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Modern Chinese Societies



***A Different Buddhist Revival: The Promotion of  
Vinaya (jīelǜ 戒律) in Republican China***

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**Abstract:** The aim of this exploratory study is to provide an outline of the Vinaya renewal in China in the first half of the twentieth century, and to point to its meanings and effects in the context of the Buddhist revival of the Republican period. Based on a preliminary investigation of monastic codes compiled by four influential Buddhist leaders in the 1930s and 1940s, my paper draws attention to their endeavor to promote Chinese monastic discipline in practice and in discourse. I argue that, during the Republican period, Chinese Vinaya represented the benchmark for both molding religious regeneration and setting the limit for Buddhist institutional innovation. The promotion of Vinaya was a long-standing, indigenous, pattern for the revitalization of the Buddhist tradition, and it also played a fundamental role in the modern evolution of Chinese Buddhism by helping the monastic community strengthen its religious authority and political legitimation. I hope to show that a deeper analysis of this phenomenon may in the future help balance current visions on Chinese modernism, dominated by Western categories, theories and dichotomies related to modernity and secularism.

**Keywords:** Vinaya renewal; Buddhist revival; monastic discipline

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## Introduction

The aim of this paper is to draw attention to a so-far overlooked phenomenon in the history of Chinese Buddhism of the first half of the twentieth century, and to point to the important role it has played in the modern transformation of this religious tradition: the promotion of Vinaya (*jīelǜ* 戒律, monastic discipline). The Vinaya renewal of the Republican era (1912–1949) deserves attention because it can contribute to enriching and expanding the category of the “Buddhist revival”, by showing how local models and moral values inherited from the past were articulated within new institutional frameworks.

As a matter of fact, Buddhism can be considered one of the most outstanding cases in point of what Vincent Goossaert (2005) has called “the renewal paradigm.” The renewal paradigm posits a decline of Chinese religions at the end of the Qing dynasty, followed by a state-induced process of “revival-cum-institutionalization” in the first half of the twentieth century (Goossaert, 2005: 19–21). Western and Chinese studies of modern

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religious history adhering to this paradigm represent a dominant trend. These studies ascribe the official acceptance of Buddhism by the new nation-state to the capacity of a few Buddhist leaders to effectively reinvent their tradition along modernist, rational, and socially oriented lines. Accordingly, the “Buddhist revival” of the Republican era is largely identified with the Western-inspired reforms envisioned and/or implemented by modernist monks such as Taixu 太虛 (1890–1947);<sup>1</sup> Protestantism is often recognized as the key model followed by Buddhist reformers in their modernizing efforts. The institutionalization of Buddhism based on these reforms mainly consisted in the construction of national associations, in the development of a confessional press, in the participation of the Buddhist clergy in charitable activities and education, and so forth (two recent examples of this kind are Goossaert, 2008 and Ashiwa, 2009).<sup>2</sup>

This paper offers a more complex representation of the modern evolution of Chinese Buddhism by stressing the endeavor of Republican monastic leaders to promote Chinese Vinaya in practice and in discourse. This exploratory study does not have the ambition to provide an in-depth analysis of the Vinaya renewal phenomenon, but instead to outline its general shape and boundaries, and to point to its meanings and effects in the context of the Buddhist revival. To sustain my argument, I focus on a selection of four influential Buddhist leaders in the first half of the twentieth century. The endeavor of these masters included the propagation of Chinese Vinaya texts containing monastic rules and disciplinary prohibitions, the recovery of some largely forgotten Vinaya practices prescribed by these texts, and the compilation of new codes of rules adjusted to specific institutions. Therefore, Chinese Vinaya is here understood in its multiple connotations (Bodiford, 2005: 2–3).<sup>3</sup> This study is based on a preliminary investigation of monastic codes (*guize* 規則) and a few related texts compiled by these Buddhist leaders in the 1930s and 1940s. Chinese religious biographies, secondary sources, and studies are also used to provide additional information on these masters’ careers and action.

In this paper, I argue in particular: that during the Republican period, Chinese Vinaya represented the benchmark for both molding religious regeneration and setting the limit for Buddhist institutional innovation; that the phenomenon of the revival was not only state-induced, but also partly spontaneous; that the Western model was not its only source of inspiration, but that a long-standing indigenous model also exerted a considerable influence in shaping the transition of Chinese Buddhism to modernity. I also suggest that the promotion of Vinaya played a fundamental role in the modern evolution of Chinese Buddhism by helping the monastic community strengthen its religious authority and political legitimation.

The “renewal paradigm” belongs to a trend of theoretical approaches that Justin Ritzinger has labelled “‘push’ models of modernity”.<sup>4</sup> These kinds of approaches

1 On Taixu see Pittman, 2001.

2 On some fundamental Buddhist institutional innovations since the end of the nineteenth century, see Ji, 2016.

3 For a study of this notion and its understanding within Chinese Buddhism, see Bianchi, forthcoming/a.

4 For an analysis of these models in the study of modern Buddhism, see Ritzinger, 2010: 4–9.

have been adopted to describe Buddhist responses to Western modernity across the entire twentieth century, and well beyond the Chinese case. One example is David McMahan's fascinating work *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (2008). While accounting for their dialogue and interaction, McMahan considers "traditional" and "modernist" as two fundamentally different interpretations of Buddhism, and addresses "demythologization", "detraditionalization", and "psychologization" as the main factors in the modernization of this religious tradition. The present article also hopes to add complexity to our understanding of Buddhist modernism as a whole by highlighting how Chinese monastic leaders offered alternatives to Western modernity instead of just accommodating to it, and by showing that, in Republican China, time-honored practices and values also found their place in the negotiation between Buddhism and modernity. It is my conviction that a deeper analysis of the phenomenon of Vinaya renewal in modern and contemporary China and Taiwan may in the future help balance current visions on Buddhist modernism, dominated by Western categories, theories, and dichotomies related to modernity and secularism.

### 1. Four Buddhist leaders of the Republican period

Xuyun 虛雲 (ca. 1864–1959),<sup>5</sup> Yinguang 印光 (1861–1940),<sup>6</sup> Xingci 興慈 (1881–1950),<sup>7</sup> and Tanxu 倓虛 (1875–1963)<sup>8</sup> were four leading Buddhist representatives of the Republican period. They all advocated and carried on a regeneration of Buddhist religious practices chiefly based on the reinstatement and observance of the Chinese Vinaya. While belonging to roughly the same generation, these masters were active in a vast Chinese territory spanning from the northeast regions of the country to Yunnan province and represented three different schools of Chinese Buddhism (Chan, Jingtū, and Tiantai). Therefore, my selection intends to point out that the promotion of Vinaya in the first half of the twentieth century was a widespread phenomenon, and not one limited to a specific geographical area or Buddhist trend. Many other contemporary Buddhist leaders might be considered for the purpose of this study. For this reason, I will also occasionally refer to Chan Master Laiguo 來果 (1881–1953),<sup>9</sup> Huayan Master Cizhou 慈舟 (1877–1957),<sup>10</sup> Vinaya Master Hongyi 弘一 (1880–1942),<sup>11</sup> Chan Master Yuanying 圓瑛 (1878–1953),<sup>12</sup> and the representative of Sino-Tibetan Buddhism, Master Nenghai 能海 (1886–1967).<sup>13</sup>

Xuyun, Yinguang, Xingci, and Tanxu grew up influenced by Confucian moral values and shared the same religious apprenticeship. This was a path partially itinerant, based

5 On Xuyun see Campo, 2013; 2016a.

6 Yinguang's chronological biography is Shen, 2000. On Yinguang, see Zhang, X., 2011. In English see Kiely, 2016.

7 See Shen, 2002 for Xingci's chronological biography.

8 Tanxu's autobiography is Tanxu, 1998; on Tanxu, see Carter, 2011.

9 For Laiguo's autobiography and teachings, see Laiguo, 2006.

10 For Cizhou's autobiography and teachings, see Cizhou, 2004.

11 On Hongyi see Birnbaum, 2003; 2007; 2013; 2016.

12 Yuanying's chronological biography is Ming, 1996.

13 On Nenghai see Bianchi, 2009.

on the study of canonical texts (they were all learned monks), on assiduous spiritual practice (they practiced meditation and/or *nianfo* 念佛, the recollection of the name of the Buddha), and on the experience of more or less extreme forms of renunciation (seclusion, retirement, auto-mutilations). At the end of their apprenticeship, Xuyun, Xingci, and Tanxu became abbots of Buddhist monasteries, which they eventually rebuilt by gathering funds and where they trained a sizeable number of disciples. Yinguang chose instead not to assume any institutional function within the Buddhist establishment: he never accepted any ordained disciple, never gathered funds, and never agreed to become an abbot. However, these four leaders all undertook the role of religious masters and devoted themselves to conventional modes of Buddhist teaching by delivering canonical lectures and/or spiritual instructions within monastic sites.

The above-mentioned biographical features strongly associate these masters with the most classical representation of the eminent monk in China—the medieval one<sup>14</sup>—a representation they had themselves taken up as a model in shaping their religious aspirations. Their actions, however, represent a precise response to the times they lived in. In the first half of the twentieth century, a period marked by the repercussions of momentous historical events such as the Taiping war (1850–1864) and the fall of the Chinese Empire (1911), these masters had to counter a complex set of issues: the material and symbolic dispersion of the Buddhist monastic community (*sangha*), age-old concerns such as anticlericalism, and new sets of demands coming from the new nation-state and from a changing society.<sup>15</sup> As I hope to show, they responded to internal and external problems with a religious regeneration effort grounded in monastic discipline and with a few institutional innovations that did not depart from it.

## 2. The promotion of Chinese Vinaya in Republican China

The leading theorist of a religious regeneration grounded on monastic discipline in the Republican period was Hongyi. He was known as a famed artist (Li Shutong 李叔同) before joining the Buddhist order and, after that, as a prominent Vinaya Master (*lüshi* 律師). Hongyi vowed to devote his life as a monk to the study, exegesis, and propagation of the *Nanshan lü* 南山律 (Vinaya of the Southern Mountain). The *Nanshan lü* was compiled by Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667) during the Tang dynasty on the basis of the *Sifen lü* 四分律 (Dharmagupta-vinaya or Vinaya in four parts, T 1428). Three out of the five *Nanshan lü* codes composed by Daoxuan were considered lost in China since the end of the Song dynasty; at the end of the Qing dynasty, the Buddhist layman Xu Weiru 徐蔚如 (1878–1937) had reintroduced the complete work to China from Japan and reprinted it. According to Hongyi, by this time the *Nanshan lü* ‘had fallen into oblivion and had not been transmitted for more than seven centuries’; by devoting to its propagation, this master hoped that ‘the orthodox Dharma (*zhengfa* 正法) may rise once more and the Buddha-sun may shine again.’<sup>16</sup> As we will see, Hongyi was not the only monastic

14 On this representation see Kieschnick, 1997.

15 On the choice of the new term *zongjiao* 宗教 to designate official discourse on religion in the twentieth century, see Barrett and Tarocco, 2012.

16 ‘Nanshan lüyuan zhuzhong xuelü fayuan wen 南山律苑住眾學律發願文’. For the text of this vow, see

leader to consider the promotion of Vinaya a crucial factor in the re-establishment of “Buddhist orthodoxy”.

Hongyi authored many works on *Sifen lü* and *Nanshan lü*. The *Sifen lü biqujie xiangbiao ji* 四分律比丘戒相表記 (Charted study of the precepts for monks in the four-parts Vinaya) was regarded as the most important by both Hongyi himself and his contemporaries. Besides lecturing extensively on Chinese Vinaya texts in order to clarify the meaning of Buddhist fundamental disciplinary rules to the monastic community, Hongyi also organized at least one formal ceremony in which, under his lead, twelve of his disciples pledged to uphold the Vinaya (in 1933; Birnbaum, 2013: 34). This master also apparently observed strict prescriptions on how to eat, dress, dwell, and behave (Yu, 1995: 90–91). Hongyi thus came to be known as the very embodiment of the disciplinary rules he unremittingly promoted.

### 2.1 “Correct” ordination procedures and other neglected Vinaya practices

The precepts that monks have to abide by are precisely the ones that are transmitted to them at the time of ordination. Therefore, the re-establishment of correct ordination procedures laid the basis of the regeneration of Chinese monastic discipline for many Republican Buddhist leaders. At this time, monasteries in China were transmitting the precepts according to the ‘ordination of the three platforms’ (*santan jie* 三壇戒, *santan dajie* 三壇大戒), a procedure established in the early seventeenth century by Guxin Ruxin 古心如馨 (1541–1615) and later promulgated by his disciple Hanyue Fazang 漢月法藏 (1573–1635). These two Buddhist masters belonged to the Nanshan lineage (Wu, 2008). The ‘ordination of the three platforms’ is a threefold process consisting of the successive transmission of the three refuges and the ten precepts of novices; the 250 precepts of fully ordained monks (348 for nuns) or *prātimokṣa* prohibitions prescribed by the *Sifen lü*, the Indian Vinaya adopted by Chinese Buddhists; and, finally, the fifty-eight Mahāyānic precepts and vows of the Bodhisattva outlined in the fifth century apocryphal scripture *Fanwang jing* 梵网经 (Brahma’s Net Sutra).<sup>17</sup> Contrary to the *prātimokṣa* precepts that can only be transmitted to male and female ordinands, the Bodhisattva precepts can also be communicated to laypeople.

However, a few Buddhist leaders of the first half of the twentieth century complained about the inaccurate and oversimplified manner in which this procedure was carried out in many monasteries, an issue that might have questioned the validity of the ordination itself. In the 1950s, in a sermon devoted to precept transmission, Xuyun recalled his own ordination around 1883–1884 at the Yongquan Monastery in Gushan (Fujian): the ordination session had ‘only lasted eight days altogether,’ with ‘many procedures being omitted’ and ‘the novices ignoring any specific designation when undertaking the precepts.’<sup>18</sup> Later in the sermon, this key reformer of the Chan school

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for example Yu, 2005: 311.

17 Today, this is the normative procedure followed in the People’s Republic of China; see on this (and for a bibliography): Bianchi, forthcoming/b.

18 ‘Fangbian kaishi 方便開示’, in Cen, 1995: 221.

explains how, thanks to correct precept transmission, he had been able to counter the decadence of Buddhism in Yunnan, where his career as an abbot had begun in the 1910s.

As a matter of fact, Xuyun systematized the organization and the frequency of, and prolonged the duration of, the ordination sessions in all the monasteries he rebuilt. This master organized ordination ceremonies almost every year. At the Yunqi *si* in Yunnan, according to the code that he wrote for this monastery, the duration of the ordination period was fixed to fifty-three days; the candidates' qualifications were to be carefully examined in order to avoid indiscriminate transmission (*Xuyun laoheshang fahui*, 2005: 294). At the Yongquan Monastery in Fujian, of which Xuyun became abbot in the 1930s, he extended the period of precept transmission from eight to thirty days (Xuyun, 1930). At the Nanhua *si* in Guangdong, ordination sessions lasted 'more than fifty days,' according to the preface written by Xuyun for the monastery's ordination register in 1935 (*Xuyun laoheshang fahui*, 2005: 265).

Both Xuyun and Tiantai Master Dixian 諦閑 (1858–1932) wrote explanations and accounts concerning correct procedures for the 'ordination of the three platforms.' A long text by Dixian on this subject was serially published in the journal *Jingye yuekan* 淨業月刊 between 1926 and 1928.<sup>19</sup> Hongyi considered the practice of transmitting Bodhisattva vows as the last stage of ordination ceremonies as improper, since newly ordained monks might not be able to grasp the profundity of these important vows. After long textual researches, this master conceived and performed individual Bodhisattva vow ceremonies for himself and a few of his students (Birnbaum, 2013). Cizhou, an expert of monastic discipline belonging to the Huayan school, apparently went as far in his search of 'Vinaya purity' as conducting ordinations according to Theravada procedures at his Anyang Jingshe in Beijing (Welch, 1967: 300–301). A similar pattern of reviving the Vinaya through 'proper' ordination procedures had been already undertaken in Japan in the thirteenth century (Groner, 2005).

Accurate ordination procedures were not the only Vinaya practice that had been neglected by this time, and these masters were also concerned with the issue of monastic discipline at large. In 1936, Tanxu, a leading representative of the Tiantai school and a disciple of Dixian, invited Cizhou to spend some time at the Zhanshan *si*, a monastery that he was building in Qingdao. Tanxu admittedly was an expert of Tiantai doctrine but not of Vinaya studies, therefore, he needed Cizhou to help him establish a code of rules for his monastery and to explain to the community the many subtleties of Vinaya regulations. At the time of Cizhou's stay, many forgotten rules were added to the religious routine of the Zhanshan Monastery: the prohibition against taking any food after noon (*guowu bushi* 過午不食 or *chiwu* 持午), the collective recitation of the precepts (*songjie* 誦戒) on the first and fifteenth day of each lunar month, and the three-month summer retreat (*jiexia anju* 結夏安居) (Tanxu, 1998: vol. 2, 202). After the departure of Cizhou, Tanxu invited Hongyi to lecture on the Vinaya and to motivate the community of the Zhanshan Monastery to keep practicing disciplinary prescriptions, with the

19 *Tiantai shan wannian si santan jiefa jiyao* 天台山萬年寺三壇戒法集要. See also Xuyun, 1936.

result that, for many 'years after the two venerable masters have left, the community has continued to abide by the prescribed regulations' (Tanxu, 1998: vol. 2, 216).

Other Republican Buddhist leaders reintroduced the above-mentioned practices to their monasteries. For example, Xuyun attached great importance to the bimonthly recitation of the precepts prescribed in the *vinayapīṭaka*. In his code for the Yongquan Monastery in Fujian, he prescribed the recitation of the precepts of the *Fanwang jing* on the fourteenth and thirtieth days of each lunar month, and the recitation of the precepts of the *Sifen lü* on the eighth and the twenty-third (Xuyun, 1930). Xuyun also enforced the prohibition against eating after noon in the last three monasteries he restored. The same can be said of Nenghai, who was an advocate of monastic discipline: he devoted many works to the study of Vinaya and assigned to it a primary role within the study curricula of his tantric *vajra* monasteries. Moreover, his communities followed a vegetarian diet and did not eat after noon, and they performed the bimonthly recitation of precepts, as well as the summer retreat and its concluding ceremony (Bianchi, forthcoming 2017).

## 2.2 *The composition of new monastic codes of rules*

Another important aspect of the religious regeneration carried out by Buddhist representatives in the first half of the twentieth century relied on the composition of new codes of rules adapted to different institutions in a changing China. Many Republican monastic codes are available; Yinguang, Tanxu, Xingci, and Xuyun, amongst other Buddhist leaders,<sup>20</sup> all composed disciplinary rules for monks residing in public monasteries (*gongzhu guiyue* 共住規約). These codes were compiled either to provide the communities of newly built or recently restored monasteries with regulations, or to solve problems linked to a perceived deterioration of religious practice and/or the administration system in pre-existing institutions.

Around 1935, Tanxu formulated a code for his newly built Zhanshan Monastery in Qingdao. The thirty-three rules of the code touch on different matters of everyday religious practice and communal life, and on more essential aspects such as the transmission of abbotship.<sup>21</sup> In 1937, Pure Land Master Yinguang moved to the Lingyanshan Monastery on a hill near Suzhou; while never accepting to be its abbot, he wrote five rules for its monastic community.<sup>22</sup> In 1942, Tiantai Master Xingci felt compelled to formulate some rules for the Fazang Monastery he had recently contributed to building in Shanghai: the many donor-sponsored rituals the community had been celebrating to meet financial needs had become a real nuisance to the monastery's spiritual life, and the rules were meant to counteract this problem (Ruan and Gao, 1992: 159–160).

20 See for example Dixian's code for Guanzong Monastery in the 1936 Buddhist publication *Guanzong gaikuang* 觀宗概況 (MFQ vol. 131: 173–260).

21 'Qingdao Zhanshan si gongzhu guiyue 青島湛山寺共住規約', in Tanxu, 1998: vol. 2, 174–178.

22 *Wutiao guiyue* 五條規約, in Shen, 2000: preface 18–19.



Xuyun wrote at least three comprehensive monastic codes. He composed the Perpetual Register of Yunqi Monastery<sup>23</sup> in Yunnan province, and the 1943 code for the Yunmen Monastery in Guangdong province (Cen, 1951: 154–175)<sup>24</sup> when he engaged in their restoration as the newly appointed abbot. The Code for the Yongquan Monastery on Mount Gu<sup>25</sup> in Fujian province was composed by Xuyun on the occasion of the thorough administrative and religious reform that he accomplished there when he stepped in as abbot in 1929 (see Campo, forthcoming 2017).

As a general theme, monastic codes by Yinguang, Tanxu, Xingci and Xuyun all advocate an ideal of individual and communal religious life based on frugality and austerity, on an in-depth knowledge of monastic rules, and on a regular and highly specialized spiritual practice. Besides determining the financial management of the institutions and their organization, the lengthier texts also establish detailed prescriptions for everyday monastic life, as well as the agenda of religious practice and rituals for the whole year. These texts share a number of essential points, which are then adjusted according to the specific conditions of each institution and to the personal convictions of their author.

In the first place, the codes recognize public monasteries of the ten directions (*shifang conglin* 十方叢林)<sup>26</sup> or institutes conforming to the same system (regardless of which school they belong to) as the only suitable environment for a spiritual practice grounded on Buddhist orthodoxy. Public monasteries are considered the property of the Buddhist monastic community as a whole, and not of a particular monastic lineage or tonsure family. Resident monks cannot alienate their possessions (land, antiquities, etc.) in any way. Moreover, they are supposed to provide food and shelter to any Buddhist pilgrim, be he a lay devotee or an itinerant monk; Xuyun often expressed his regret at not being able, in his wandering period as a young monk, to find shelter for the night at any temple at Mount Jizu in Yunnan. Consequently, the codes by Yinguang, Tanxu, Xingci, and Xuyun also stipulate that monks residing inside these monasteries are forbidden from accepting tonsure disciples. This was to avoid malpractices deriving from monastic kinship jeopardizing a system that is public by its nature and thus open to the entire Buddhist community. The transformation of many Chinese Buddhist temples in “public monasteries of the ten directions” complies with a trend diffused all over Chinese territory during the Republican period, as many articles in the Buddhist press of the time show.

Moreover, the codes unanimously banish two more practices considered by these leaders to be the reasons for triggering the decline of the Buddhist monastic system: first, donor-sponsored rites and rituals involving social interactions (*yingchou* 應酬),

23 ‘Yunqi chansi wannian boji 雲棲禪寺萬年簿記’, ca. 1930, in *Xuyun laoheshang fahui*, 2005: 293–298.

24 Also included in *Xuyun laoheshang fahui*, 2005: 301–315.

25 ‘Gushan Yongquan si chongding andan guize 鼓山湧泉寺重訂安單規則’ (Xuyun, 1930).

26 The division between public monasteries and hereditary temples is established since the Song dynasty (Foulk, 1993: 163–164) and it applies to Taoist institutions as well (Goossaert, 2000: 60). On the origins of this classification in Song China, see Schlütter, 2005. On the characteristics and organization of public monasteries and hereditary temples in Republican China, see Welch, 1967.

regarded as a cause of “corruption” for the clergy; and, second, the transmission of abbotship to the abbot’s Dharma disciples rather than to the most eligible member in the community.

Consider for example Yinguang’s code for the Linyanshan Monastery, ‘The community will practice *nianfo* single-mindedly and, with the exception of weeks of intensive *nianfo* practice, no Buddhist rites involving social interactions will be held’ (Shen, 2000: 18–19). Starting from the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war in 1937, Tanxu was forced to introduce donor-sponsored rites at the Zhanshan Monastery. Nonetheless, he affirms that they were strictly regulated: rites had to be celebrated only inside the monastery and only at specific hours so as not to disturb the activity of the recently established Buddhist school; monks were not allowed to perform funerary rites where coffins had to be escorted; and there was no price fixed in advance and no financial contribution had to be solicited, but only free offers were to be accepted, etc. (Tanxu, 1998: vol. 2, 170–171).

On the transmission of abbotship, see for example the first entry of Xingci’s code,

Concerning the system, from now on this shall be a public monastery choosing its abbots by selection of the worthy; therefore, the two branches of Dharma disciples that I Xingci have already established will not be allowed to take over the abbotship (Ruan and Gao, 1992: 159–160).

In the first entry of his 1930 code for the Yunqi Monastery, Xuyun affirms that the abbot—to be chosen by drawing lots in front of Weituo statue<sup>27</sup>—must possess a Dharma scroll, regardless of whether it is from a public or hereditary monastery, or from which Buddhist school. In the case that the new abbot did not already possess one, he would continue the Dharma of the earlier generation of the monastery, but he was not allowed to receive the Dharma from the retiring abbot. Besides giving prescriptions for the transmission of abbotship in his code for the Zhanshan Monastery, Tanxu also devoted to this specific issue one long essay “Transmitting the Dharma without transmitting the abbotship”.<sup>28</sup> The codes also stipulate the necessary qualifications of the candidates to the position of abbot and which criteria shall prevail in the choice of the man. The importance of the figure of the abbot for giving the correct example to the monks in the community also led Tanxu to compose separate rules focusing on the abbot’s responsibilities and obligations as the leader of the monastic community.<sup>29</sup>

At this stage, it is difficult to know to what extent these masters’ concern with Vinaya regulations passed from theory to practice, and to what extent the monastic codes compiled by these leaders were actually enforced, or for how long. But in any case, it

<sup>27</sup> On this practice, see Welch, 1967: 154–156.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Chuanfa bu chuanzuo 傳法不傳座’, in Tanxu, 1998: vol. 2, 226–236. Part of this text is translated into English in Welch, 1967: 173–176. On the practice of Dharma transmission as related to the transmission of abbotship, see Welch 1963. On the instrumental role played by Chan and Tiantai dharma lineages in the transition of Buddhist authority, expertise and legitimacy beyond the Maoist period, see Campo, forthcoming.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Zhanshan si zhuchi jiandan lingzhong kecheng guize 湛山寺住持簡單領眾課程規則’, in Tanxu, 1998: vol. 2, 219.

appears that the propagation of Chinese Vinaya texts, the recovery of largely forgotten Vinaya practices, and the compilation of new codes of rules laid at the core of the religious regeneration envisioned by Republican leaders such as Xuyun, Yinguang, Xingci, and Tanxu.

As a matter of fact, Republican leaders were not the first Buddhist representatives to counter an alleged decline of the monastic community through the restoration of Vinaya. A similar pattern of religious revitalization had been already carried out, among others, by Daoxuan at the beginning of the Tang dynasty and by Guxin Ruxin and his disciple Hanyue Fazang at the end of the Ming dynasty (McRae, 2005; Chen, 2007). However, the main source of inspiration for Republican monastic leaders seems to have been the Vinaya renewal movement promoted by Master Jianyue 見月 (1601–1679), Guxin's heir in the Nanshan lineage, at the end of the Ming and the beginning of the Qing dynasty. The two works authored by Jianyue—the *Chuanjie zhengfan* 傳戒正範 (Standards for Precept-transmission), and the Code of rules for the Longchang Monastery of Baoshan, in Jiangsu (*Longchang si gongzhu guiyue* 隆昌寺共住規約)—have had a profound influence on the Vinaya renewal movement of early twentieth century, especially as far as precept-transmission, and the prerogatives of public monasteries that I have mentioned, are concerned.<sup>30</sup> According to Tanxu, Jianyue's *Chuanjie zhengfan* was the only work on precept-transmission that had been available from the end of the Ming until his times, and therefore the only work on which monasteries near and far relied (Tanxu, 1998: vol. 2, 208).

### **3. Not a “modern” Vinaya: The promotion of Vinaya and the revival movement**

A few questions arise from these considerations: in what way and to what extent was the promotion of Vinaya more than just a very traditional way of religious rejuvenation carried out by the Buddhist clergy in the Republican era? Did it contain new and/or modern elements? How did it relate to the revival movement? In the following section, I hope to show that Vinaya as promoted by Republican monastic leaders did include some novelties, and it did accommodate new institutions and practices, and therefore, it cannot be considered a mere restoration or return to the past. At the same time, it did not compromise on its fundamental principles and universal vocation, therefore, it did not become “modern” in the Western acceptance of this term. In this respect, the articulation between, on the one hand, Vinaya conceived as a received but not static tradition, and, on the other hand, the new Buddhist institutions of early twentieth century, accounts for a broader understanding of the category of Buddhist revival.

#### *3.1 New features in the organization of Buddhist monasteries and communities*

A preliminary analysis of the above-mentioned codes composed in the 1930s and 1940s reveals that preoccupations resulting from the momentous irruption of Western modernity into China definitely had an impact on the internal organization of Buddhist

<sup>30</sup> See Chen and Deng, 2000: 385–386 (and 399–401 on the influence of Jianyue on Republican reformed precept-transmission in particular).

monasteries and communities, spanning from the adoption of minor monastic facilities to major institutional transformations.

In the first place, Republican Buddhist leaders welcomed a few modern improvements into their monasteries. The monk Yueyao resided at the Yongquan *si* for two years at the time when Xuyun was its abbot in the 1930s. According to Yueyao, after the restoration conducted by this master, the monastery could boast a modern infirmary designed to treat infirm monks and laymen living in the monastic compound or coming from outside. The infirmary (*ruyi liao* 如意寮) was a modern two storey building with clean rooms, 'where a specialized doctor was available upon request and where medical materials and drugs of every kind were granted to patients.'<sup>31</sup> Yueyao affirms that this kind of improvement was rarely seen in Chinese Buddhist monasteries at that time. According to another witness, Xuyun also adopted a simple but innovative system to supply the monastery with clean water when rebuilding the Yunmen *si* in Guangdong in the 1940s. Through underground iron pipes, the drinkable water was brought from a nearby pure source directly to the monastery's main kitchen, pouring into the boilers and earthenware jars without having to be transported. Two pestles used hydraulic energy to hull the rice. Moreover, at any time monks could use running water to wash the toilet ditch, this being 'very convenient not only because no effort was needed, but especially for sanitary and hygienic reasons' (Zhengyuan, 1951: 5).

A few autobiographical writings such as the autobiography of Chan Master Laiguo,<sup>32</sup> also describe at length the transformations brought about by new abbots to important monasteries. Besides relating modifications of the religious calendar and of prescriptions for everyday life, these texts point to the many ways in which old institutions were adapted to modern commodities and needs. Laiguo, who directed the Gaomin Chan Monastery for more than thirty-years, also adopted water pipes for several reasons in 1935: to facilitate construction works, since water was used to grout new buildings such as the stupa; to economize manual labor, since monks did not have to lift and carry water with carrying-poles anymore; to spare the alum, which was previously used to purify water; and, last but not least, to avoid harming living beings, since when drawing water and adding alum to it, 'fishes and shrimps big and small were all killed by the chemical and sank to the bottom of the buckets' (Laiguo, 2006: 539). Laiguo calculated that, thanks to water pipes, about a hundred *yuan* were saved per year. The very traditionalist abbot also highly appreciated electric lights. These were installed in the stupa to reduce the danger for workers during construction work and, afterwards, by way of offerings to replace Buddha lamps, wax candles, and kerosene oil. In this way, the community of Gaomin was able to save an average of 2000 (out of 3000) *yuan* per year, that which made Laiguo exclaim, 'The advantage of electric light is huge indeed!' (Laiguo, 2006: 538–539)

31 Yueyao 月耀, 'Xuyun dashi zai Gushan 虛雲大師在鼓山', in Cen, 1995: 75. On illnesses linked to inadequate hygienic conditions and infirmaries in Buddhist monasteries during the Republican period, see Welch, 1967: 116.

32 'Zixing lu 自行錄', in Laiguo, 2006.

Besides modern facilities, more fundamental novelties made their way into Chinese monasteries in the first half of the twentieth century, as monastic codes were supplemented by regulations for Buddhist schools and seminaries for monks and, starting from the 1940s, even by codes for Buddhist farms. These new institutions came to be annexed to the monasteries themselves and they also had to be regulated according to the Vinaya.

One of the earliest developments in what we now call “modern Buddhism” concerns the education of monks. Several Buddhist modernist movements emerged in many Asian countries in the first half of the twentieth century, which shared the concern to improve the secular and religious education of the monastic community. China was no exception. The initiative of establishing Buddhist seminaries inside temples originated in China as a self-protecting measure against the State confiscation of monastic property to promote modern education. Nevertheless, the instruction of the Buddhist community quickly became a major preoccupation of the monastic leadership (Welch, 1968: 10–15 & 103–120). Both Vinaya expert Cizhou and Tiantai master Tanxu played a major role in this enterprise.

Cizhou began in the 1920s to devote himself to the education of the Buddhist clergy, not only by giving extensive lectures of Buddhist texts, but also by establishing or running Buddhist institutes and universities in many Chinese provinces such as Hubei, Jiangsu, and Fujian (see Ruan and Gao, 1992: 242). The same can be said of Tanxu; this shall not come as a surprise, since his own master Dixian had been the first Buddhist leader to establish in 1910 a modern school for monks in China, the Buddhist Normal School for Monastics (Fojiao shifan sengxuexiao 佛教師範僧學校) in Nanjing, Jiangsu. According to a chart drafted by one of his disciples, Tanxu promoted the establishment of thirteen modern Institutes of Buddhist Studies and Buddhist schools in many provinces of North (Tianjin), East (Shandong) and Northeast (Liaoning, Heilongjiang, Jilin) China (the complete list is in Tanxu, 1998: vol. 2, 224–225). Even if we might consider this estimate overstated, and even if some of these institutions are reported to have lasted only one or two years, Tanxu’s efforts in raising the instruction of the Buddhist clergy cannot be underestimated. The same can be said of Xuyun, who founded three Buddhist seminaries in the monasteries he restored. Hence, some monastic codes composed in the 1930s and 1940s also contained rules for the new Buddhist seminaries annexed to the monasteries. For example, Tanxu’s code for the Zhanshan Monastery is supplemented by the provisional rules for its Buddhist school.<sup>33</sup> The set of regulations composed by Xuyun for the Institute of Buddhist Studies at the Yongquan Monastery also exists (‘Fujian Gushan foxueyuan zhangcheng’; see Campo, forthcoming 2017). This Buddhist seminar was directed and transformed by Cizhou in the years 1932–1933 (‘Gushan foxueyuan gaiban fajie xueyuan’).

Moreover, having soon realized the necessity for monks to provide for their own subsistence, since the 1930s, Xuyun encouraged his communities to cultivate the

33 ‘Qingdao Zhanshan si fojiao xuexiao zanxing guize 青島湛山寺佛教學校暫行規則’, in Tanxu, 1998: vol. 2, 178–184.

fields and, starting from the 1940s, he actually established farms in his monasteries to reclaim the uncultivated land. The set of regulations composed by Xuyun for the Dajue Farm on mount Yunmen in Guangdong can be considered an unprecedented innovation in the domain of monastic regulations,<sup>34</sup> just as we can consider Buddhist farms as a remarkable reinvention of the tradition.

### 3.2 *New features in the relationship between clergy and society*

We have seen how, during the Republican era, Xuyun, Yinguang, Xingci, and Tanxu (amongst others) engaged in a regeneration of the Buddhist community by promoting Chinese Vinaya and by welcoming into their monasteries a few important innovations. Besides regenerating the Buddhist community from within, these leaders also committed to innovate Buddhist institutions and the way they related to the society outside monastic compounds. I will mention a few examples associated to major developments in Chinese Buddhism of the first half of the twentieth century: Buddhist social action, the growing role of the Buddhist laity, the establishment of national Buddhist Associations, and the birth of a Buddhist press.

The trademark religious philanthropy of the Republican era marked in China the beginning of a civic society cooperating with (and, at times, even replacing) the State in providing social welfare. In this context, the increase, systematization, and diversification of Buddhist social action can be considered a central feature of modern Chinese Buddhism. If social action carried on by Buddhist laymen has recently started to receive scholarly attention (see for example Katz, 2010), the clergy too engaged in welfare work.

For example, since many children living in the area did not receive an education, in 1947 Xuyun founded a primary school at the Nanhua Monastery in Guangdong.<sup>35</sup> Access to the school was unrestricted; no tuition was required and school supplies were given to pupils free of charge ('Xuyun fashi zai Nanhua si chuangan Fojiao sili Nanhua xiao xuexiao', 1947: 20). Well-to-do families offered contributions to cover the board, fees, and books of their children. With their contributions, Xuyun apparently managed to give the same benefits to peasant's children, who were also welcomed free of charge (see also Jy Din Shakya, 1996). Xingci is known for his humanitarian commitment in Shanghai during The Sino-Japanese War. After the war, he devoted himself to the establishment of schools for deprived children and youth, most notably the Xingci elementary school (Xingci xiaoxue 興慈小學). Tanxu also established a primary school at the Zhanshan Monastery in Qingdao, the Chengzhang xiaoxue 成章小學 (Tanxu, 1998: vol. 2, 169–172). This master also carried on moral reformation (*ganhua* 感化) of prisoners in jails and in specialized institutes (Tanxu, 1998: vol. 2, 171–172), thus contributing, similar to many other Buddhists, to the program that marked in China the transition to a modern prison system. The same can be said for Yinguang, who supported at least one initiative to preach Buddhism in Zhejiang prisons (Kiely, 2016).

34 'Nongchang zuzhi jianzhang 農場組織簡章', in Cen, 1951: 175–177.

35 Xuyun had also established a school at the Huating Monastery in Kunming, Yunnan, see Osgood, 1963: 84.

Among the crucial developments of Chinese Buddhism during the Republican period, the growing role of the Buddhist laity also must be mentioned. The relationship between the Buddhist clergy and the laity has changed significantly in China since the end of the Qing dynasty. In the first half of the twentieth century, different forms of Buddhist laity and new types of Buddhist lay identities emerged one after another and often coexisted (see among others Goldfuss, 2001; Jessup, 2010; Aviv, 2011; Schicketanz, 2014).

Many representatives of the clergy endorsed the growing importance of the Buddhist laity. Yinguang is especially known for the privileged relationship he established with engaged laymen. This master not only welcomed hundreds of lay disciples, while always refusing to accept ordained disciples, he also inspired the foundation and maneuvered the activities of the first modern lay Buddhist societies in Shanghai, especially the Pure Karma society (Jingye she 淨業社), during the 1920s and 1930s. Xuyun specifically imparted religious instructions (*kaishi* 開示) to engaged laymen from all walks of life using a simple language, more comprehensible than the Buddhist idiom standardized over many centuries. He also celebrated large-scale public rituals followed by massive takings of refuge, and welcomed groups of laymen (Chinese as well as foreigners) to join the monastic community for meditation.

One fundamental innovation to Chinese Buddhism starting from 1912 was the establishment of national Buddhist organizations, a new kind of institution destined to 're-embed Buddhism in the modern social structure and religious field' (Ji, 2016). Many of the protagonists in this study actively took part in the foundation of a number of national Buddhist associations and/or their local branches. To mention a few examples, Tanxu's master Dixian was among the founding members of the General Association of Chinese Buddhists (*Zhonghua fojiao zonghui* 中華佛教總會) established in Shanghai in 1912 and Xuyun joined this association at the meeting of its national representatives in 1913, as a representative of Yunnan province. Together with Yinguang, Dixian was also chosen as a member of the supervisory committee of the Chinese Buddhist Association (CBA, *Zhongguo fojiao hui* 中國佛教會) founded in Shanghai in 1929, while Xingci was a member of its executive committee (Ruan and Gao, 1992: 170–177). Both Xuyun and Nenghai were elected as honorary presidents of the Buddhist Association of China (BAC, *Zhongguo fojiao xiehui* 中國佛教協會), established in Beijing in 1953 under the aegis of the Chinese Communist Party.

I will briefly consider one last innovation in the Buddhist tradition of the first half of the twentieth century to which the protagonists of this study gave a relevant contribution: the birth and booming of a confessional press in many Asian countries. The fundamental impact of print culture on the evolution of Buddhism in China has been established in the last few years (Tarocco, 2007; Scott, 2013). Less known, perhaps, is that Yinguang was the first Chinese Buddhist master to avail himself, in the 1910s and 20s, of the modern, mass-market print culture to spread morality books and Buddhist texts, including his own *Collected writings* (Yinguang fashi wenchao 印光法師文鈔), which soon became a Buddhist best-seller (Kiely, 2010: 199–203). Moreover, Yinguang himself founded a society

devoted to the printing and circulation of Buddhist texts, known as the Honghua society (Honghua she 弘化社), that is still active today.<sup>36</sup>

This overview is far from exhaustive; a thorough investigation of Republican Buddhist leaders' activities is needed to fully ascertain their important contribution to the modern evolution of Buddhist institutional practices. However, it appears already that many innovations adopted by these Buddhist leaders both inside and outside monastic compounds partly adhered to the new, state-induced, Western-inspired model of Buddhist institutionalization. How did these new elements relate to their promotion of Chinese Vinaya?

### *3.3 Reconciliation and contradictions: The articulation of Vinaya and new Buddhist institutions*

We have seen how, during the Republican period, Chinese monasteries accommodated Buddhist schools and seminaries for monks as well as Buddhist farms, and how new sets of rules were developed to regulate them. While these new institutions responded to internal and external “modern” demands related to the instruction of the clergy and the financial self-sufficiency of monastic communities, it would appear that they were harmonized with a way of life regulated by the Vinaya itself. New institutions were integrated in the way of life that Republican Buddhist leaders had established for their communities without conflicting, at least in theory, with monastic discipline and rules. According to Tanxu, about a hundred and twenty or thirty people resided at the Zhanshan Buddhist school for monks, eighty or ninety of which were student-monks, and the rest engaged laymen and personnel. Tanxu affirms that the institution was purely scholastic in nature and purpose, and that all people involved respected and followed the religious practice of the resident monks. As for monks who specialized in profitable repentance rites, ‘as soon as they hear about the regulations of the Zhanshan Monastery, they do not come, and even if they arrive they are unable to stay, therefore all those who live here are students’ (Tanxu, 1998: vol. 2, 170). In effect, one of the rules of the Buddhist school prescribes, ‘besides observing the precepts of the Buddha (*fojie* 佛戒), student-monks of this school must abide by all the rules of both the present monastery and school’ (Tanxu, 1998: vol. 2, 181).

Nor did agricultural work in the newly established farm exempt the monks of the Yunmen Monastery from their daily participation to morning devotions, and to evening meditation sessions or plenary recitation of the Buddha’s name; only evening devotions could be practiced in shifts (Cen, 1951: 177). As a matter of fact, Xuyun’s Buddhist farms did not depart from the universal vocation of Vinaya. When establishing them in his monasteries, this master affirmed finding religious legitimation both in the Buddhist hermits’ custom of growing their own vegetables, and in the combined practice of ‘meditation and agricultural work’ advocated by the Tang dynasty code of Chan Master Baizhang Huaihai 百丈懷海 (720–814) (Campo, 2013). As Jan Kiely notes in the case of Yinguang,

<sup>36</sup> See [http://www.weibo.com/honghuashe?is\\_hot=1](http://www.weibo.com/honghuashe?is_hot=1)



concessions to worldly politics were subsumed within broader themes of universal salvation and karmic transformation, and an emphasis on charitable relief, not killing living beings, moral-spiritual reform through education, and *nianfo* recitation (2016: 64).

The institutional innovations welcomed by the protagonists of this study outside monastic compounds did not seem to compromise with the Chinese Vinaya either, even though the articulation of Vinaya and new Buddhist institutions was not without contradiction. Tensions were both internal and external to the monastic community, and concerned, on the one hand, the relationship between the *sangha* and the laity, and on the other hand, the boundaries separating them.

One example concerns the growing role of the Buddhist laity and its interference in the management of Buddhist affairs and monasteries (see Ji, 2016). Notwithstanding the intense and (mostly) harmonious relationships that these four masters entertained with the Buddhist laity, and notwithstanding the privileges that some of them granted to engaged laymen, they still believed that the authority of the clergy in the religious realm was not to be questioned. That is to say, the fundamental superiority of monks over laymen was not to be challenged. The fifth rule of the code for the Zhanshan *si* shows how Tanxu's appreciation of the respective roles of clergy and laity did not depart in the least bit from the most conventional one,

In this monastery, the concern of the *sangha* is to uphold the Law, [therefore] it manages internal affairs; the concern of the engaged laymen of the Association of Buddhist studies is to protect the law, [therefore] they assist in dealing with external affairs (Tanxu, 1998: vol. 2, 174).

Buddhist journals and Buddhist associations in particular were a predictable arena for displaying and handling contradictions internal to the Buddhist circles. In these newly opened spaces for debates and discussion, confrontations took place over the boundaries separating monastics from the laity, that is, matters pertaining to the Vinaya and especially to the possibility of abolishing major rules of monastic discipline. In the first half of the twentieth century, the ten precepts for ordained monks and nuns were repeatedly called into question, starting from the very first of them: the interdiction to harm any living creature. In their enthusiasm for political participation, progressive wings of the Buddhist monastic community encouraged in effect the active involvement of monks in The Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945). In Mahayana ethical relativism, superior beings (such as Bodhisattvas) are beyond good and evil, and a few ambiguous passages contained in the Buddhist canon were conveniently used by communist monks such as Juzan 巨贊 (1908–1984) to legitimize a violent approach to the war on the part of the *sangha* (Xue, 2005).<sup>37</sup> However, Buddhist monastic discipline is unequivocal in its condemnation of violence, and it is no accident that the protagonists of this study chose instead to contribute to the national effort by different, non-violent means such

<sup>37</sup> This reinterpretation of the first precept was not a novelty in the history of Buddhism, see Demiéville, 1973. On Juzan's activities in the years 1949–1953, see Xue, 2009.

as rituals, donations, humanitarian aid, and the circulation of pacifist pamphlets and texts.

The first of the ten precepts also requires vegetarianism for monks and nuns. Where debates over the abandonment of celibacy and the vegetarian diet by Buddhist clerics were carried on in Japan from the beginning of the seventeenth century until the twentieth century, ending with a victory for progressive voices (Jaffe, 2002; 2005), and a reform of the Buddhist system on the Japanese model was carried out in Korea in the years 1930–1940,<sup>38</sup> things were to turn out differently in China. Indeed, the influence of these monastic leaders over the religious world of the Republican era allowed them to impose some of their convictions—such as their conventional view of monastic discipline—on the entire Chinese Buddhist community.

Especially before The Sino-Japanese War, Japanese Buddhism represented a suitable model for reforming the Chinese tradition. The issue of abandoning fundamental Vinaya rules had been raised in the pages of the periodical *Xin fojiao* 新佛教 as early as 1920, when a layman had proposed that monks had the right to marry, abandon the vegetarian diet, look for fame, and be happy. The Buddhist leader Yuanying, Taixu's master, had refuted all these proposals on a Vinaya basis, 'thus sustaining the central role of *vinaya* rules in the light of a Buddhist revival' (Bianchi, forthcoming 2017).

These ideas of emulation were toned down during The Sino-Japanese War (Sueki, 2010), but reemerged after the Communist takeover of the country. The abolition of major monastic precepts such as vegetarianism, celibacy, and the prohibition against drinking alcohol (respectively, the first, third, and fifth precepts) was practiced by a minority of monks at the very beginning of the years 1950s in the name of the religious freedom (Welch, 1972: 128–129), before the most progressive fringes of the Buddhist clergy put it forth during the negotiations preceding the foundation of the BAC (Buddhist Association of China) in 1952–1953. Three representatives of Chinese Buddhism counted among the eleven promoters of the BAC in 1952: Xuyun, Yuanying, and Juzan. Yuanying was to be elected president of the BAC, but as his health was deteriorating (he died a few months after the foundation of the association), it was the turn of Xuyun to fight tooth and nail in order to avoid a lasting modification of the Chinese Vinaya. He succeeded thanks also to the intervention of one of the four representatives sent by the Communist government to participate in the meetings: Li Jishen 李濟深 (1885–1959), an ancient Guomindang official who was one of his most devoted disciples.<sup>39</sup>

These elements allow us to provide a few tentative answers to the questions we previously asked: did Chinese Vinaya as it was promoted in the Republican era contain new and/or modern elements? And how did it relate to the revival movement? If we consider "modernity" as mainly consisting of a set of notions related to nationalism and democracy, and if we understand Buddhist modernism as especially relying on factors such as rationalization, demythologization, and de-traditionalization, then the

38 Only to be revoked in 1954, see Hur, 2010.

39 For a detailed account of this issue (and for a bibliography), see Campo, 2013: 302–314.

Vinaya promoted by Republican monastic leaders cannot be qualified as “modern”, and the phenomenon of Vinaya renewal cannot be included in the history of Buddhist modernism. However, this did not prevent the Vinaya renewal and its promoters from playing an active role in the revival movement of early twentieth century.

It appears that, in the first half of the twentieth century, Buddhist institutional innovation went hand in hand with a long-established modality of revival based on monastic discipline. Xuyun, Yinguang, Xingci, and Tanxu, as well as many other monastic representatives, engaged in a modernization of Buddhist practices and institutions inside and outside monastic compounds. Moreover, even if disciplinary rules *per se* do not seem to have undergone any significant alteration, and even if it would appear that Chinese Vinaya sets limits to the innovations that might be welcomed, the promotion of Vinaya in the first half of the twentieth century did include some novelties, reinventions, and creative reformulations; although not “modern”, it was a new Vinaya after all. This suggests that, in Republican China, modern preoccupations did not always entail “modern” solutions, but rather a composition of recuperation, novelties, reinforcement, innovations, and improvements; the action of Buddhist monastic leaders stood outside a tradition-modernity dichotomy.

#### **4. The promotion of Vinaya in Republican China: meaning and effects**

Why did Buddhist representatives of the first half of the twentieth century place so much emphasis, in practice and in discourse, on Chinese monastic discipline? What exactly did they react to, what kind of problems did they want to solve? I will point to a few possible issues related to the historical situation of the first half of the twentieth century. These issues emanated from inside and outside the monastic community, and originated from a combination of age-old issues and new political and social demands.

In the first place, one must not forget that the “Buddhist revival” of the Republican era took place on the ruins of the Taiping War, and therefore, not only against the backdrop of an alleged moral decline of the Buddhist clergy, but also of a concrete material and symbolic dispersion of monastic communities. Monasteries had to be rebuilt, and disciplinary rules and religious practice had to be reintroduced. The Buddhist reconstruction was carried out under the new historical and ideological conditions of the Opium Wars’ aftermath, and it assumed, in the largest part of Chinese (and Western) historiography, the contours of the decline/revival paradigm. The decline of the Buddhadharmā was part of the Buddhist rhetoric of the time. At the same time, different passages of the Buddhist scriptures, as well as statements pronounced by Republican monastic leaders, identify the Vinaya as the very foundation of the Buddhadharmā. Vinaya was therefore a most convenient base to start a reconstruction of the tradition. Xuyun’s above-mentioned sermon on precept transmission begins with these words:

In the last decades, I have often said that the defeat of the Law of the Buddha is due to unorthodox precept transmission (*chuanjie bu rufa* 傳戒不如法). If precepts were transmitted according to the Law, monks and nuns would be able to strictly

abide by the Vinaya, and Buddhism would have not achieved its present decline.  
(‘Fangbian kaishi’, in Cen, 1995: 221–222)

Moreover, the formal separation of religion and State in China in the first half of the twentieth century was announced by and resulted in a threat to Buddhist legitimation and monastic religious authority both at the political and social level (see Goossaert and Palmer, 2011). In this context, Republican Buddhist leaders’ insistence on monastic discipline seems to respond to a phenomenon that existed since medieval times, but was reinforced by the import of Western secularism: anti-clericalism (Zürcher, 1994: 131). For many centuries up until 1900, Chinese anti-clericalism rested on a distinction often fictitious and rhetorical between “good” and “bad” monks; this distinction entailed the idea that only a meditative and secluded life could be acceptable to define the role of the clergy.<sup>40</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century, both the new Chinese Nation-state and society demanded greater participation (and usefulness) of religion on the social level. Buddhism was thus compelled to mediate between, on the one hand, the promotion of an elitist and idealized form of institutional religion compliant with the “good clergy” parameters and, on the other hand, a henceforth necessary civil commitment that, if uncontrolled, risked “corrupting” monastic communities and attracting them to criticisms of society. This issue does not only concern Chinese Buddhism; as Gregory Schopen points out in a study on Mulasarvastivada Vinaya (2007: 61–62), one of the most striking characteristics of all Buddhist Vinayas is how monastic practice was constructed or adjusted so as to give no cause for complaint to the laity.

Tanxu’s concern with the public image of his monastery in Qingdao is revealing on this matter. This master insisted that Buddhism in Qingdao could be considered the purest in China. In Qingdao, traces of monks were never to be seen in unseemly places such as theaters, public baths, restaurants, and barbers, and newspapers would never report of disagreements between lay people and monks or of monks’ violations of monastic rules. The monks of Zhanshan *si* were not allowed to go out for no reason:

If sometimes monks can be seen coming and going on the streets, engaged laymen all know that those are monks of the Zhanshan *si*, and they will greet and salute them. Therefore, when they are out on the street, monks do not dare the slightest slackness or looseness: they profoundly fear to disgrace Zhanshan’s reputation (Tanxu, 1998: vol. 2, 171).

The reliance on Chinese monastic discipline to modernize Buddhist institutions and to regenerate religious practices seemed to precisely reconcile an elitist and idealized form of religion with a controlled civil commitment. Indeed, from what we may call a perspective “internal” to the Buddhist community, Vinaya has often represented a way to innovate and adapt the tradition without departing from religious orthodoxy established by the consensus of monastic leadership. Drawing on the example of Tang Master Daoxuan, who presented a new model for the use of traditional forms to reinvigorate religious life, William M. Bodiford has already stressed how ‘vinaya uses

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40 Beginning in the Ming dynasty, see Goossaert, 2002a & 2002b.

the authority of (apparent) conformity to established tradition to promote innovation and adaptation' (2005: 7).

From the perspective of the relationship between Buddhism and the outside world, the promotion of high standards of conduct has often been a way for the monastic community to strengthen its religious authority, social credibility, and political legitimation in moments of historical weakness. To this aim, several "purifications" of the Buddhist order based on monastic discipline have frequently been carried on across the Buddhist world, whether top-down (by royal edicts, throughout the history of Theravada, for example, see Swearer, 1999: 6) or bottom-up (as advocated by Buddhist representatives across Chinese history).

One reason is that, besides being considered the very foundation of the Buddhadharma, disciplinary rigor also represents a gage of orthodoxy both internal to the community and, externally, in the eyes of the political power. In this context, it should not come as a surprise that a Vinaya revival is also observable in contemporary China. Many Buddhist Republican leaders have pointed out the importance of Vinaya as a guarantee of Buddhist orthodoxy,<sup>41</sup> for example Xuyun:

[...] But if one departs from the Buddhist precepts (*fojie* 佛戒), he might be practicing meditation, repeating the name of the Buddha or lecturing on the scriptures, he will always be in contradiction with the Law of the Buddha and fall into heterodoxy (*waidao* 外道) ('Minguo sanshiliu nian zai Xianggang Donglian jueyuan jiang', in *Xuyun laoheshang fahui*, 2005: 139).

Tanxu expressed the same idea when introducing in his memoirs the Vinaya specialist Cizhou, 'Whenever the Vinaya of the Buddha (*Fode jielü* 佛的戒律) is present, then there is the orthodox Dharma (*zhengfa* 正法); if monks do not observe the Vinaya, then the orthodox Dharma quickly disappears.' (Tanxu, 1998: vol. 2, 198) Citing late Ming Buddhist master Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭 (1599–1655), Hongyi stated, 'The only possible cause for the extinction of the orthodox Dharma (*zhengfa* 正法) is that Vinaya is not understood.'<sup>42</sup> It is no surprise that a discourse on orthodoxy and on its fundamental element—the Vinaya—was so recurrent in a moment when Buddhism was perceived as declining. As Elizabeth Morrison (2010: 44) notes in her work on Qisong 契嵩 (1007–1072), 'because the narrative of decline creates a fear of no legitimate authority or capacity for practice, it often appears hand-in-hand with an assertion of authority and the establishment of orthodoxy.'

Xuyun also clarified the connection between disciplinary rigor and political legitimation and affirmed that, since the propagation of the *Nanshan lü* in China, 'when the precepts are strictly observed, all the *devas* assure protection, and offerings are bestowed by the king' (*Xuyun laoheshang fahui*, 2005: 23).

41 On Yinguang and orthodoxy, see Zhang J., 2011: 88–90.

42 See the studies on Vinaya in the complete works of Hongyi (*Hongyi wenji* 弘一文集, Lü xue 律學, section 問答十章), also available online: <http://book.bfn.org/books2/1204.htm#a05>

Another reason why the promotion of high standards of conduct is closely related to the social credibility and political legitimation of the Buddhist monastic community is that only a pure *sangha* can fulfill its role of participating in the moral education of the people. Elaborating on a sentence from the Liang dynasty text *Hongming ji* 弘明集 attributed to Sengyou 僧佑 (445–518),<sup>43</sup> Xuyun emphasized how Buddhist precepts can contribute to the moral edification and pacification of the country:

If in a hundred-families village, ten people keep the five precepts, then ten people are honest and prudent; if a hundred people cultivate the ten virtues, then a hundred people live in harmony. Transmit this teaching to the whole world, and the virtuous men will be a million. [...] Therefore, to receive and keep the five precepts is not only a way of respectfully conform to the Buddhist system and obtain a joyful fruit as a reward, but it can also render a divine service to the law of the Country ('Zai Aomen Ping'an Xiyuan kaishi guijie', in *Xuyun laoheshang fahui*, 2005: 147).

Therefore, the promotion of Vinaya in Republican China also represented one fundamental driving force behind Buddhism making the transition to new historical and ideological conditions. Xuyun, Yinguang, Xingci, and Tanxu—as well as the Buddhist institutions they established and controlled—had managed to gain official recognition and political legitimation from the political powers of the Republican era. They had obtained the authorization to re-establish large public monasteries, the invitation to officiate large-scale rituals for the protection of the country, the permission to run schools and rehabilitation institutes, the ratification of many local and national associations, and the abandonment of policies on monastic expropriation, and so forth. The efficacy of the action of Republican monastic leaders shows that the criteria envisioned by the Nation-state for religious legitimation in the first half of the twentieth century were not entirely new, but that they also partially tallied with late Imperial standards for religious orthodoxy, at least where Buddhism is concerned.

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<sup>43</sup> *Hongming ji* 弘明集, T52 n. 2102, *juan* 11 (He ling Shangzhi da Song Wen huangdi zanyang fojiao shi 何令尚之答宋文皇帝讚揚佛教事, 0069a15).

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