coming to Hebei, Jing Hui had no meaningful connection with Hebei Province. He was not born there and had never lived there. It is also important to note that there had been very few Buddhist believers in Hebei in the 1980s. Catholicism and Islam have been much more prominent with large and active communities, and Protestantism has been growing fast.⁶ However, for reasons not

⁶ It has been well-known that about a quarter or more of Chinese Catholics have been in Hebei Province. This means that there were about a million Catholics in Hebei in the late 1980s, according to the officially published national statistics.

publicly articulated, the provincial government wanted to develop Buddhism. According to articles in the *Chan* magazine and our interviews with Jing Hui, it was the Hebei Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) and the United Front Department (UFD) that initiated the contact with Jing Hui, inviting him to Hebei to establish the Hebei Buddhist Association. The first meeting of Buddhists in Hebei, organized by the Hebei RAB in anticipation of Jing Hui's arrival, was held on the second day of his arrival in the provincial capital of Shijiazhuang City.

What motivated the Hebei RAB and UFD to recruit an outside monk to establish the Hebei Buddhist Association? One reason might be that there had been strong demand by Buddhist believers in Hebei. But we have not found any evidence of this at this time. Or perhaps the Hebei RAB hoped to have a strong provincial Buddhist association in order to curb troubles caused by Buddhist believers. Articles in the *Chan* magazine indicate that there were some unspecified 'troubles' among Buddhists in Xingtai and other prefectures. Another possible reason might be that the underground Catholics and Protestants had been a constant headache for the Hebei RAB and UFD, so much so that the officials wished to use Buddhism to counterbalance the growing Catholicism and Protestantism. After Jing Hui's arrival in Hebei, one of his first assigned tasks was to organize the Buddhist association for the Prefecture of Baoding, which happens to be the very center of underground Catholics in China (Madsen 1998, 2003). Upon probing during an interview with us, however, Jing Hui responded by saying that he did not know and did not hear about such an intention of the authorities to use Buddhism to counterbalance Catholicism. Nonetheless, generally speaking, the Chinese authorities put more trust in Buddhists than Christians, and some officials have expressed their wish to see more and better development of Buddhism than Christianity, for Buddhism is considered a native or fully assimilated religion, whereas Christianity remains to be perceived as somewhat foreign. Finally, another likely reason for the provincial government's support of Bailin Temple is a pragmatic consideration for diplomacy. With the quite frequent visits of certain

There have been several Hui Muslim autonomous counties in Hebei. The Hebei Religious Affairs Bureau reports 580,000 Muslims and 350,000 Protestants in 2003 (see <http://www.hebmzt.gov.cn/HBreligion/index.jsp>, downloaded on December 21, 2004). We have not found specific statistics or estimates of religious believers in Hebei in the 1980s.

Japanese and other overseas pilgrims to the Buddhist holy sites in Hebei, it was an embarrassment for the Hebei authorities, especially those in charge of religious affairs, that there was no corresponding Buddhist association to receive the international Buddhist guests properly, who were considered to be among the friendly international forces for China. Nevertheless, based on our research up to now, we do not have clear evidence about the initial motivation of the Hebei RAB and UFD for recruiting Jing Hui to develop Buddhism in Hebei Province. Further research is necessary to clarify this matter.

No matter what was the motivation, however, the Hebei government has provided firm and persistent support for Jing Hui in his efforts to develop Buddhism in Hebei. The Hebei RAB actively and insistently recruited Jing Hui, covered the expenses of his initial activities in Hebei, and directed the local county government to 'return' the site of the Bailin Temple to the newly established Hebei Buddhist Association. Since then, the Hebei RAB has sent representatives to every major activity of the Bailin Temple, including every ceremony of ground-breaking and dedication of the buildings, every Life Chan Summer Camp, and other major gatherings. Furthermore, provincial support has gone up in rank. In addition to the Hebei RAB and UFD officials, several top-level officials of the Hebei Province have visited the Bailin Temple either as congratulatory representatives at major events or on special visits. The list of the provincial dignitaries includes provincial vice governors, the provincial governor, and the provincial CCP secretary. Their presence at the gatherings and their special visits have conveyed an unambiguous message of political support for Jing Hui and the Bailin Temple. Jing Hui told us in November 2004:

Because the Life Chan Summer Camp is a cross-provincial activity, according to the state's regulations, each year we must send in advance an application to the provincial bureaus and departments in charge of religious affairs. Only after the application is approved can we proceed. . . . During the past twelve years, once or twice we considered not holding the summer camp. We reported [our intention] to the government. But the provincial RAB and UFD disagreed, asking us not to stop for any reason. They told us that we must continue to do it, for the summer camp is a bright spot in Hebei's Buddhist culture. It is also a bright spot in our province's religious affairs. They said that if you discontinue, the effect would not be good, for other people may think that it is we who did not allow you to do it. Therefore,

you have to do it. Whatever difficulties there are we can work together to solve them. [Therefore,] we decided to continue to do it by shoring up our courage, facing the reality, and overcoming difficulties.

Governmental support also means governmental supervision and pressure. The Hebei Provincial bureaus obviously liked the Summer Camp so much that the Bailin Temple could not stop doing it.

The County Government

Similarly important for the success of Bailin Temple is the support by the local government of Zhaoxian County. This is evident when we consider other unsuccessful efforts of Jing Hui. On top of the list of tasks handed to Jing Hui was to restore the Linji Temple, a much more famous temple designated for restoration by the State Council in 1983. Linji is in the jurisdiction of Zhengding County, which is in the same Shijiazhuang Prefecture as Zhaoxian County. The officials of Zhengding County have not been cooperative, so that the Linji restoration effort has made little progress. The head of the Zhengding County RAB was not in favor of developing Buddhism. Coincidentally, according to Jing Hui, he was a person of Hui ethnicity. The Hui is one of ten ethnic groups that believe in Islam. Another initial effort of Jing Hui in Hebei was to establish the Buddhist association in Baoding Prefecture and revitalize Buddhism there. That has not been successful either. Several Baoding Municipal and Prefecture bureaus have blocked the effort to return and restore a Buddhist temple—the Great Compassion Hall (*da ci ge*)—for religious services. One of the arguments was that the Great Compassion Hall was not a functional temple in the 1950s and 1960s, so that it was not within the scope of ‘implementing the religious policy’ meant to return the pre-Cultural Revolution religious properties to religious organizations.

In contrast, the Zhaoxian County government has given the Bailin Temple unequivocal support. First of all, in order to ‘return’ the site to the Hebei Buddhist Association, it had to relocate the Zhaoxian Normal School and the county Education Bureau that had occupied that site. Relocating important educational institutions to give way for building a Buddhist temple could have caused opposition by intellectuals as well as communist ideologues. The Bailin Temple had become defunct long before, thus not as justifiable for restoration as those temples that were closed down during the ‘Cultural Revolution.’

After a brief round of talks, however, the Zhaoxian government generously granted about seven acres (40 *mu*) of land around the dilapidated stupa to the newly established Hebei Buddhist Association. Less than ten years later, another piece of land of similar size was added to the Bailin Temple compound. Meanwhile, the Zhaoxian County top-level officials have been present at all major events of the Bailin Temple.

Why does the county government support the construction and expansion of the Bailin Temple? The published speeches given by the county CCP secretary and county governor at major events of the temple clearly show that the major consideration has been economic. The local officials perceive the Bailin Temple as a potential opportunity for the county's economic development. They hope that the temple will attract domestic and international visitors and tourists, some of whom might become interested in bringing the goods and produce of Zhaoxian to other parts of the country and other parts of the world, and some of them might then also be lured to invest in Zhaoxian. The standard passage in the official speeches is about the economic strengths of Zhaoxian. For example, at the opening ceremony of the first Life Chan Summer Camp in 1993, the county governor said:

The restored Bailin Temple is a golden bridge of exchanges between Chinese and foreign Buddhists. Zhaoxian has a long history, outstanding people, and abounding land. The folk ethos is simple and kind. . . . The Zhaoxian economy has made impressive gains in recent years, with advanced agricultural methods and rich products. It is our nation's distinguished base for commercial crops and high quality wheat. The superior quality of the Zhaozhou snowflake pear is well-known both in China and the world. The county and town industries have reached the primary level, with over five hundred products that are quite competitive. In order to speed up the pace of reforms and opening-up, the county government has established a four-square-kilometer economic development zone and has created a series of favorable policies to encourage investments by foreign businesspeople. We sincerely welcome Chinese and foreign businesses and individuals to come to Zhaoxian to invest in commerce and establish enterprises. Our unique advantages and the good investment environment have attracted many businesspeople to invest here. We genuinely hope Buddhist friends will get to know Zhaoxian and will spread good words about Zhaoxian, so that we can better develop this piece of sacred land. (*Chan* 1993-4)

Given that most of the participants of the Life Chan Summer Camp were young people and college students, the governor's pitch might

seem to be out of place. However, the listeners of this speech, thus the intended audience of it, were not limited to the summer camp participants, but also the summer camp's sponsors and the temple's patrons, many of whom were overseas Chinese businesspeople.

The economic motivation of the county government becomes even more apparent in the Bailin Square Project. Beginning in 2001, a 33,000 square-meter (eight acre) commercial plaza has been developed across from the Bailin Temple. It was designated as one of the major economic development projects of Shijiazhuang Prefecture and Zhaoxian County. It claims to be the country's largest wholesale center for material goods used in Buddhism, such as statues, incenses, construction materials, music instruments, clothes, and other artifacts. The plaza is also intended to be a center for tourist goods and crafts, and to be a tourist spot along with the Bailin Temple and the famous Zhaozhou Bridge. How much economic benefits for the county have been generated by the temple-related projects remains to be studied.

The Central Government

The most important support for the Bailin Temple, however, comes from officials of the central government. Without the open encouragement of the highest authorities, the Bailin Temple would have been unable to hold the large-scale, high-profile, cross-provincial activity of the Life Chan Summer Camp. Without tacit backing by the highest authorities, Bailin Temple would have been unable to sustain criticisms from inside the Buddhist community and from Communist ideologues. At the interview in November 2004, Jing Hui said:

Consistent support by the government is the fundamental assurance and guarantee for the expansion of our activities. This is because the Life Chan Summer Camp is a very sensitive activity. Many college students have participated in it. Some people raised criticisms, saying that Buddhism was competing with the Communist Party for the next generation. This view was brought to the Central United Front Department and the State Religious Affairs Bureau. In response, they [the officials] did some explanations, saying that the young people and college students we had were those who had been believers of Buddhism. Some college students came occasionally [without previous Buddhist faith], but they came not really to convert to Buddhism. They came because they were interested in Buddhism, and their study was related to Buddhism. It was helpful for their academic study to hear lectures

by some experts. Such explanations we cannot make. It must be done by the government [officials]. The State Religious Affairs Bureau, the Hebei Religious Affairs Bureau, and the United Front Department did a lot of work. They have indeed given us powerful support. They have given us the green-light. Their support is the fundamental assurance and guarantee.

The support of the central government manifests itself in publishing positive news reports in the *China Religions* magazine, the official publication of the State Religious Affairs Bureau, and other state media. They have also arranged to have China Central Television make a special news report about the Bailin Temple. But the most effective support is through the visits of high-ranking officials. On 15 April 1999, the Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and Politburo member, Li Ruihuan, visited Bailin Temple. On 1 April 2000, Vice Premier Qian Qishen came. On 5 November 2001, President Jiang Zemin, accompanied by top military and party officials, made a visit. During the process of rebuilding the Bailin Temple, there have been various difficulties and obstacles. This is not really surprising in China today as the religious policy remains restrictive in many ways. But the visits of top officials changed things. Jing Hui told us:

Things gradually began to turn better after the dedication of the Hall of the Universal Illuminating Light in 1992. The really important moment was after completing the Guanyin Hall in 1995, when the Provincial Party Secretary made a visit. From then on it has really turned better. . . . On 5 November 2001, President Jiang Zemin came to visit us. The situation turned unprecedentedly better. His visit itself was a very great support to us. It was not only helpful for us here, but also helpful for the whole Buddhist community.

Overjoyed by President Jiang's visit, Jing Hui published several pieces of poems in the *Chan* magazine to celebrate this unusual occasion. He explained in an interview with a Malaysia Buddhist magazine in 2002:

President Jiang's descending upon our temple delighted all of our clergymen and laymen, even the whole Buddhist community [of the country]. It shows that leaders of the central government affirm Buddhist endeavors, Buddhist activities, and the Buddhist status in today's China. Therefore we were all delighted. This would bring a new momentum for our Bailin Temple's endeavors to spread the dharma and benefit the people. It was also an encouragement and impeller. President Jiang Zemin stayed at the Bailin Temple for over an hour, touring through all the buildings. During the tour, he spoke affirmatively about our

activities in the past few years. He thought that what we had done—developing Buddhist culture, temple management, and contribution to society—had great significance and very positive influence for the rule of morality promoted by the state at the present.⁷

After Jiang's visit, other high-rank officials have continued to come to visit the Bailin Temple. The latest one was Politburo member Li Changchun on 11 November 2004.

Why does the central government support the Bailin Temple? The last sentence of the above quote of Jing Hui suggests that the authorities might be interested in the positive moral functions of Buddhism. Market transition has been accompanied by the moral and political corruption of government officials, and social anomie among people of all walks of life. In response, the CCP has periodically carried out political campaigns and ideological propaganda to renew political and ethical principles among its members and all citizens. However, these efforts have failed to stop moral decadence. Some elite scholars and government officials have begun to consider the possibility of using religions to supplement the political and ideological efforts. However, this line of thinking—religions may make moral contributions to society—is contradictory to orthodox Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. Dogmatic ideologues have criticized and resisted the change. The more pragmatic leaders have also been cautious in calling for contributions by religious groups. They share with the ideologues the concern that strong religious groups could result in political challenges to CCP's rule. Jiang's visit to the Bailin Temple was indeed a bold move in this regard. It indicates that this brand of Buddhism has gained some level of trust from the highest authorities.

However, the most important reasons to support the Bailin Temple are political. One concerns the outside world: Bailin Temple is used as a showcase of China's freedom of religion. The other concerns managing religious affairs: Bailin Temple is used as a model of religious accommodation to the socialist society under CCP rule.

China has been constantly criticized by Western countries for its bad human rights record, including its restriction of religious freedom. To answer Western criticisms, the Chinese government has published the White Paper about Freedom of Religious Beliefs in

⁷ See the WebPage of the Bailin Temple: <http://bailinsi.fjnet.com/NEW-CHANNE/blch/BOLINTALK26.HTM>. Downloaded on December 28, 2004.

1997 and several other white papers about the human rights situation in China. It has also invited foreign delegations of religious leaders to visit religious sites in China. The Bailin Temple in the 1990s became an excellent showcase for the purpose of international public relations. In the most recent visit by the Politburo member Li Changchun, he made this remark: "We should more often arrange for foreigners to come here to see, to let them know, the real status of religion in China."⁸ Jing Hui understands very well this intention of the central government, and he tries to use it for his own purposes of reviving Buddhism in China. He told us:

The government wants to make us a window for external propaganda regarding religion. But propaganda about religion should play down the political ideology, only by doing so can it be effective for external propaganda, can it have positive effects. . . . Policy should leave enough space for religion. Zhao Qizheng [Director of the International Communication Office of the CPC Central Committee] and Li Changchun [Politburo member] both said that we had this space. Regarding religious affairs work for international and domestic purposes, I have over 20 years of experience, or it can be said that I have over 50 years of experience, borne with the new China. I have seen much and have done much, so that I am very clear about how far we can go, about the proper extent of observing the religious policies, about what to tell them [foreigners], and about what we want to get them to do.

Asian countries have been less confrontational in criticizing China's human rights situation, although they may also hold unfavorable views regarding it. Some Asian religious leaders try to promote their particular religion in China by making frequent pilgrim visits to the temples. In fact, without the frequent visits of Japanese Buddhists in the 1980s, the Bailin Temple would have remained a site of ancient relics at most. Jing Hui admits:

In history, our country's Buddhism had a very great impact on the four countries of Vietnam, North Korea, South Korea, and Japan. Up to now they still come often to China to visit the original temple sites. After the Cultural Revolution, Chinese Buddhism has been restored and has developed quite fast. This is inseparable from the push by people of these countries. In Hebei, the most eminent sites are the

⁸ See the WebPage of the Bailin Temple: <http://bailinsi.fjnet.com/NEW-CHANNE/WSBL/FMQX/041111/lcclf.htm> Downloaded on December 28, 2004.

Linji and Bailin Temples. Without the help of the Japanese, it would have taken another decade or more to begin the restoration (*Chan* 2000–2).

Not only do the Japanese continue to make frequent visits to the Bailin Temple, now European and American delegations have also been brought there.

The other important reason the central government supports the Bailin Temple is for domestic purposes. Since 1979, the Chinese government has allowed five religions to operate under the ‘patriotic’ associations. In spite of various pragmatic measures regarding the economy, culture, and social life, however, the reform-era CCP has not given up its Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology. Throughout the last two decades, restrictions on religious organizations have actually increased instead of being relaxed (Potter 2003; Kindopp and Hamrin 2004). However, restrictive regulations and heavy handed suppression have not been effective in curtailing religious revivals, but have driven some believers into the underground or into finding creative ways to go around the regulations (*Yang forthcoming*).

In the mid-1990s, an alternative strategy was adopted. Instead of confrontation and containment, the authorities now wish to co-op religious organizations. President Jiang Zemin called for officials to “actively guide the religions to accommodate the socialist society.” Since then, concerted efforts have been made to encourage religious leaders to develop new theologies suitable for the socialist system under CCP rule. For example, the State RAB and Central UFD have pressed Protestants to undertake a campaign of ‘theological construction.’ Bishop Ding Guangxun has since advocated a theology of love, so that non-Christians would not feel excluded from Christian salvation. However, resistance by Christian clergy and lay leaders has been strong, for they believe the theology of love contradicts the belief in ‘salvation by faith through grace.’ Given this situation, it is indeed delightful for the CCP leaders to find that Jing Hui’s Life Chan appeals to Buddhist believers. They hope that other Buddhist leaders would come in line, and wish that other religions would model themselves on the Bailin Temple’s approach. For example, on 23 August 2004, a group of 66 Catholic leaders participating in a national seminar led by Bishop Ma Yinglin was brought to the Bailin Temple.

The Bailin Temple has not only developed a highly marketable brand of Buddhism, the Life Chan, its Sangha has also frequently

expressed patriotism. At major gathering events, the first item of the ritual procedure has always been playing the national anthem, a clear symbol of patriotism. The Bailin monks have also learned to repeat 'love the country and love the religion,' with 'love the country' ahead of 'love the religion.' In the long speech given at the Third Conference of the Board of Directors of Hebei Buddhist Association on 29 November 2001, Jing Hui made repeated calls for patriotism:

First and foremost [among the tasks of the Buddhist Association] is to love the country. The second is to do religious work. No matter what Buddhist organization on what level, whether you are at the county level or the municipal level, you must have a clear goal. First, it is to lead the mass of believers to love the country. Second it is to guide the masses of believers to have a proper religious life and perform corresponding religious activities. . . . The fundamental responsibility of the Buddhist association is to lead the mass of believers to walk on the way of love for the country and the religion, maintaining the orthodox beliefs and the orthodox acts. . . . Everyone must understand the rich contents of 'love the country.' Love the country is not abstract and empty talk. It has concrete contents. At the present time, to love the country is to passionately love our present socialist motherland. We live in the land of the People's Republic of China, so two fundamental principles are unshakeable. The first is to follow the Chinese Communist Party's leadership. The second is to support the socialist system. These two principles are the core of love the country. There is no ambiguity about it (*Chan* 2002-1).

In addition to frequently making patriotic statements, Jing Hui insists that the Life Chan is very compatible with the CCP's idealism. He states:

It is totally possible to make Buddhism accommodate socialist society. The Buddha told us, the most fundamental principle of spreading the dharma is 'the proper theory for the right moment.' The proper theory for the right moment requires us to combine the Buddhist dharma with the particular social reality and mental reality, to serve the fundamental goal of purifying human hearts, and solemnifying the nation (*Chan* 2002-2).

Jing Hui even equates the ideal Communist Society to the 'Pure Land' in Buddhism, saying that it is the best social system that humans have ever come up with.

If we really live according to those ideal goals, our country will have a very promising future. Communism is in accordance with the fundamental spirit of Buddhism. Because of this, we hope that Buddhist

thought, Buddhist culture, and Buddhist moral spirit can contribute to the construction of socialist material and spiritual civilization. Our future society, to use our Buddhist terminology, should be a pure land in the world. This is our ideal. To construct the pure land in the world, everyone of us must have high moral standards and conscience, put oneself under the cultivation ideal of Buddhist ‘do no evil, do all good, and cleanse one’s own mind,’ and regulate one’s words and acts by the rules of the five precepts and the ten goodnesses. If we can all do this, then we can say that we can realize the construction of a socialist spiritual civilization (*Chan* 1999–1).

These words are certainly music to the ears of the CCP leaders who are in pressing need for affirmation of its ideological goals and for popular support for its leadership.

Conclusion

Bailin Temple has been thriving. The major factors for its success include the able leadership of the well-connected and well-positioned Venerable Jing Hui, his articulation and promotion of a marketable brand of Buddhism—the Life Chan—with innovative slogans and practices, the financial support of wealthy overseas and domestic donors, and most importantly, the political support of government officials.

The political support of the authorities for Buddhist development may not be totally surprising in reform-era China. In spite of the fact that the Chinese Communist Party insistently claims to adhere to the ideology of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, in fact pragmatism has dominated the process of its policy-making in most social spheres, including religious affairs. Before the reforms started in 1979, driven by the radical ideology, the CCP prohibited all religions in Chinese society. But the eradication measures from 1966 to 1979 failed. Religious believers persevered in the underground, and the number of Christians even multiplied during that period. With the publication in 1982 of “The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Affairs during the Socialist Period of Our Country” (Document No. 19) the CCP acknowledges that religion will not wither away any time soon and that religious affairs must be handled with great care. It instructs CCP and government officials to rally religious believers for the central task of economic construction. Out of pragmatic considerations, religion has been tolerated. Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism under the government-sanctioned

'patriotic' associations have been allowed to operate as long as the believers love the country, support CCP rule, and observe the socialist laws. Since the mid-1990s, the policy of passive toleration has been replaced by 'actively guiding religions to adapt to the socialist society,' which in reality means that religious believers must follow the Party line. All five religions have been pressed by the authorities to revise or reconstruct their respective theologies to make the adaptation.

The Venerable Jing Hui and his Bailin Temple have followed the Party line closely. He not only provides frequent lip-service to the CCP leaders, defers to them, and honors them on many occasions, but he also offers a new brand of Buddhism that seems to be quite compatible with Communist ideology. Or, at least he appears to speak in earnest about the compatibility of Life Chan Buddhism and Communism.

While winning the political support of the authorities, Jing Hui has also tried hard to maintain his legitimacy in orthodox Buddhism. In this regard, inheriting the ancient Bailin Temple that was eminent for a distinctive tradition of Zhaozhou Chan is very helpful. This religious capital has been indispensable for Jing Hui. Meanwhile, Jing Hui has repeatedly emphasized his discipleship status under the Venerable Xu Yun, who was probably the most revered monk among the Buddhist Sangha and laity in modern China. The aura of Jing Hui comes in part from his lineage claim as a loyal disciple of the charismatic Xu Yun. Interestingly, Xu Yun was known to be a traditionalist monk, very unlike reformist Tai Xu who advocated 'Buddhism in the World.' Nonetheless, Jing Hui has managed to claim the heritage of both Xu Yun's traditionalist charisma and Tai Xu's reformist teaching.

To explain the success of the Bailin Buddhist Temple in today's China, it is necessary to go beyond institutional factors as well as individuals' tactics. In the sociological literature of religious growth and decline, the dominant supply-side model argues that in an unregulated religious market, strict and competitive groups tend to grow (see Finke and Stark 1992; Finke and Iannaccone 1993; Iannaccone 1994; Finke 1997; Stark and Finke 2000). However, the thriving Bailin Temple is not strict, for it has offered the Summer Camp free of charge to the participants. Nor is its doctrine in high tension with the surrounding culture. To the contrary, Jing Hui has proclaimed a brand of Buddhism that clearly accommodates the ruling Chinese

Communist Party and its Communist ideology. The Life Chan emphasizes living harmoniously with other people, rather than challenging others. This low tension, not very strict temple has been thriving under Communism.

The key to understanding Bailin's success lies in the political context. The religious economy in China is highly regulated. To explain the religious dynamics in Communist-ruled China under heavy regulation, it is necessary to distinguish three parallel markets (Yang *forthcoming*). State-sanctioned religious groups and activities comprise the 'red market.' Underground religious groups and activities comprise the 'black market.' Legally ambiguous groups and activities comprise the 'gray market.' The group dynamics in the three markets are different. The Bailin temple has been thriving in the red market, in which the most important factor for success is winning the trust and support of government officials. Indeed, political submission to the government and theological accommodation to the ruling ideology are preconditions for a group's legal existence. The factors leading to Bailin's successes are likely to be relevant for other religious groups in the red market. But these factors probably are not effective for religious groups in the black or gray markets.

As a temple in a highly regulated economy, the success of the Bailin Temple has clear limitations. While the Life Chan doctrine pleases the authorities, some other Buddhists may regard it as a compromise and consider it unacceptable. In the limited time of this study, we have not found open criticisms of the Bailin Temple doctrine and practices by other Buddhist monks or lay believers. In the interview with us, however, Jing Hui did mention in passing that there were criticisms of the Bailin activities by other Buddhists as well as by people outside the Buddhist community, but that the criticisms were muted after President Jiang Zemin's visit in 2001. Therefore, the apparent blooming of the Bailin Temple is not a result of fair competition in a free market. In fact, there has been a shortage of supply in the highly regulated religious economy in Communist-ruled China (Yang 2004). As demand exceeds supply, religious seekers often fill most of the temples and churches that have managed to stay open.

Another limitation of the Bailin Temple's success is that it is not a local congregation. Although the local county government has supported the temple's expansion, we were told that not many local residents were regular participants in the temple. Most of the participants

of the signature activity—the Life Chan Summer Camp—come from afar, often from other provinces. Most of the major donors have been overseas Chinese Buddhist businesspeople. How long the Bailin Temple can maintain the continuous support of these distant devotees remains to be observed.

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