

## DYNAMICS OF THE BUDDHIST REVIVAL MOVEMENT IN SOUTH CHINA: STATE, SOCIETY, AND TRANSNATIONALISM\*

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### I. Introduction

A resurgence of Buddhism has been occurring in China since 1979. This is surprising given harsh state policies towards religion in the preceding decades. After coming to power the Communist Party gradually restricted religious practice and institutions. During the 1950s smaller Buddhist temples were taken over by various public entities for factories, schools, recreation halls and military sites, while younger nuns and monks were compelled to disrobe and marry, and older ones were gathered in larger temples for reeducation. During the Cultural Revolution all religious activity was labeled “feudal superstition,” temples were sealed and defaced by Red Guards, and old monks and nuns were forced into menial jobs (Welch 1972). By the late 1970s there were no openly operating religious sites while existing religious practice was furtive and underground. In 1979 state policies changed from suppressing religion to recognizing its legitimacy. Since then Buddhism has not only revived but is flourishing as temples are rebuilt, new clergy trained, and rituals performed.

This revival is especially dynamic in Fujian province. The province’s estimated 4,000 Buddhist temples, nuns and monks constitute about half of all Buddhist temples and clergy in China.<sup>1</sup> Temples once occupied by local governments and public units have been reclaimed by Buddhists and rebuilt. Steady streams of worshippers and tourists to major temples rise to torrents of tens of thousands during such festival days as Guan Yin’s birthday. This flourishing has been noted by Chinese and foreign observers alike. The historian Arthur Waldron writes: “Today, southern and southeast China in particular are alive with Buddhist observances and young monks and nuns and pilgrims of all ages are in evidence — some of them communist cadres who have turned to Buddha - and delight in the freedom to travel, share fellowship and devotion, and perhaps acquire some scared souvenirs” (Waldron 1998: 131). Researchers from the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences have commented on the marked economic self-

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<sup>1</sup> These figures refer only to Han Buddhism and do not include the Lama Buddhism of the Tibetan and Mongolian minorities or the Pali Buddhism of southern minorities such as the Dai in Yunnan Province.

sufficiency of the region's temples (Luo 1991: 170-182). And the Catholic priest and specialist of Chinese religion Donald MacInnis singled out Nanputuo Temple, in the commercial city of Xiamen, as the "most vibrantly active temple I visited" (MacInnis 1989: 124) during a tour of three provinces.

Explanations of this revival view it, explicitly or otherwise, as a shift in state and society relations. The transformation since 1979 of a Maoist state pursuing class struggle into a developmentalist state seeking market-led economic growth has been accompanied by more liberal social and cultural policies that have tolerated such once proscribed institutions as religion, rituals, and popular traditions (Anagnost 1994, Siu 1989, Stockwell 1993). The few scholars who focus on southeast China's religious flourishing attribute it to the region's extensive links to overseas Chinese which provide economic support and enhance local government tolerance (Dean 1993, 1998; Madsen 1998).

This chapter explains southeast China's Buddhist revival movement by merging a state-society analysis with a transnational perspective. The former highlights consequences in state policy and ideology for societal actors and the actions of societal actors to expand their autonomy and legitimacy, both through self-organization and bargaining with the state. The latter focuses on networks of resources and perceptions traversing sovereign borders. My explanation, drawing on overlapping concerns within these two perspectives, emphasizes how transnational networks between a locale in southeast China and overseas Chinese communities affect local state-society relations in the context of the Buddhist revival. In the next section I critically examine several explanations of religious flourishing in south China and sketch my own framework. Subsequent sections shall; examine the historical context that stimulated the growth of Xiamen's Buddhist community and subsequent emigration of master monks to the Chinese diaspora; the central state perceptions and policies since 1979 in regard to overseas Chinese, economy, and religion, and the especially liberal local government interpretations in southeast China; sketch the revival of Xiamen's Buddhist community in the context of these liberal policies; describe the transnational financial and personnel movements between Xiamen and overseas Chinese locales that help constitute the revival; consider the somewhat ambiguous implications of these transnational practices for the legitimacy of Xiamen's Buddhist activities in the eyes of the local government; and discuss theoretical implications in conclusion. My data draws on interviews and documents obtained in fieldwork in Xiamen, Fujian's main commercial city, and visits to other areas in China in 1989-90, return trips to Xiamen in 1995, 1998, and 1999, and visits to temples in New York, Boston, Los Angeles, and Singapore with links to Xiamen in 1993, 1994, 1997, and 1998.

## II. *Theoretical Considerations*

State-society explanations that focus on south China's religious flourishing are either too generalized and ahistorical to explain the dynamics of the local revival or do not consider broader institutional systems of organization and legitimacy in which state and religious actors are embedded. Richard Madsen's account of China's Catholic revival reflects the former tendency. Although primarily based on fieldwork in north China's Hubei Province, Madsen also notes the greater vitality of the Catholic resurgence in the south. He attributes this to a confluence of factors: "the south — especially the southern coastal areas — is more prosper-

ous, has a greater variety of ties to the outside world, and is less constrained by the rigid political control of the Party center in Beijing” (Madsen 1998: 20). Madsen maintains that these factors enhance the autonomy of the southern Church from the state and promote unity within the Church. However, Madsen never explains how these factors are connected to each other, instead treating them as variations within a national state-society framework (i.e. poor versus wealthy, less versus more state control, less versus more outside ties). My basic position is that a more powerful explanation of the southeast revival can be obtained by taking this regional revival as the object of explanation rather than deriving an explanation *ex post facto* of the revival as variations on national state-society processes. Towards this end I more carefully consider local history and its interaction with national and global processes.

The local focus of Kenneth Dean’s study of the revival of Taoism and popular cults in Fujian overcomes these problems of Madsen’s account but raises further problematics. Dean argues that local Fujian governments see the revival of religious activities as a way to obtain revenue from wealthy overseas Chinese believers who come to participate in religious activities (Dean 1993: 5). Due to this strong economic interest, Fujian government officials take a stance towards religion that is more tolerant than central state religious policy. Dean weaves together the factors mentioned by Madsen into a process rooted in local history and state-society relations. In so doing he overcomes several other weaknesses of Madsen’s study. First, his focus on the institutional interests of local government bypasses the reductionist thrust of Madsen’s emphasis on the personal corruption of officials. Second, he overcomes Madsen’s state-centric emphasis in which autonomy is ultimately produced by decisions of local officialdom by highlighting the resources mobilized by the local community in representing itself to the local state to establish legitimacy. However, the weakness of Dean’s study is, in my view, that it focuses mainly on local relations in Fujian and considers transnational links as one-way movements of resources into locales. I differ in emphasis by viewing the resources as embedded in networks of reciprocal (i.e. two-way) exchange movements: resources move from overseas communities to Fujian locales and visa-versa. Also, the Fujian locales are not terminal points but rather nodes in more far-flung networks. In sum, my emphasis shifts from examining the overseas resources to the origins and maintenance of the institutions (i.e. networks) in which these resources move.

The foregoing critical examination of extant explanations of the dynamism of the southeast religious revival suggests that explanatory gains can be derived by focusing on the transnational networks. The concept of transnationalism usually emphasizes processes of global capitalism that cut across sovereign boundaries. Earlier formulations of transnationalism saw these processes as flows of money, images, ideas, people, and technology, such as Arjun Appadurai’s ethnoscaples (1990). In this view Xiamen could be the locus of overlapping flows that deposit rich resources in the locale. Recently scholars, critical of this early formulation for its lack of agency, have emphasized the social practices and identities that constitute the transnational movements. For example, the “modern Chinese transnationalism” propounded by Douglas Nonini and Aiwah Ong (Nonini and Ong 1997) emphasizes the particularistic norms and practices rooted in family and kinship discourses that link Chinese commercial and associational activities across sovereign boundaries. These transnational practices also construct “Chinese” identities in diverse locals and therefore this transnationalism also constitutes the politics of local Chinese communities.

Extending Nonini and Ong’s concept of transnationalism to the Buddhist revival deepens

my analytic focus on networks in two ways. First, it highlights the networks as social practices. In this light I will examine the shared interests (i.e. deriving scarce resources), norms (i.e. mutual support), and identities (i.e. teacher-disciple relations and shared south Fujian ancestral origin) that constitute the networks. Second, it highlights how transnational networks affect politics within national societies. Here I will examine how the overseas links create perceptions of legitimacy and bargaining strategies between the local Buddhist community and the local government in China. However, I differ with Nonini and Ong's view of modern Chinese transnationalism in two ways. One concerns the link between transnationalism and state hegemony. Nonini and Ong's concept of modern Chinese transnationalism shares the more general assumption that transnational processes traversing sovereign boundaries evade hegemonic state constructions of subjects. My view is more ambiguous as I also describe state attempts to channel religious transnational networks towards its goal of market economic development through integration with the global capitalist economy. The other concerns the time frame in which modern Chinese transnationalism is placed. Nonini and Ong see modern Chinese transnationalism as emerging in the latter quarter of the twentieth century. Such a view overlooks more long-term historical patterning. In this paper I show that the transnational networks emerging since 1979 are following paths dug before the revolution by the emigration of monks abroad to southeast Asia. Linking earlier trends in the twentieth century with the post-1979 flows deepens understanding of how choices and decisions within the Sangha by master monks and perceptions of the Chinese state at various levels also construct the transnational networks.

### III. *Historical Background*

The current Buddhist revival movement in Xiamen is linked to the expansion of the global capitalist system and European powers to China in the nineteenth century, creating new interactions along the coast. Port cities became the site of trade between their hinterlands and the global economy, spurring capital accumulation and new population flows. Also, the collapse of the region's rural handicraft industry in southeast China due to competition from cheaper western manufactures and a land squeeze from overpopulation pushed thousand of peasants to emigrate to Southeast Asia and the Americas as coolie labor. They came overwhelmingly from Fujian and Guangdong provinces. By the second half of the nineteenth century, many of these Chinese had prospered in business and began to send capital back to their ancestral homelands in southern China. These factors stimulated the growth of Xiamen and other port cities such as Shanghai and Shantou. By the 1930s Xiamen had a population of 200,000 and was among the wealthiest cities in China. It accounted for about 72 percent of provincial and 5 percent of national foreign trade (Lu et al 1989:119).

The wealthy business class that developed in these communities became patrons of Buddhism, leading to a boom in the construction of new temples and monasteries unprecedented since the Tang Dynasty a millennium earlier. At the forefront of this revival were master monks known not only for learning but for entrepreneurial talents in building new temples and monasteries, and their close relations with lay persons. By and large the revival emphasized traditional modes of education and practice. However, a radical reform movement emerged, first in Shanghai, that borrowed elements of Christian church and secular schooling

in order modernize Buddhism. The most famous reformist monk was Ven. Tai Xu who advocated standardization of Buddhist texts to distinguish Buddhism from popular cults and rituals, the training of clergy by modern teaching methods, ecumenicism and interaction with other religions, and proselytizing and international exchange (Welch 1972).

By the 1920s Xiamen was a center of Buddhist modernization. In 1924 Ven. Zhuan Feng made Nanputuo Temple non-denominational with an abbot elected by monks. He invited Ven. Tai Xu to establish a modern school for educating monks, the South Fujian Buddhist Academy (*Minnan Fuoxue Yuan*), in 1927. Although closed in 1937, the South Fujian Buddhist Academy acquired much renown. The Xiamen business community helped support young and talented monks in their study. Many of these monks, in the Sangha tradition of wandering, frequently visited overseas Chinese communities of southern Fujianese in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, lecturing, attracting new disciples, and raising funds for temples (Welch 1968: 191). Lay devotees were also active in the movement, teaching in the South Fujian Buddhist Academy, and participating in social welfare activities and associations to promote Buddhism such as the South Fujian Buddhist Youth Society (*Minnan Fuojiang Xin Qingnian Hui*) and the World Buddhist Propaganda Society (*Shijie Fuojiang Xuanquan Hui*). Other devotees stressed self-cultivation outside the temples and compiled the *Buddhist Cultivation Essential Texts* (*Fuojiao Xiuxue Yaodian*), a single volume of sutras that has been called the Buddhist Bible and is still used for self-cultivation.

During the 1940s the flow of monks to Southeast Asia increased as they emigrated to escape the Japanese occupation of Xiamen during World War II and the subsequent civil war. After 1949, cut off from the mainland they concentrated on building up their temples and congregations which, following the economic rise of overseas Chinese business, grew into large and powerful institutions that deepened their contacts with each other and with Taiwan and Hong Kong. This gave rise to networks of communication, personnel and financial flows linked to the movements of monks, regional identities and teacher-disciple relations.

### 3-1. The Evolution of Buddhist Networks in Overseas Chinese Communities

Let me briefly trace some of the links as they developed over the decades from roughly the 1920s until reconnected to Xiamen's Buddhist community after 1980. A crucial set of networks stems from Ven. Zhuan Feng. Ven. Zhuan Feng was born in southern Fujian's Nanan county in 1879 and became a monk at age 17. In 1920 he became the prior of Nanputuo Temple. As previously noted, he was responsible for modernizing innovations there. In 1940 he emigrated to India and then to Singapore where he passed away in 1948.

In 1925, Ven. Zhuan Feng's disciple, Ven. Hui Quan became the first democratically elected abbot of Nanputuo Temple in 1925. Ven. Hui Quan, assisted by his disciple Ven. Hong Chuan also developed Huqiyuan Temple and Wanshilian Temple in Xiamen. In the 1930s Ven. Hui Quan emigrated to Southeast Asia, accompanied by Ven. Hong Chuan, where he developed Miaoxianglin Temple in Penang, Malaysia. Upon the death of Ven. Hui Quan in 1943, his disciple Ven. Hong Chuan became abbot of Miaoxianglin Temple and of Pujue Temple in Singapore. Both of these temples would eventually become the largest temples in Malaysia and Singapore respectively. In 1974 he became the abbot of two of the largest Buddhist temples in the Philippines, Shinyuan Temple and Huazang Temple.

This network stemming from Ven. Zhuan Feng has also spawned other networks. One

example concerns Ven. Guang Yu. His master was the abbot of Jinjiting Temple in Xiamen who was executed by the Nationalist Party state on charges of collaboration with the Japanese forces during World War II. Thereupon Ven. Guang Yu fled to Malaysia where Ven. Hong Chuan accepted Ven. Guang Yu as his disciple and made him the abbot of Miaoxianglin Temple. Finally there is a connection between Nanputuo Temple and Singapore's Longshan Temple. When Ven. Zhuan Feng fled to Singapore, two of his other disciples Ven. Guang Jing and Ven. Guang Chai also accompanied him. They took up residence in Longshan Temple, Singapore's oldest Buddhist temple and became well known monks in Singapore.

While, the southeast Asian Chinese network is most important for Xiamen's Buddhist community, there is another overseas network linked to Northeast China. It is connected to Nanputuo Temple through the person of Ven. Miao Zhan, a native of Liaoning province in northeast China and Nanputuo Temple's first abbot after 1979. He was born in 1910 in Liaoning province in northeast China. He became a school principal in the 1930s and was imprisoned by Japanese forces as a suspected member of the underground resistance. Upon release he became a monk in 1939 and spent several years in Zhanshan Temple, Shandong province where he became close to the famous monk Ven. Tan Xu.<sup>4</sup> He then spent over a decade at different temples for meditating, occasionally assuming office. In 1957 he came to Nanputuo Temple and soon became prior. Although forced out of Nanputuo Temple and compelled to disrobe during the Cultural Revolution he remained nearby and survived by raising and selling vegetables. After 1979 he again donned monks robes, becoming the leading monk of Xiamen's Buddhist community and, in 1989 the abbot of Nanputuo Temple. His background as a northerner gave him connections to monks from North China. During the civil war in the late 1940s a number of monks from the northeast had emigrated to North America and scattered over the United States and Canada where they established temples and Buddhist Associations in Chinatowns. With the more tolerant policy climate in China since 1979, these various networks became connected to Xiamen's Buddhist community.

#### IV. *State Policy*

Overseas Chinese connections have had a marked effect on the Chinese state's policies, especially at the level of local government. In Fujian province central policies are refracted by local government perceptions of the economic potential of these overseas communities. Since 1978 state policy has shifted from the previous policy of suppressing religion and persecuting believers in the name of class struggle towards giving freedom of religious belief and permitting religious activities that further the state's new goals of market driven economic development. This shift's underlying rationale is suggested in a key policy document titled "The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question during Our Country's Socialist Period" issued in March, 1982 by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party:

Yet at the same time we must realize that it will be fruitless and extremely harmful to use simple coercion in dealing with people's ideological and spiritual questions — and this

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<sup>4</sup> Ven. Tan Xu represented a conservative approach to Buddhist revival in the early twentieth century that emphasized stricter discipline while Ven. Tai Xu embodied a modernizing approach of adapting elements of Christianity such as training seminaries, proselytizing, and philanthropy.

includes religious questions. We must further understand that at the present historical stage the difference that exists between the mass of believers and nonbelievers in matters of ideology and belief is relatively secondary. If we then one-sidedly emphasize this difference, even to the point of giving it primary importance — for example, by discriminating against and attacking the mass of religious believers, while neglecting and denying that the basic political and economic welfare of the mass of both religious believers and nonbelievers is the same — then we forget that the Party's basic task is to unite all people (and this includes the broad mass of believers and nonbelievers alike) in order that they may strive to construct a modern, powerful socialist State. To behave otherwise would only exacerbate the estrangement between the mass of believers and nonbelievers as well as incite and aggravate religious fanaticism, resulting in serious consequences for our Socialist enterprise. Our Party, therefore, bases its policy of freedom of religious belief on the theory formulated by Marxism-Leninism, and is the only correct policy genuinely consonant with the people's welfare (Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party 1982: 435-436).

This statement suggests how religious policy since 1978 has been guided by the state's desire to mobilize the entire population in support of its new goals to enhance the power of the state and well-being of society through market-led economic growth. Furthermore, religion will die a natural death when China achieves the communist stage of history and so there is no need for the state to actively suppress it in the interim: this conceptual move maintains the overall historical vision of the Party's socialist project while allowing the Party to tolerate and even condone practices that might appear to contradict it.

Whereas prior Cultural Revolution policy labeled all sorts of beliefs and rituals as "feudal superstition" and targeted them for elimination the new policy distinguishes religion from feudal superstition. To be considered a religion, a religion requires a logical system of thought with a concept of an afterlife that is written in texts and practiced in fixed sites administered by a trained clergy. Adherents of religions that meet these criteria (Buddhism, Catholicism, Taoism, Islam, and Protestantism) can reclaim confiscated property, conduct rituals, and train clergy. Superstition refers to spirit mediums and fortune tellers whose activities lack any of the aforementioned criteria and are therefore still suppressed. Presumably this classification reflects the state's desire to maintain control by permitting only activities that are easy to regulate such as belief systems with fixed sites and texts while continuing to suppress other activities. Officials in charge of implementing religious policy in Fujian mentioned a third category, called popular worship, to manage many of the local cults and temples that lack systematic texts and trained personnel but have many adherents both domestically and abroad. They can be opened as historical and cultural sites for tourism, and their religious activities tolerated in order to avoid offending overseas adherents.

In regard to overseas Chinese, the state's shift to a market orientation since the late 1970s has rekindled a century old perception among successive Chinese states of them as a force for modernizing the domestic economy and the need for aggressive policies to attract their investment (Yen [1982] 1995: 160-1). In the first half of the twentieth century overseas Chinese capital built modern factories, established the first department stores, built railroads and power generating plants, and subscribed to domestic bonds and loans. This was especially true in Guangdong and Fujian, the two provinces with the thickest overseas ties, where

“almost all banks, shipping and motor companies in these two provinces, as well as a variety of factories, are financed by Overseas Chinese” before 1949 (Fukuda [1939], 1995).

This rekindled perception is most clearly evident in the creation of five special economic zones in the early 1980s in Guangdong and Fujian provinces to attract overseas Chinese investment. The Xiamen Special Economic Zone was established to attract investment from Taiwan and Hong Kong, and the approximately 4 million overseas Chinese with ancestral roots in south Fujian who reside primarily in Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia.<sup>5</sup> Special economic zone policies gave the city government autonomy in stimulating the local economy.<sup>6</sup>

### 4-3. Local Government Policy

Central state policies towards religion and overseas Chinese are refracted in the perceptions and practices of southeast local governments. Local governments in Fujian province see toleration towards the religions, cults, and popular rituals practices by overseas Chinese as a means to encourage their economic investment. This perception was manifested in various ways by the comments of Xiamen officials to me. The chief of the Xiamen Religious Affairs Department said to me, “Overseas Chinese come to worship and when they do so, they also look around for economic possibilities and then invest.” A section chief in the Xiamen Religious Affairs Department told me the story of a Christian who was so moved upon seeing active churches when he returned to China that he invested 100 million yuan. Other officials emphasized the economic benefits generated by the overseas Chinese pilgrims and tourists who patronize local shops, hotels, restaurants and transportation companies. One official even noted the psychological benefit to overseas investors who needed to be assured of the availability of monks to assess the *fengshui* for their new factories.

Therefore, with an eye to wealthy overseas Chinese, the Xiamen city government, as with local governments throughout Fujian province, clearly sees it in their economic interest to encourage the revival of temples so as to generate goodwill among overseas Chinese and, hopefully, stimulate their investment. This local government tolerance towards religion appears in keeping with the central state’s overriding interest in developing a market economy and its new administrative practices of giving local government greater autonomy in economic matters. For rural governments where many activities not classified as religion in state religious policy are found, such as cults and spirit mediums, tolerance often involves permitting them more freedom than their policy classification permits. As suggested in the aforementioned example by Kenneth Dean, tolerance is achieved not through bribery or ignoring state policy but through creatively applying it ways that uphold its classificatory scheme even while circumventing its strictures.

In Xiamen, tolerance in regard to Buddhism consists of the city government’s rather thorough implementation of central state religious policy. For example religious policy stipulates that temples that existed before 1949 can be reclaimed by Buddhists. In many other

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<sup>5</sup> It roughly estimated that there are 20 million Overseas Chinese in the contemporary world of which about one fifth have ancestral roots in Minnan. Also, about four fifths of the approximately 25 million Chinese in Taiwan and Hong Kong have ancestral roots in Minnan and speak the local dialect.

<sup>6</sup> For example it could approve any investment of under U.S.\$30 million without having to apply to the higher authorities.



locales, local governments have either been unwilling to evict the public entities that occupy temples or seek to control them as tourists sites to generate revenue. But in Xiamen all 28 pre-revolutionary temples have been returned to Buddhist groups, even when this has entailed evicting such extremely powerful entities as Peoples' Liberation Army units. Also, the Xiamen government has approved huge increases in the scale of buildings in existing temple compounds and many have been rebuilt two or three times their original size. And when temple land has been taken over by the city government for public projects, the temples have been relocated to new sites in choice locations. One such location is a ridge running along the city's new business district. Several relocated temples there have received land plots several times larger than the ones they were evicted from. These new plots, perched on the side of the ridge, are highly visible. In this favorable policy context, Xiamen's Buddhist community has undergone a remarkable revival.

### V. *The Post-1979 Revival of Xiamen's Buddhist Community*

The largest of Xiamen's Buddhist temples is the ecumenical Nanputuo Temple, followed by several other temples that are directly under its control, such as Huqiyuan Temple and Wanshilian Temple. There are also several hereditary temples (*zixunmiao*) that belong to specific sects and have their own overseas connections. A few of the temples are so-called family temples as the monks that have developed them have brought their parents and siblings and their families to live at the temple. Almost half the temples are lay nun halls (*caitang*) whose members are nuns who have taken their bhikku vows but have not shaved their heads, wear lay clothing, and hold regular jobs.

These temples are financially self supporting. In the 1980s, this support was largely through donations by overseas Chinese, as will be described below. However, this form of support has declined in a relative sense as the large capital investments needed to rebuild temples is largely completed, the rising domestic business class increases in prominence as patrons, and overseas Chinese are increasingly financially strapped due to the Asian financial crises of the late 1990s. Also, since the late 1980s many temples have generated significant income by charging fees and soliciting donations for performing rituals. The larger temples also run various businesses such as stores selling Buddhist scriptures and vegetarian restaurants. Some of the lay nun halls run their own businesses as well, selling organic vegetables and vegetarian green bean cakes cooked on the premises. While the operation of for-profit businesses may seem at odds with Buddhist precepts it is seen as necessary by Buddhists to comply with the state policy that religious institutions be economically self-supporting.

This growth of the Buddhist community was supported by the revival of the South Fujian Buddhist Academy to train clergy. When ordinations were revived in Fujian in the early 1980s, it was mostly for the reordination of elderly nuns and monks who had been forced to disrobe during the Cultural Revolution. These clergy, largely from rural areas, returned to their villages after their ordination and did not provide personnel to the urban temples in Xiamen. Therefore the revival of the Academy in 1984 and the creation of a nun's class at Wanshilian Temple in 1985 was crucial for providing younger personnel to staff the temples. Also, many of the first graduates of the Academy in 1989 were kept on as teachers, were placed in leadership positions in Nanputuo Temple, and joined the staff of the Xiamen Buddhist

Association (*Fuojiao Xiehui*). The number of nuns has grown and a larger nuns' campus, at Zizhulin Temple was inaugurated in 1998. Altogether there were about 400 novitiates studying in the men's and women's classes by the mid-1990s.

In addition several associations have emerged to support the Buddhist community. One is the Xiamen Buddhist Association which is in charge of all temples in Xiamen and is the official intermediary between the state and the Buddhist community. The Xiamen Buddhist Association is not simply a tool of the state for controlling Buddhism but can also stand on the side of temples and the Buddhist community to support their activities. It, too, is largely staffed by monks and nuns who have graduated from the South Fujian Buddhist Academy. Also noteworthy is the Believers Association (*Ju Shi Lin*) revived in the late 1980s. This association had about 1,300 members divided into ten branches with each one representing an area of the city. The Believers Association organizes worship at temples, outings for elderly believers to Mazu Temple and other shrines, and social welfare activities to take care of elderly devotees.

## VI. *Resources in Overseas Chinese Networks*

Resources moving in transnational networks have played a crucial role in the aforementioned revival process of Xiamen's Buddhist community. A key resource received by Xiamen Buddhists is money while they provide overseas Chinese communities with personnel to staff their temples.

### 6-1. **Movements of Money**

Since 1980 overseas Chinese have provided much of the funding for restoration of temples, monasteries and construction of new buildings. These funds are forthcoming in several ways. One is through funds collected by master monks abroad from the devotees in their congregations. In this fashion Ven. Hong Quan funded the reconstruction of the temples that his master Ven. Hui Quan had developed in the 1930s, Huqiyuan Temple and Wanshilian Temple, and supported the establishment of a nun's program of the South Fujian Buddhist Academy at the latter temple.

Other funds are donated directly by believers. An illustrative case is the C family who has ancestral roots in the Minnan region and is a wealthy business family with branches in Singapore and Hong Kong. When they contacted Nanputuo Temple's abbot, Ven. Miao Zhan, in the early 1990s to donate money, he directed their funds to develop the nuns program of the South Fujian Buddhist Academy. Supervision of the project was entrusted to a lay person who worked in the Xiamen Buddhist Association and was a former middle school classmate of the C family patriarch. The C family paid for the construction of all the buildings for a new campus to house the nun's program on the condition that Nanputuo Temple pay the costs of compensating the People's Liberation Army which had occupied the land and building the infrastructure such as roads to the site. In return the C family has requested that the top floor of one of the buildings be reserved for their exclusive use as an apartment and ancestral hall.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Their ancestors' tombs in their ancestral home in Yongchun county were ransacked during the Cultural Revolution and so they want to ensure their safety.

Many of Xiamen's lesser temples have their own networks. Bailudong Temple is an example. Dating to the Ming Dynasty, it sits on one of Xiamen's hills. Before the revolution, its head monk Ven. Jue Bing went to Hong Kong and made the Fahui Devotion Hall (*jingshe*) in Hong Kong's North Corner (*Beijiao*) district where many people from south Fujian live. During the Cultural Revolution, the army requisitioned the hill. So the temple's return after 1979 involved negotiating with the army. Ven. Jue Bing's disciple Ven. Yuan Guo and successor of the Fahui Devotion Hall provided some of the 485,000 RMB to compensate the army for the buildings it had constructed on Bailudong Temple land. Ven. Yuan Guo became prior of Bailudong Temple and funded its restoration and expansion. Bailudong Temple has a dozen monks and every two months two monks travel to Hong Kong to tend to Fahui Devotion Hall and its aged head monk.

Flows of overseas Chinese tourists and pilgrims to China are also an important source of funds. For overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia who come to visit their ancestral villages in southern Fujian, Xiamen is the port of entry into China. They usually stop at Nanputuo Temple as their first site of worship upon return to give offerings to their good fortune abroad. Another form of tourism is the worship groups from Taiwan visiting the Mazu Temple who make side trips to Nanputuo Temple. Their gate receipts, patronage of the vegetarian restaurant, and donations contribute to the temple's coffers. For some temples, rituals commissioned by overseas Chinese are an important income source. For example, each year members of the congregation of Miaoxianglin Temple in Malaysia visit Xiamen to have a Shuilu Fahui ceremony performed at the Jinjiting Temple. Fees for such rituals are said to have earned Jinjiting Temple 3,000,000 RMB in 1998. As noted above the abbot of Jinjiting Temple in the early 1940s was the master of Ven. Guang Yu who subsequently fled to Malaysia where he became abbot of Miaoxianglin Temple.

Finally, in these money flows, Xiamen's Buddhist community is not a terminus but a node on flows stretching into the hinterland. By the standards of the hinterland Xiamen temples are wealthy and Nanputuo Temple provides financial support to institutions elsewhere in China. In 1998 Nanputuo Temple was supporting Buddhist academies in Heilongjiang, Guangdong, and Jiangxi provinces. It also provided RMB 100,000 to the China Buddhist Association in Beijing and RMB 200,000 to the Fujian Buddhist Association. It also donates teaching materials to Buddhist academies elsewhere. Some of the resources flowing from Xiamen to the hinterland move along Ven. Miao Zhan's aforementioned networks of personal ties with northeast China Buddhist communities.

## 6-2. Movements of Clergy

Significant numbers of clergy move through the overseas networks. They travel for several reasons. During the 1980s there was a strong demand from the abbots of overseas temples for young clergy. These abbots were elderly monks who had left China before the revolution and wanted to find successors before they passed away. In their overseas Chinese communities, young people are not willing to enter the Sangha and so these monks contacted Ven. Miao Zhan to send successors. Some elderly monks even traveled to their home villages in China to select young men to send to the South Fujian Buddhist Academy for training with the expectation that they would then emigrate to succeed them. Other temples in China rotate personnel with temples overseas. The aforementioned Bailudong Temple is an example of this:

every two weeks two monks are dispatched to assist their master in Hong Kong.

Monks also travel abroad to participate in special ceremonies and occasions in other temples abroad. Individual monks skilled in conducting rituals help overseas temples organize rituals while larger groups travel abroad to participate in special ceremonies at other temples. During the 1980s these visits to overseas temples were important for mainland monks to learn rituals, many of which could no longer be seen in China as they had not been performed for decades. For the overseas temples Nanputuo Temple functions almost as a reserve of personnel who can be drawn upon when large numbers of monks are needed for ceremonial occasions.

Also a small but significant minority of Nanputuo Temple and South Fujian Buddhist Academy personnel move along the northeast network. Some of this movement is internal flows from the northeast to Xiamen. Our informants told us that, in contrast to many young southern novitiates who are poorly educated, novitiates from northeast China are better educated urbanites and occupy important administrative and teaching posts in Nanputuo Temple and the South Fujian Buddhist Academy. Another movement is from the South Fujian Buddhist Academy to temples and Buddhist associations in North America founded by monks who migrated before the revolution. Some of the monks and nuns I knew were motivated by a desire to spread the Dharma among non-Chinese, a motivation in keeping with Ven. Tai Xu's call for proselytizing by the Buddhist clergy.

Interestingly, this movement of clergy across national borders is facilitated by a peculiarity of Chinese emigration policy. In China it is easier to get permission to emigrate abroad if the foreign sponsor is an immediate family member. As all Chinese monks and nuns have the last name of Shi, their masters who sponsor them are considered by the Chinese authorities to be immediate family, facilitating their emigration from China. Also, immigration policies in other countries can smooth the movement of Buddhist clergy over national borders. For example, in the United States there is a special visa category for religious personnel, the so-called "R-visa." It was established in order to make it easier for foreign religious personnel to go and serve cultural and ethnic immigrant groups in the United States. When monks and nuns enter under these statuses they obtain permanent residency with little problem (Liebman 1996: 126-129).<sup>8</sup>

## VII. *Overseas Networks as Double-Edged Sword of Legitimacy*

The transnational networks just described generate various perceptions which both enhance and challenge the legitimacy of Buddhists in the eyes of the local government. Xiamen's Buddhists can legitimate their activities as in keeping with the city government's economic policies of integrating Xiamen's economy into the international economy and increasing contact with overseas Chinese, a priority reflected in such city government slogans as "outward opening" (*xiang waixing lianxi*), "open up to the outside" (*duiwai kaifang*), and "Let Xiamen understand the world, let the world understand Xiamen" (*rang Xiamen liaojie shijie, rang shijie liaojie Xiamen*). The Buddhist community maintains that its overseas links

<sup>8</sup> According to my interview with a lawyer specializing in immigration in the Seattle, Washington in summer of 1998, it has become increasingly difficult for Chinese nuns and monks to enter. This is because U.S. authorities are concerned that lay people are pretending to be monks in order to get an R- visa and immigrate to the U.S. for economic reasons.

also further the city's international integration. It can also successfully play on the concern of the local government to maintain a good impression with overseas Chinese. Thus, in bargaining for the return of a temple or the appropriation of government funds for temple reconstruction, Buddhists stress a site's importance to overseas Chinese. For example, when the city government sought to raze Miaosi Temple to build a road and allocate land elsewhere for a new temple the Xiamen Buddhist Association opposed this plan by stressing the temple's historical value, as a Ming Dynasty relic and original site of the Xiamen Buddhist Association in 1930, and its fame among overseas Chinese.<sup>9</sup>

The perceived link between Buddhism and internationalization is heightened by the tours of overseas monks back to China. For example Ven. Hong Chuan made eight trips to China in the 1980s, trips that included stopovers in Xiamen and southern Fujian province. On these tours he was accompanied by a coterie of disciples including overseas Chinese business persons and met with national leaders of the China Buddhist Association, Religious Affairs Bureau, and United Front Department as well as more local level officials and the mayors and vice mayors of Xiamen, Guangzhou and other important cities. Such tours increase the state's perception of the importance of the monks among overseas Chinese which, as noted above is a key motivation for toleration of Buddhism. Also, during these tours, the monks might urge devotees to invest. Supposedly Ven. Hong Quan urged a wealthy devotee to invest in Xiamen in the early 1980s. This resulted in the founding of the Yinhua Tile Factory, one of the largest overseas Chinese investments in Xiamen at the time. Also these tours are publicized in the official media, diffusing perceptions of state legitimation of Buddhism. For example an article dated November 2, 1986 in the *People's Daily* is titled "Panchen Lama Meets with Ven. Hong Chuan and Expresses Gratitude for the Master's Support of China's Buddhism."

The establishment of new master-disciple relations between monks inside and outside of China further enhances the legitimacy of persons and temples in Xiamen's Buddhist community through deepened ties with prominent master monks and wealthy temples overseas. One especially noteworthy example was the acceptance by Ven. Miao Zhan of Ven. Hong Chuan as his disciple in 1980. This act, which was communicated to central authorities in Beijing, was a symbolically powerful display of respect for the elderly Ven. Miao Zhan by one of the most revered Buddhist masters in Southeast Asia's Chinese communities. This display most likely enhanced Ven. Miao Zhan's authority in dealing with local government officials and devotees.

Yet the large movements of personnel can be a double-edged sword, challenging the autonomy and legitimacy of Buddhism. The resources from overseas to Xiamen's Buddhist community are also viewed by the local government as challenging its authority. For example, for Ven. Miao Zhan's ascension ceremony in 1990 hundreds of monks and devotees in southeast Asia planned to charter airplanes to attend. The Xiamen city government opposed this, citing the expense of entertaining so many guests. Even though the overseas Chinese would pay their way and create no financial burden on Nanputuo Temple, Ven. Miao Zhan

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<sup>9</sup> A somewhat similar process has been documented in a village in suburban Xiamen by the anthropologist Huang Shu-min. He writes that the township government initially rejected a petition to rebuild the local Lin family ancestral hall "on the grounds that such an act would encourage the return of feudalistic relations based on patriarchal kinship solidarity. The Lins countered the official denial by claiming that the funds for rebuilding this ancestral hall had come from an overseas Chinese living in Singapore and that rebuilding it would attract many overseas Chinese with the surname Lin to return to the motherland for investment. So the township government issued the permission for its reconstruction" (Huang 1998: 219).

decided not to invite them. According to one official who is both a Buddhist and a government official, the city government was concerned about such a large, public show of overseas Chinese support for religious activity. More recently, the local government is said to be concerned that the frenzy of temple expansion in Xiamen funded by overseas Chinese and other private sources in the 1990s gives the impression that the Communist Party is no longer needed to accomplish matters. Supposedly this concern underlay the decision of the current Nanputuo Temple abbot, Ven. Sheng Hui, to limit overseas invitations to 50 for the opening ceremony of the nuns program of the South Fujian Buddhist Academy at Zizhulin Temple in 1998.

Finally, the overseas links are also seen as avenues for unknown and therefore sinister forces entering the local Buddhist community. This is especially apparent in stories of shadowy monks coming from Taiwan. According to one story, one monk from Taiwan was followed by the Security Bureau (*Anquan Ju*) on suspicion of propagating religion by paying people to become nuns and monks. Searched at the airport when he attempted to leave Xiamen, he was discovered to have documents critical of the Xiamen government regulation of Nanputuo Temple and expelled from China. Also, some temples appear to be run by women who dress as nuns but have no master and have not taken bhikkuni vows and are said to be supported by money from Taiwan for unknown purposes. Finally, it is also said that Taiwan money helps set up false temples. An example of this fear of overseas Buddhists as avenues for sinister forces to enter China is the discovery by the Public Security Bureau of four Buddhist temples that were Yi Guan Dao temples from Taiwan. According to a newspaper report, these temples were established by a Taiwan business person who began investing in Fujian in 1993, and conducted illegal rituals, sermons, and proselytizing. They were shut down by the authorities in 1999 in order to stop the infiltration of Yi Guan Dao into the mainland (*Xiamen Ri Bao*, 1999, July 18: 6).

In sum, the networks are constituted by exchanges of different resources. This mutual benefit helps explain why they are forged. The existence of the networks also helps confer legitimacy on the actors. While Buddhists can use this legitimacy as a resource to further their ends, the situation in Xiamen shows that they cannot always derive advantage from them.

### VIII. Conclusion

The preceding analysis has constituted a critique of extant state-society frameworks for interpreting religious revivals, such as the Buddhist one, underway in contemporary China. On the one hand a national framework is too abstracted and generalized to explain the dynamics of local situations while, on the other hand, a local framework overlooks the broader institutions and processes in which state-society relations are embedded. My analysis, by focusing on how local state-society relations and interests are constrained by institutions and processes at the local, national, and transnational levels, sheds light on these issues. For example, I have shown how the tolerant attitude of the local state policy towards religion innovatively synthesizes state religious and economic policy, giving it greater legitimacy and stability than if it were simply a corruption or deviation from central policies. Also, I have shown how transnational networks provide not only flows of resources to the local society but also constitute resources for overseas Chinese communities: this emphasis on two-way flow

further understanding of the keen interests among Buddhists in scattered communities inside and outside of China for reestablishing and maintaining links. Finally, I have shown how the existence of the transnational networks among Buddhist communities affects the relations of Xiamen's local Buddhist community with the local government.

Examining the Buddhist revival in broader context also sheds new light on the interaction between economy, state and religion in China since 1979. It highlights the economic interest of the state at all levels in encouraging some degree of religious revival to further market development. This is particularly true for beliefs such as Buddhism and Taoism which are seen by the state as being "Chinese" in contrast to Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism which are seen by the state as having foreign origins and are viewed with suspicion as fueling independence movements within China or giving foreign (primarily U.S.) politicians ammunition to criticize China for human rights violations. The local situation in Xiamen illuminates how the the Buddhist revival can further the state's economic goals. The reconstruction of Buddhism in China helps promote a greater identification with and loyalty to Chinese "culture" and "civilization" by domestic and overseas Chinese that the state seeks to channel towards promoting economic investment.

This suggests an interpretation of the consequences of revived religions and overseas networks for state and society that differs from widespread views in the scholarly literature. A number of scholars see revived religions, cults, and popular rituals as enhancing societal autonomy, particularly in the southeast, by creating values and networks outside the state's organizational and ideological concerns (Madsen 1997; Siu 1989). Similarly scholars see overseas networks as enhancing autonomy in the domestic society by bringing resources into Chinese society that are outside of state control (Pei 1994: 166-67, Solinger 1992: 137), especially in the southeast, and through their flexible practices that confound disciplining by states (Ong and Nonini 1997). However, if we see the Buddhist revival as supporting the state's new goal since 1979 of creating a market economy, the preceding claims lose considerable force. Indeed, a key part of economic reform policies are the creation of horizontal networks of information and exchange in society to supplant the pre-reform vertical networks centered on the state. Thus, the state can be said to encourage the Buddhist revival as a means to create these horizontal linkages by giving overseas Chinese incentive to invest in China.

The revival of Buddhism is also embedded in processes of the shift of the state project of "modernization" since the late 1970s to emphasize integration with global capitalism. In this context the Buddhist revival might not only enhance societal autonomy but also a new state hegemony to discipline "Chinese" subjects across the sovereign boundaries of the state to further economic growth. One can imagine that as the appeal of communist ideology is further eroded as a force for producing national identity and loyalty to the state, the state might emphasize Buddhism as a strategy of cultural nationalism.

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